PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
10 April 2002—19 April 2002

£70

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 383**

FOURTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Monday 15 April at Seven o'clock.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 17 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

RAF St. Athan

1. **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): What discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Defence about Royal Air Force St. Athan. [44146]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues at the Ministry of Defence. I very much welcome the recent announcement by the Minister for the Armed Forces that the Welsh Guards are to be relocated to RAF St. Athan, in my hon. Friend's constituency, from May 2003. I am also pleased that the Ministry of Defence and the Welsh Development Agency will be working together on proposals to develop the site facilities, including the possibility of establishing an aerospace park at St. Athan.

Mr. Smith: I warmly thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. The development at RAF St. Athan, and especially the creation of a world-beating aerospace park, is indeed wonderful news. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news this week that there will be no need, in that multi-million pound development, to extend the runway at RAF St. Athan, which I know is a great concern for the local community?

Now that the Defence Aviation Repair Agency forms the central part of that development, will my right hon. Friend, when he next meets his ministerial colleagues, point out that as DARA has become a trading company, it must be allowed to trade fairly not only with the private sector but with other arms of the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He will of course welcome the fact that the Welsh Guards are to come to RAF St. Athan, because it means that some 600 personnel will come to his constituency, which will obviously be a big boost to the local economy. In addition, the working relationship between the Government and the National Assembly, through the Welsh Development Agency, means that the development will be of enormous significance to the Vale of Glamorgan and surrounding areas. I pay tribute in particular to my hon. Friend for all the work that he has put into the project.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): We, too, welcome the fact that the Welsh Guards will be based at RAF

St. Athan, and that they will be based in Wales for the first time in the 83 years of their existence. However, does the Secretary of State agree with Welshman and Welsh Guardsman Simon Weston, who recently said that it would be pure folly for the Government not to mark the 20th anniversary of our great victory in the Falkland Islands? What does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do to make certain that the part played by the Welsh Guards in that victory is suitably marked?

Mr. Murphy: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and I am glad that he welcomes the Welsh Guards' return to Wales after nearly a century. I shall certainly take up his point with my colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and, of course, with the Assembly.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts to preserve defence industry jobs at St. Athan. Is he aware that in the league table for defence spending in the UK, the north-east is top, with spending of over £700 per person, and Wales is bottom, with less than £120 per person? What efforts will he make to close that gap?

Mr. Murphy: I have visited my hon. Friend's constituency on a number of occasions. The aerospace developments in north-east Wales are particularly significant for his constituents and others, but I am sure that he and others will welcome today's news in the *Western Mail* that 267 regional selective assistance projects have been approved in Wales, which is a record number; that manufacturing production figures are up for the first time since the summer; and that business confidence in Wales is better than it has been for many years.

Barnett Formula

2. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What plans he has to change the Barnett formula to ensure equality of spending per head on health between Wales and England. [44147]

3. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary on the operation of the Barnett formula; and if he will make a statement. [44148]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues. The Government keep the operation of the Barnett formula under review, but have no plans to change it.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answer but I wish that he had said a little more about health spending. He is probably not aware that the new Hereford hospital will have 120 fewer acute beds than the current one and that 10 per cent. of the hospital's patients come from Wales. The primary care trust needs a 4.1 per cent. increase in health spending, which is £6.5 million. Will the right hon. Gentleman make representations to Health Ministers and the Treasury to ensure that Hereford hospital has 120 more acute beds, which will benefit not only my constituents but the people of Wales?

Mr. Murphy: I suspect that not many hon. Members would see the significance of Hereford hospital, but the hon. Gentleman is of course right that many patients come from mid-Wales to Hereford—and Shrewsbury—for treatment. He made his points well and I will make sure that the Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales is aware of them. However, the Assembly has given the health service in Wales £3.5 billion in 2002 and 2003, and a further £49 million for 2003–04. That is an enormous sum to be spent on the health service. I only wish that the Conservative party had some ideas about where it would get the money that it wants to improve the health service.

David Taylor: The perverse nature of the Government grant distribution system within the United Kingdom must not be allowed to continue. The Secretary of State knows that even though Wales's population of 2.9 million is identical in aggregate to that of the east midlands counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire pre-1997, and the two regions have similar economic and social profiles, the level of public expenditure in Wales is significantly higher. Is not a full-scale economic and social assessment long overdue to form the basis for regional distribution, and should not the Barnett formula be thrown on the same bonfire as its English standard spending assessment cousin?

Mr. Murphy: No, I do not agree that the Barnett formula should be scrapped—far from it. My hon. Friend is aware that the Barnett formula was established 20-odd years ago and that it has served us well under both Labour and Conservative Governments. As far as I know, the Conservatives have no plans to change the Barnett formula, nor did they when they were in office for all those years, and it was of course a Labour Government who introduced the formula. It prevents constant haggling about finance every year, and it deals only with changes in spending levels. My hon. Friend is also aware that one of the reasons—the chief reason—why Barnett was established was that deprivation in Scotland and especially in Wales was acute and needed to be tackled. The Barnett formula has done that very well.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. There is currently great deprivation in Wales—look at the fact that a good part of the country is covered by objective 1. Let me respectfully remind the right hon. Gentleman that Lord Barnett said that the Barnett formula was not a formula, and that it was meant to be temporary. It is time that we revisited it and introduced a proper needs-based formula, which is what is really needed in Wales and other parts of the UK.

Mr. Murphy: There is very little evidence to suggest that Wales would be better off as a consequence of such a change. Some time ago in the Assembly, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities was asked precisely the same question. She replied:

> "On the Barnett formula itself, if I were convinced that reopening the Barnett issue would be of benefit to Wales, I would do that. However, I am not yet convinced of that."

The reality is that it has served us well and there is no need to change it.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I concur with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. May I suggest that, in fact, the complexity of changing from Barnett to some other formula would result in much wailing and gnashing

of teeth throughout the United Kingdom, as we in Wales found when changes were made to the local government formula and all the new arrangements were regarded as worse than the originals?

Mr. Murphy: The House should take note of my hon. Friend's words. As a former Welsh Office Minister before devolution, he is conscious of the fact that Wales benefited from the formula then, as it does now. I remind the House that because the formula ensures that changes per head are set at the same level in Wales as in England, the idea that the formula disadvantages England is simply wrong.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): None the less, I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that Wales could do with more money if it were available, and that the best way to achieve that is to elect a Liberal Democrat Government, who would raise direct taxation and put the money into public services. Until that great day, is the right hon. Gentleman at least willing to consider holding a cross-party debate on whether it is possible to produce a more level playing field for Wales, perhaps by reviewing the Barnett formula, accepting that if he can prove the points that he has already made, there is no need for change?

Mr. Murphy: I suspect that I will have long retired from politics before we reach that great day of a Liberal Democrat Government. While we are waiting, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that some days ago his party discussed its shadow Budget. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor)—I assume that this is agreed by Peter Black, who is the hon. Gentleman's Assembly spokesman on finance—is happy to commit a future Lib-Dem Government to using the Barnett formula. I assume, then, that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the formula gives Wales more money.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that resources for health care should be allocated on the basis of need, and not, as the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) suggests, on the basis of a crude head count?

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that there is a correlation between household income and health? Therefore, notwithstanding the impressive growth in prosperity in Wales since 1997, so long as average household incomes are lower in Wales than elsewhere, it will be appropriate that more should be spent on health care in Wales.

Mr. Murphy: My right hon. Friend is precisely right. He is aware, too, that it is for the Assembly to decide how much money is spent on the NHS in Wales, irrespective of what the Barnett formula gives Wales.

Average life expectancy in Wales is about a year less than in England, and the proportion of the working-age population with a limiting long-term illness is about 50 per cent. greater than in England. These are fundamental problems that can be addressed only by proper resourcing, and that is precisely what a Labour Government and a Labour Assembly are doing.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is it not a fact that through the Barnett formula more money per patient is spent on the NHS in Wales than in England? Is it not also a fact that the NHS in Wales is in a worse state than it is in England? There are far too many people waiting far too long for treatment in Wales because there is an enormous shortage of consultants and nurses. John Osborne, the ear, nose and throat specialist at Ysbty Glan Clwyd, said:

"It is a more stressful job today, and people are retiring early. Money for new developments is virtually nil. That means the service stands still or goes backwards."

Is he right?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong in saying that the Barnett formula determines the amount of money spent per person on the health service in Wales. It does not do that.

Mr. Evans: More money is spent in Wales.

Mr. Murphy: Indeed, more money is spent on the NHS in Wales, but that is not because of the Barnett formula. The formula and the changes to it give Wales extra money. It is for the Assembly to decide how it distributes that money. It has given extra money to the health service in Wales precisely because of the points to which I alluded.

The issue is not only about money, but about reform of the health service. I note that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the Conservative party voted against the reform proposals when they were before the House.

Mr. Evans: The Secretary of State agrees that more money is being spent per patient in Wales than in England, yet there are many shortages. The British Medical Association in Wales estimates that it needs a 30 to 50 per cent. increase in the number of consultants to improve hospital services. Vacancy rates in cancer are 24 per cent. In mental health, the rate is 17 per cent. and in radiology it is 13 per cent. We have eight consultant neurologists, but the British Association of Neurologists says that we need 28.

After five years of a Labour Government, the Government are scouring Germany for doctors and Spain for nurses, while British patients are being sent to France for operations. Children in Wales wait up to nine years for non-emergency plastic surgery—the worst waiting time in the developed world. Is it not time to cut the spin, to stop the sloganising and to deliver a first-rate NHS, which is what the Government promised in the first place?

Mr. Murphy: Why does the hon. Gentleman not understand that more money is spent on the health service in Wales because of the neglect of the health service for nearly two decades? That is the reason behind it. The hon. Gentleman should understand also that over the past 12 months, waiting for cardiac surgery fell by 38.6 per cent. Waiting for orthopaedic surgery fell by 10.6 per cent. and the number of patients waiting for cataract surgery fell by 25 per cent.—all during the winter months. In addition, the hon. Gentleman is wrong about personnel. We now have 400 more doctors, and 500 extra nurses are being trained in Wales this year. By 2004, there will be

4,300 more nurses, more midwives and more health visitors. That is far more than there ever were under the Conservative Government.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Secretary of State will be aware that, in Blaenau Gwent, we have some of the worst health problems in the United Kingdom. I am sure that he will also accept that if we are to tackle bad health, we must tackle poverty. With that in mind, will he have a quiet word with the First Secretary about the money that he is wasting on a millennium arts centre and on the new Noddy-like transport system whose sole object seems to be to get Assembly Members from the Assembly to the council chambers without getting wet? Will he suggest that those schemes be dropped and the money reinvested in tackling health and poverty in areas such as Blaenau Gwent?

Mr. Murphy: I shall certainly have a quiet word with the First Minister, although how quiet it will be on such issues is anybody's guess. With regard to my hon. Friend's constituency, as a valley Member of Parliament myself, I am aware of the health spending inequalities over the years between different parts of Wales. That is why the Assembly has rightly listened to the findings set out in Professor Townsend's report, which I hope will end that inequality.

Regional Airports

4. **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn): What discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and ministerial colleagues on regional airports in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [44149]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with Assembly and UK Government Ministers on a wide range of transport issues, including regional airports in Wales. Aviation is a matter that is reserved to the UK Government, but Assembly officials have had close contact with colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about regional air services, regional air services co-ordination studies and the regional consultation documents that are to be published later this year.

Albert Owen: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He is aware of the importance of a fully integrated transport system and the economic benefits that it can bring periphery areas, including mine in north-west Wales. Will he therefore use what influence the Wales Office can exert to ensure that all four corners of Wales are served, so we can have a united and inclusive Wales? May I suggest that commercialisation of RAF Valley in my constituency can help in that matter?

Mr. Touhig: I should congratulate my hon. Friend on his efforts on behalf of RAF Valley and RAF Mona in his Anglesey constituency. I can tell him that the Wales air services consultation document, which is one of six regional consultation documents that are currently being finalised by the DTLR, considers specifically the possible roles that regional airports might play in terms of passenger air traffic. That consideration will cover all sites in Wales, including RAF Valley and RAF Mona on Anglesey, as well as the airfields at Caernarfon and Welshpool.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does not the Minister accept that an airport can only ever be as good as the infrastructure that supports it? It is not getting on and off the plane that matters to passengers, but the time that it takes to get to the airport. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the National Assembly's road-building strategy which, by ignoring that fact, appears to condemn all airports in Wales to third-world status? Will he again have a word with his colleagues in the National Assembly to try to bring about a change of heart? What is needed are improved road links—and they should be built.

Mr. Touhig: I am not so sure that we have third-world conditions in Wales. Perhaps if the right hon. Gentleman were to visit, he might find that out for himself. The regional air service study that has been commissioned by the DTLR will cover Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the south-west midlands and the north of England, and will consider how each region might best be served by a combination of available airports and aerodromes. It will identify the strategic enhancements that are required to improve service access to existing and potential regional airports and appraise the economic, environmental and social cost-benefits of a range of airport developments. All those matters will be considered in the study.

EU Structural Funding

5. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): What discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the progress of the objective 1 programme in west Wales and the valleys. [44150]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with the objective 1 programme. On 21 March, more than 500 objective 1 projects had been approved, worth a total of more than £300 million in European grants. More than £68 million of objective 1 grant has already been paid out by the Assembly.

Mr. David: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Would he care to give examples of specific projects in south Wales—perhaps in my constituency—which are receiving funding? Is he aware that Mr. Philip Owen, who is in charge of these European Commission programmes in the United Kingdom, sees the Welsh programme as a model of good practice?

Mr. Murphy: I understand that my hon. Friend visited Brussels with other hon. Members some weeks ago, where that point was made to him. I have in front of me a large list of objective 1 approved projects in the Caerphilly constituency, which shows that the objecuive 1 programme is doing precisely what we wanted it to do when it was approved.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): During the last round of objective 1 negotiations with the Chancellor, the then First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales had to resign to ensure that Wales

got its fair share of the allocation. Is the Secretary of State for Wales prepared to put his political life on the line to ensure that Wales gets its fair share this time round?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is sitting not far from me, and that it is not appropriate for any Minister to comment on the spending review at this stage. I would simply say to the hon. Gentleman that I see no reason at all for the present First Minister to resign.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Will my right hon. Friend raise with the First Minister the use of objective 1 funds to improve road links and the road-building programme? Is he aware that there is a view that objective 1 money cannot be used for roads? Given that west Wales is close to the periphery of Europe, and that roads can increase gross domestic product, is it not rather senseless to deny the use of objective 1 money for the building of roads?

Mr. Murphy: My right hon. Friend has a point when he says that infrastructure projects, including roads, will help the economy in his part of Wales and in others. I am informed that roads can be part of an objective 1 programme, so long as the local partnership agrees. He is also aware that the whole purpose of objective 1 is to restructure the Welsh economy, and the infrastructure is obviously an important part of that.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The areas of Wales that were not fortunate enough to get objective 1 designation are very concerned about how objective 2 is being implemented. Will the Secretary of State receive representations on behalf of the people in objective 2 areas, and consider the redesignation of those areas to objective 1, given the effect that foot and mouth disease has had on them?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is aware that two thirds of Wales is covered by the objective 1 funding, but I shall be more than happy to receive representations from his constituency regarding the operation of objective 1, bearing in mind the fact that that would have to be done with a representative from the Assembly, which is responsible for the implementation of the programme.

Cardiff (European Capital of Culture Bid)

6. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and the First Secretary about Cardiff's bid to be European capital of culture 2008. [44151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and the First Minister to discuss a range of issues, including Cardiff's capital of culture bid.

Kevin Brennan: If, by any chance, in the near future, my hon. Friend sees the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* Oh, here he comes! Will he draw to his attention the excellent bid that was submitted last week by Cardiff to be the European city of culture in 2008? Will he also note the total support across Wales, with one or two small exceptions, for that bid?

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has just entered the Chamber, and I have no doubt that he is aware of the issue that my hon. Friend raises. Cardiff is a vibrant and exciting city in which to live and work, and I am constantly impressed by its vitality. It is a commercial, cultural and learning centre, and a major centre for the arts. I can do nothing better than to echo the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales at the Welsh Grand Committee last November—in answer, I think, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan)—when he said that he was backing Cardiff's bid to become the European capital of culture. I hope that all Welsh Members will do that, as it would benefit Cardiff and Wales.

Renewable Energy

7. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If he will make a statement on Government support for renewable energy in Wales. [44152]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The Government's approach to renewable energy is to set the framework but leave the market to decide on the type and location of projects to be pursued. The renewables obligation, which came into effect in England and Wales on 1 April 2002, will provide an assured market for renewables until 2027.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for his reply. May I remind him that an objective 1 project at Aberporth in my constituency has a renewable biomass energy-creating project at its centre? That project has been endangered by the withdrawal of Ministry of Defence funding for its apprentices in the past two weeks. What action is the Minister taking in the Wales Office to ensure that that shortfall of funding will be plugged so that the project can go ahead? Will he come and visit the project to see for himself how we can renewably regenerate that area of west Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of the biomass project to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I am also aware that this morning he met the Secretary of State regarding the decision to discontinue apprenticeships at Aberporth. I commend the hon. Gentleman for his hard work lobbying on that issue, and I understand his disappointment. My right hon. Friend and the First Minister met QinetiQ earlier this week, and they are now exploring with other agencies ways to obtain continued funding for the apprentice school. I will happily visit the proposed site of the Aberporth technical park. If we pull together on this issue, we will gain great benefit for the whole of Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [44176] **Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Peter Bradley: This is a momentous day for my family and me, because this morning my wife and I, in common with thousands of parents up and down the country, took our children to school for the very first time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aw!"] Thank you—any contributions to their lunch boxes would be gratefully received. Will the Prime Minister assure me that he and the Chancellor will regard next week's Budget as a defining opportunity not just to sustain but to increase Government investment in public services, which will define the quality of life that our children will enjoy, and to create a national consensus about the society that we want to live in, about the limits as well as the extent of the Government's power to create such a society, and about the rights and responsibilities of each citizen in helping to achieve that?

The Prime Minister: I was not entirely sure what momentous decision my hon. Friend was about to announce. The key for the Government is to proceed on the basis of a strong economy that delivers the investment in our public services that we need. Already, record investment in education has produced the best school results this country has ever seen. We see from today's report by the chief executive of the national health service that most indicators in the NHS are moving in the right, positive direction, although there is a lot more to do. The only way we will be able to keep that investment coming through our public services is to make the right choices in the Budget to sustain that investment over the long term, so that the people of this country get the opportunities they need, and that depends on public services for all.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In the future, if left unchecked, Iraq will be able to deploy its weapons of mass destruction against targets in western Europe, including the United Kingdom. As the last head of the United Nations inspectors makes clear, development of those weapons continues unchecked. Given that, will the Prime Minister confirm reports that he told President Bush over the weekend that if military action is needed against Saddam Hussein, the British Government will support and, if necessary, contribute to it?

The Prime Minister: The time for military action has not yet arisen. However, there is no doubt at all that the development of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein poses a severe threat not just to the region, but to the wider world. I draw the House's attention to the fact that, in my first statement to the House a few days after 11 September, I made it clear that the issue of weapons of mass destruction had to be, and should be, dealt with. How we deal with it will be a matter for deliberation and consultation in the normal way. After 11 September, we proceeded in a calm and sensible way, and we shall do so again, but we must confront the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Not only is Iraq developing weapons of mass destruction, but it has also become apparent that it is a major sponsor of terrorism in the middle east, bankrolling many of the families of suicide bombers and providing terrorists with bomb-making equipment. In the United States, the Prime Minister spoke about a "regime change" in Iraq. Given his reported comments, will he confirm that getting rid of Saddam Hussein may now be an objective of the Government?

The Prime Minister: As I said in Texas, there is no doubt at all that the region would be a better place without Saddam Hussein. It is worth pointing out that the Iraqi people themselves would rejoice most at Saddam Hussein leaving office. We should never forget that that regime has a particular record: the Iran-Iraq war in which 1 million people lost their lives; the annexation of Kuwait, which precipitated the Gulf war; and perhaps the most appalling act of all, the use of chemical weapons on the Kurdish people. There is no doubt whatever that the world would be a better place without Saddam. However, the method of achieving that is, as I said, open to consultation and deliberation. When the judgments are made, I have no doubt at all that this House—indeed, the whole country—will want to debate the issue thoroughly.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does the Prime Minister believe that countering the growing threat from Saddam Hussein is about protecting lives in Britain and the lives of British forces abroad, and not just about supporting our allies? In the USA, the Prime Minister described those who refuse to accept the need to act as "utterly naive". Does he believe that they misunderstand the nature of the threat, or that they will simply refuse to accept any evidence that they are given?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that I should comment on other people's motives in relation to this matter, however kind it is of the right hon. Gentleman to offer me that opportunity—I am sure he wants to be helpful. The key issue is that this is not something that has suddenly arisen, and it is important that the House understand that. Before 11 September, a whole series of negotiations took place about potential new United Nations Security Council resolutions to put in place a better sanctions regime, and about how we try to ensure that weapons inspectors get back inside Iraq. The reason why the UN Security Council resolutions that were originally proposed and passed demand that weapons inspections take place in Iraq is precisely that the threat of weapons of mass destruction is real and present.

The issue is quite clear. As I said in my speech in Texas, Saddam Hussein has a very clear message from the international community: the weapons inspectors should go back in—anyone, any place, any time. That is the message that we must give him. Simply turning our backs on the issue of weapons of mass destruction is not an option. That is why I think it so important that we stand with the United States in saying that this issue is one that has to be, and will be, confronted. We will do so in a sensible and measured way, but we cannot allow a state of this nature to develop those weapons without let or hindrance.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I tell the Prime Minister how pleased I am that our right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will attend the most important United Nations environment conference on rain forests next week? However, it is equally

important that we have a commitment to the environment at home. Will the Prime Minister look closely at assurances given to me that timber used in the refurbishment of the Cabinet Office, at 22 Whitehall, is sustainable? If, as Greenpeace suggests, it is not, will he look again at his Government's contract?

The Prime Minister: Because of what happened earlier today, I am more acquainted with the fixtures and fittings of the Cabinet Office than I was previously. My understanding is that the timber that is being used is indeed certified as sustainable, so Greenpeace's campaign is misconceived. However, the matter will doubtless be looked into by those responsible.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): It is reported today that 3,000 post office branches in urban areas are scheduled to close. Does the Prime Minister support that?

The Prime Minister: No, it is not correct that 3,000 offices are scheduled to close. What is correct, however, is that there needs to be a major programme of change within the Post Office, which we are prepared to support with several hundred million pounds. The reason for that is perfectly simple: the current situation is not sustainable, unless we were to spend very large sums of public money in doing so. If that is the Liberal Democrats' position, perhaps they should say so.

Mr. Kennedy: The House will notice that the Prime Minister cannot side-step the facts. Since he took office, 1,500 post office branches in rural areas have already closed. Double that number are to close in urban areas, yet Labour's last election manifesto described those facilities as "an invaluable resource". By definition, how can they be an invaluable resource if 4,500 of them are to shut?

The Prime Minister: The reason why the change in the Post Office has to come about is precisely that it is not possible, unless we are to spend very large sums of money, to say that no post office will ever close. In fact, under the restructuring proposals, 95 per cent. of people will still live within a mile of a post office in urban areas, and as a result of the restructuring package, we will of course give the best protection possible to rural post offices. *[Interruption.]* I know that the Liberal Democrats always like to propose a problem but never a solution, but the fact is that, in the end, the only solution is to restructure. Even that will cost somewhere in the region of £270 million. If we were to go further by guaranteeing that no post office would ever close, no matter what its circumstances, the bill would run to hundreds of millions of pounds more. I am afraid that we simply cannot do that.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Given the Prime Minister's reported comment that those who take a different view from his on events in the middle east are utterly naive, may I ask him whether it is naive to be dismayed at the succour that has been given to Sharon by the mixed messages that have come from the American and British Administrations? Is it naive to be aware of the bellicosity of elements in the American Administration, based on ideology; or is it naive to believe in the centrality of the United Nations in resolving the problems of the middle east?

The Prime Minister: I have not described anyone who takes a different view from mine on Iraq as utterly naive. I said that it would be utterly naive to say that weapons of mass destruction were not an issue, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not say that either. The issue is how we deal with that—I said what I said on Iraq a moment or two ago—but in relation to the middle east, it is not correct to say that there have been mixed messages. We are absolutely clear that we condemn entirely those things that are happening in the middle east at the moment, which is why Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories and do so now, as the American President has said; but we also—I hope that my hon. Friend would do so too—condemn without reservation the terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens: both must be condemned.

This is a difficult situation not because the messages are mixed, but because I am afraid there has to be a message of restraint and an end to violence for both sides. The only way in my judgment that we will get a resolution to this issue is not if we take sides on it, but if we actually make sure that, in a sensible way, we say to both sides that the Israelis have to withdraw from the occupied territories and cease the reprisals, and the Palestinians have to take action against those people engaged in terrorist attacks.

Q2. [44177] **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) a moment ago, the Prime Minister very properly said that there should be a period of consultation and debate before contemplating any military action against Iraq; but does he agree that, lying behind that debate, there would have to be the very fundamental principle that if a rogue state threatens the peace and security of this nation, it would be a gross dereliction of duty if we did not take military action against it?

The Prime Minister: Of course we must make sure that we are protected against any such state. I hope that this Government's record on issues such as Kosovo and Afghanistan and, indeed, in relation to Iraq shows that we are prepared to take that action. But I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, as I am sure that the whole House will, that action of this nature is very serious, that it should not be undertaken lightly and that it should be undertaken in consultation and deliberation with key allies.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Returning to the subject of Iraq, does not the Prime Minister agree that, dangerous and difficult though the situation in Iraq is, it cannot be tackled in isolation; and that, on the position in Palestine and Israel, we must tackle both issues without being seen to be exercising double standards, not only because that is fair and just, but because in the war against terrorism it would be counterproductive to be seen to be exercising those double standards?

The Prime Minister: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend; it is important that we act without double standards and that we act on both issues. That is precisely

why we passed UN Security Council resolution 1402 in respect of the situation in the middle east at the present time, which made it absolutely clear that we support both Israel's right to security and a viable Palestinian state, and that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories. Of course it is also important that we deal with the issues of weapons of mass destruction.

Some people say that America has not been engaged in this issue, but that is unfair. Secretary of State Colin Powell is now in the region. He will visit Israel shortly. That mission is extremely important. *[Interruption.]* Well, with the greatest respect, these issues are difficult to deal with, and the fact that the Secretary of State has been sent to the region is an indication of the earnestness of American intentions in relation to these issues.

It is also extremely important that we carry on, as we are, in intensive negotiations with everyone involved, including our European partners, the UN and countries such as Russia. The resolution of this issue will require a massive collaborative effort on the part of the international community, but no one should think it will be easy, because it will not.

Q3. [44178] **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): The Prime Minister may recall that a month ago I asked him about delays in cancer treatment. He reassured me that the Government were investing more. Is he aware of the anger and frustration felt by many cancer patients and clinicians because a high percentage of those specifically earmarked funds has been siphoned off, owing to NHS bureaucracy, and to financing low-priority activity such as reducing the debts of hospital trusts? What guarantees can he give that money specifically pledged by the Government to their top health priority is spent for the designated purpose?

The Prime Minister: We do need to make sure that money allocated to cancer treatment is spent on that. All I would say to the hon. Gentleman—to put what he has just said in a balanced perspective—is that the report that drew attention to the problem also said in specific terms that cancer services in this country were improving. More than 90 per cent. of people who are referred to a consultant are now referred within two weeks; the figure was just over 60 per cent. when we came to office.

We are investing a massive amount in cancer services, but the hon. Gentleman is right: more still needs to be done. I therefore hope that next week's Budget will give us an opportunity to make a sustained investment in cancer care—but also in other vital parts of the health service—over a considerable period. I hope the hon. Gentleman and his party will support us in that.

Q4. [44179] **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): I believe that the Prime Minister has been entirely right—*[Laughter.]* I believe that he has been entirely right to be as active on the international scene as he clearly has been in recent weeks. May I, however, seek a reassurance on behalf of my constituents that, in next week's Budget and in the coming months, the Government will remain committed to their highly successful domestic agenda—a strong economy, investment in public services, and repairing the damage that the Conservative party has done to our communities? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: I thought it was a very good question. My hon. Friend is of course absolutely right. The Conservatives never like being reminded that when they were in office interest rates were at 15 per cent. for a year and at 10 per cent. for four years, there was savage underinvestment in our public services, and unemployment rocketed. Fortunately, under this Government we have the strongest economy that we have had for decades, the lowest inflation, the lowest interest rates and the lowest unemployment. That is why the Conservative party does not like it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Perhaps the Prime Minister would like to agree with this one. Commander Ward, the decorated squadron commander from the Falklands—a war whose 20th anniversary we now mark—said that the Prime Minister's decision to withdraw Sea Harriers would lead to the

"loss of many lives and ships".

Does the Prime Minister agree with that?

The Prime Minister: No. We are satisfied that the decisions we have made through the strategic defence review allow us to defend our country properly, and I pay tribute to the superb work done by our armed forces around the world.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister should know that in the strategic defence review it was proposed to phase out both the Sea Harrier and the GR7, but not before 2010, when a replacement aircraft was supposed to be available. He must also know that the aircraft that the Government are now talking about putting on the carriers—the GR7—is slower, has no air-to-air radar, and is not designed for air defence at all.

The Prime Minister may recall that Sandy Woodward, commander of the Falklands taskforce, said his decision meant that the fleet would now have to rely on United States carrier support if it ever carried out operations. In the light of that, will he not reconsider the rather stupid decision to withdraw Sea Harriers?

The Prime Minister: First, let me point out that the right hon. Gentleman is complaining about the amount that we are spending on defence. All these decisions are, in the end, about the resources available. I think people in the armed forces remember that when his party was in power it slashed defence spending. The first real-terms increase took place under this Government, when we came to office. As regards the right hon. Gentleman's specific point, I do not accept that the efficiency of our armed forces is being undermined by that.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister cannot go back to the pre-1997 Government, given that his own strategic defence review, on which he bases his evidence, makes it absolutely clear that that aircraft would stay in service until a replacement had been found. The Prime Minister's previous Chief of the Defence Staff, General Guthrie, recently said that

"the Defence programme was underfunded before September 11th."

The Territorial Army has been cut, the Navy is short of ships and the Royal Air Force is short of pilots, yet the Prime Minister constantly increases our commitments. Surely the resolve to stand up to would-be aggressors becomes worthless if we lack the ability to do so.

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that our armed forces are at all in the state that the right hon. Gentleman describes. On underfunding, I was making exactly that point a moment or so ago. When his party was in office—*[Interruption.]* For 10 years, the Conservative party cut defence spending. Under this Government, the armed forces have had the first real-terms increase in defence spending for years. If Conservative Members are demanding that even more money be spent on defence, I hope that they will support the decisions that are announced in the Budget next week.

Q5. [44180] **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): In the context of Israel, I hope that the President was prepared to listen to my right hon. Friend's experience in Northern Ireland, which shows that the only way to build peace out of conflict is patient politics and persuasion, not bombs and bullying.

During those important discussions, did my right hon. Friend have time to mention the United States' imposition of steel tariffs and to point out to the President that that is no way to do business with a loyal friend and ally?

The Prime Minister: The action that the United States has taken—against many countries, obviously—is now the subject of European Union action under the World Trade Organisation. I made it absolutely clear that we fundamentally disagree with the United States' decision, which is not good for anyone, including the US steel industry. The action undertaken by the WTO is important. If the WTO finds against the United States, I hope that it will abide by that ruling. The more free trade there is, and the fewer restrictions on trade, the better.

Q6. [44181] **Mr. John Maples** (Stratford-on-Avon): Can the Prime Minister explain the difference between what we and the Americans are doing in Afghanistan to root out al-Qaeda terrorism and what Israel is doing on the west bank to root out Palestinian terrorism? Why is one right and the other wrong?

The Prime Minister: In the case of Israel and the Palestinians, a process is under way to resolve a longstanding dispute, so the two situations are not identical. We will secure a lasting solution in the middle east peace process only when we understand that it cannot be simply a military solution. We will need a political solution. Israel will not go away; the Palestinians will not go away. The only solution will be based on recognising Israel's right to exist—that should be recognised by the whole Arab world—and on giving the Palestinians a viable Palestinian state in which to live.

Having said that, of course I deplore the terrorism that is taking place. It is terrible that there are so many innocent victims. In the end, as we have learned from bitter experience in Northern Ireland, the only solution is a political process that works.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is widespread support in the House and the country for the proposition that the Iraqis should comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions and allow unfettered access to arms inspectors? Will he give the assurance that before any military action that may eventually become necessary is contemplated, Saddam Hussein will be given every opportunity to comply with those resolutions?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's point is right. Saddam Hussein is in defiance of the resolutions with which he should comply. However, he has the opportunity to comply with them now. He is not in doubt about what is necessary. The United Nations resolutions are clear; there are nine and he is in breach of every one. The international community's position is also clear. Whatever people think about the action that will follow, he must comply with the resolutions. To that extent, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Q7. [44182] **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): May I give the Prime Minister another opportunity to tell the House whether he has done a deal that involves an amnesty for IRA terrorists on the run?

The Prime Minister: It is not a question of a deal but of recognising, as we did in the Weston Park proposals, that there is an issue about people who in some cases have been charged and in others, convicted, and who have been out of the country for a long time but are not covered by the existing process. We shall find a way to cover them, and we will do that sensibly; we made that clear at Weston Park. It is not a deal but a sensible issue that needs to be resolved.

Q8. [44183] **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): Contractors are currently on site, preparing to start construction work on the £11.5 million Rothwell-Desborough A6 bypass in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the local authorities and all those local people who campaigned for that vital road for more than 25 years? Will he note the stark contrast between that public investment and the false promises and fantasy road schemes that we had from the Conservative party for so long?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to congratulate all involved in the Rothwell-Desborough A6 bypass. It is worth pointing out that my hon. Friend's constituency is one of many that will benefit from such schemes. The transport plan includes an increase of 44 per cent. over the previous 10 years in investment in our public transport system, road and rail. That demonstrates the necessity of the investment in public infrastructure that we will continue to make.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The Prime Minister has clearly set out what he expects the Palestinians and Israelis to do. I doubt whether a single hon. Member does not support that. What did he and the President discuss doing if Israel continued to ignore UN resolutions and persisted in its current actions?

The Prime Minister: There is no alternative to continuing the pressure to ensure that it complies and, in line with that, that the Palestinian Authority takes the necessary action against terrorists. Even with the United

States, there can be no resolution without some assistance from the parties that are directly involved. From the perspective of the international community, we will remain fully engaged. Not only the United States but the United Kingdom, the European Union, NATO, Russia—the whole international community—wants to help. However, to do that we need at least some give from the sides that are directly involved in the dispute.

Q9. [44184] **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): Although I acknowledge the Government's recognition of Liverpool's housing needs by placing it in the new pathfinder housing area, does my right hon. Friend agree that they cannot be tackled without major new investment funds being made available? Will he support the provision of major funds to the new housing market renewal fund, which will tackle dereliction and its associated problems in Liverpool and elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: We are putting substantial additional sums into neighbourhood renewal programmes in Liverpool and elsewhere. When those schemes are properly co-ordinated, with all the various departments working together, they are very successful. I know that my hon. Friend will agree that we must also tackle some of the social disorder problems in those local communities. For that reason, the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on matters such as abandoned cars and street crime is so important today.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The Prime Minister sets standards in government. Will he tell the House whether there is a daily record of authorised, unattributable briefings or are some deniable? Is it a condition of ministerial office that those in government obey the code for Members? Who monitors the ministerial code and who requires Ministers to uphold it?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman has any complaints to make, he can make them to the normal authorities in the normal way. I am absolutely satisfied that much of what the Conservative party raises is complete nonsense.

Q11. [44186] **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): On Friday last, when the final shift was worked at the heavy end of the Llanwern steelworks, it was announced that the steel boss who axed 6,000 steelworkers' jobs last year was to be rewarded with a bonus of 130 per cent., bringing his salary up to almost £500,000. Why, in almost every crisis of this kind, do the workers end up losing out and losing their jobs, but the steel bosses and bosses of other industries are allowed to gift themselves fortunes?

The Prime Minister: I do understand the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised. All I would say is that, as a result of the money that we are putting into those areas, the work that the Employment Service is doing, and the strength of the economy overall—some 26,000 jobs have been created in Wales over the past few years—we at least give people who lose their job the best chance of getting a new one. In respect of the bonus paid to the chairman of the company involved, I am afraid that that is not a matter for me.

Speaker's Statement

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the Prime Minister, I wish to express on behalf of the House our warm thanks to the Serjeant at Arms and to all those staff who contributed to the preparation of Westminster Hall for the lying in state of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, or who assisted in handling the large numbers of visitors who came to pay their respects. Many of the staff involved have worked extremely long hours with great dedication and the House is proud of them. I also wish to inform the House that a book of condolence is available for Members to sign in the Library of the House. I have signed it myself, and I encourage colleagues to do so.

Middle East

3.32 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): May I join you, Mr. Speaker, in the sentiments that you have just expressed? All those who worked so hard on the lying in state, the funeral and the procession gave the country a ceremony of which we can all be justly proud.

With permission, I should like to make a statement following my discussions with President Bush in Crawford, Texas. Normally, an informal bilateral meeting would not be the subject of a statement. Exceptionally, because of the situation in the middle east, I thought it right to come to the House and give hon. Members a more extended chance to put questions than Prime Minister's Question Time affords.

Of course, at Crawford, we discussed many issues, including bilateral relations, trade issues, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, Russia and NATO, Africa, and energy policy. I am very willing to answer questions on those issues. However, I shall concentrate on the middle east. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will also deal with this issue in the usual way in tomorrow's business statement, and there will be a further opportunity for debate next week.

There are many situations, both at home and abroad, which are called a crisis when, in truth, they are not. In this case, however, it is hard to overstate the dangers or the potential for this conflict to impact far beyond the region. It is, indeed, a genuine crisis, and one on which all of us, in whatever way we can, small or large, have a duty to act.

In the past few days, I have discussed the situation not just with President Bush, but with President Putin, President Mubarak, President Chirac, Prime Minister Jospin, Prime Minister Aznar and others. I look forward to discussing it in depth with Chancellor Schröder of Germany this weekend. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been in constant contact with his counterparts.

Nobody who has been following recent events on television could fail to recognise not only the seriousness of the situation but the appalling and real human suffering. In the past fortnight, there have been at least 55 deaths in six suicide bombings in Israel. Just this morning, at least eight people died in a suicide attack on a bus near Haifa. On the west bank, at least 230 Palestinians and 34 Israelis have died. Over 1,500 Palestinians have been injured, and a million Palestinians live under curfew.

There have been terrible human tragedies on both sides. Our hearts go out to the families of the victims, whether Israeli or Palestinian: the two Israeli women who went with their families to a cafe in Haifa and lost their husbands and children in a dreadful suicide bomb attack; the Palestinian bell ringer of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem who was shot and killed in Manger square; and the 12-year-old Palestinian boy who went out to buy some milk when the curfew was lifted and never returned—he, too, was shot and killed. Amidst the suffering, there appears to be no strategy to end it, and therefore no hope.

Both sides must see that violence is not, and never will be, the answer. The solution to this crisis will never be reached if it is seen purely as a security or military question. There must be a political process too.

[The Prime Minister]

I believe that the whole House will welcome President Bush's statement last week calling on the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories, and on the Palestinian Authority to tackle the terrorism. Without those basic minimum steps, or some steps towards meeting those objectives, and without a proper ceasefire, we cannot even begin to get a political process restarted.

So what can be done? In summary, I can tell the House that we are taking the following steps. We are in close touch with the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the United States, with our European Union partners, and with Governments in the Arab world in the urgent search for a way of stopping the bloodshed and getting a political process restarted.

We shall be seeking a UN Security Council resolution, based on Crown Prince Abdullah's plan, to promote such a process, following Secretary of State Powell's visit to the region this weekend. We stand ready to help with monitoring, both of detainees and of a ceasefire when one is established. I am convinced that this is a role that the European Union is well placed to undertake.

We are also ready, together with our European partners, to help the Palestinian Authority rebuild the infrastructure of the west bank and Gaza, and to work with it, too, in reconstituting its administrative structures. We are also ready to help the authority establish an accountable and transparent security structure that can co-operate with the Israelis and the wider international community to ensure peace and security in a Palestinian state and so underpin the stability of the region.

In respect of stability in the region, I shall say a word on Iraq. Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if I repeat some of what I said earlier. There will be many occasions on which to debate Saddam Hussein's flagrant breach of successive UN resolutions on his weapons of mass destruction. For the moment, let me say this: Saddam Hussein's regime is despicable, he is developing weapons of mass destruction, and we cannot leave him doing so unchecked. He is a threat to his own people and to the region and, if allowed to develop these weapons, a threat to us also.

Doing nothing is not an option. As I said in my speech in Texas, what the international community should do through the UN is challenge Saddam to let the inspectors back in without restriction—anyone, any place, any time. If he really has nothing to hide, let him prove it.

I repeat, however, that no decisions on action have been taken. Our way of proceeding should be and will be measured, calm and thought through. When judgments are made, I shall ensure that the House has a full opportunity to debate them.

I return now to the more pressing matter of Israel and Palestine. At some point, both sides will realise that, no matter how much blood is shed and no matter how many lives are wasted, Israel will still be there, and the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinians will still be there.

The initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah, to which I referred a moment ago, has been agreed by the Arab nations and is based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 1397. It is the only realistic basis for a solution—land for peace. The Israelis must allow a state of Palestine, secure in its own borders. In exchange, the Palestinians and the whole Arab world must recognise and respect Israel's borders and her security. A UN Security Council resolution restating these principles, with firm international backing, is the best way forward politically.

The House will know that in the region, particularly from the Israelis, there is much hostility to the idea of outside intervention. I entirely understand why, but the sad and simple truth is that the hatreds are too deep, and the wounds too raw, for the two sides to be able to resolve this alone. The US is right to be engaged and to press both sides to change, and I am clear after my visit to the US that the focus and engagement that is required will be forthcoming. Colin Powell's visit to the region is welcome evidence of that.

Both sides have heard many words of condemnation, and I do not need to add to them here. I understand the anger of the Palestinians, who see the steady encroachment of Israeli settlers who take their land from them in defiance of international law and successive UN Security Council resolutions. That must stop, but so must the appalling suicide bombings that have taken so many Israeli lives in the past few months. Palestinians have supporters the world over for their cause, but that support is weakened every time the suicide bombers act. Chairman Arafat must speak to his people and do everything in his power to stop these murderous outrages.

Both sides, therefore, know from the international community what needs to be done and they should get on and do it now. Real leadership is tested by the tough decisions and not the easy words. So, no matter how strong the feelings, no matter how deep the hatreds, now is indeed the time to pull back, to stop, and to realise that the current strategy is going nowhere, that the time for violence is over, and the time to get a peace process going is long overdue.

The international community is ready to help. People the world over are willing us to do so. Wherever we can help, we will. Whatever we can do to help, we will. But we need co-operation from both sides directly involved in the conflict.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I start by joining the Prime Minister and you, Mr. Speaker, in congratulating the Serjeant at Arms and all the members of staff in both Houses who helped so significantly in preparing this House and Westminster Hall in particular for the Queen Mother's lying in state?

We thank the Prime Minister for making his statement today. The appalling terrorist attack this morning has reminded us—as he pointed out—that the crisis in the middle east remains on a knife edge.

The Prime Minister's list of those innocents from Haifa to the west bank who have lost their lives, particularly this morning, is tragic and memorable. Today, the prospects for resuming any kind of peace process seem remote. It is because of the gravity of the situation with which we are now confronted that there must be a stepping-up of our efforts to help both Israel and the Palestinian people find a resolution to this conflict, as the right hon. Gentleman said.

Of course, we wish the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, well in the round of negotiations that he is conducting and is about to conduct in the region and we welcome the reaffirmation today by the Prime Minister and President Bush of their commitment to a just

settlement—one in which the two states, the state of Israel and a viable, democratic Palestinian state, can live together in peace and security.

We also agree that the incursions by Israeli troops into Palestinian Authority territory must end without delay, as has been said. Whatever the short-term successes that might be gained through military action in the west bank, there can be no purely military solution to this centuries-old dispute. Does the Prime Minister agree, however, that it is also the duty of any Government to protect their citizens from violence, including terrorism, as I believe he pointed out? The Israeli people have also been subjected to a vile and orchestrated campaign of terror. Day by day, suicide bombers have massacred innocent civilians, while Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority appear to have taken little or no effective action to confront those who are behind them. Does the Prime Minister agree that, in line with our demand for an Israeli withdrawal, there is now a heavy responsibility on Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority? They simply must deliver.

I am sure that the Prime Minister is aware of two documents that the Israeli Government maintain were found in the camps. If they are genuine, they show a clear link between Chairman Arafat and the terrorist networks sustaining the suicide bombers. That confirms the belief that if the will exists within the Palestinian Authority, it is possible to deliver a period of peace—it happened for 24 days over Christmas. Chairman Arafat has admitted that he was responsible for that peaceful interlude. Now, he will have the opportunity to deliver again. There must be sustained pressure on the terrorists from Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

I wonder whether the Prime Minister agrees that Arab states of good will must make it clear to countries such as Iran and Iraq that they should cease their meddling in these affairs, as it is becoming more and more clear they have been doing in the past few months.

Does the Prime Minister agree that the biggest issue and perhaps the key to the whole peace process, has to be the short and long-term guarantee of Israel's security? The worst outcome would be an Israeli withdrawal only to be followed by a further wave of suicide bombings. In the event of such bombings, Israel would again want to act to defend itself and its people, which would plunge the whole situation into crisis. The Prime Minister is aware of the problem because he has spoken about the need for observers—he did so again today. They may have a useful role to play in the coming months, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that they cannot be expected to police terrorism on the west bank in the way that Israel would understandably require as a precursor for further talks? What is the Prime Minister's assessment of Chairman Arafat's willingness to guarantee Israel's security against future attack? What is his assessment of the ability of Arab states to assist in this crucial short-term task, beyond the long-term peace negotiations?

The principal lesson that we can take from Northern Ireland—the Prime Minister is right to make this point—is that only when terrorism ends will there be a realistic prospect of a resumption of meaningful peaceful dialogue. In his statement, the Prime Minister referred to rebuilding the infrastructure of the west bank and Gaza. Does he agree that a complete and unequivocal end to terrorism could lead to significant economic benefits? Does he agree that holding out such a prospect in very obvious terms could be an encouragement to those who are engaged in terrorism perhaps to think again?

We agree that the basis for any resumed dialogue following an end to violence should be the proposals put forward recently by Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which remain the only prospect for long-term peace and security in the area. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the plans should include the guarantee of the short-term security of Israel; otherwise, they will not come to anything at all. The two cannot be divorced, as I hope the Prime Minister agrees.

The Prime Minister is right to say that now is the time for real leadership to shine through. The crisis will only get worse unless two things happen without delay: the end to violence, coupled with those guarantees of security. The Opposition will continue to support the Government and the United States in their pursuit of those two objectives.

The Prime Minister: We are in complete agreement about the basic principles here. The right hon. Gentleman says that the incursions by the Israeli defence forces should end without delay and that the Palestinian Authority must cease terror. That is right. The question is how we get people to a situation where that is likely to happen.

I totally understand why Israel feels, when its citizens are being subject to these appalling terrorist acts—acts of random violence, but with the specific purpose of doing as much damage to innocent civilians as possible—that it has to retaliate. My concern has always been—I have said this to the Israeli Prime Minister—that while I understand that, what is the strategy to get us from where we are at the moment to a different place?

In my view, the key is to make sure that we combine an overall long-term process—basing that on Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative seems sensible, since it recognises the two basic principles that most people now accept—with sufficient minimum security steps that re-engage the parties with some semblance of confidence.

That is very difficult, which is why I proposed some form of outside help. Of course, those involved could not do the work of policing terrorism. However, one of the things that the Israelis constantly say, with some justification, is that if the Palestinian Authority arrests suspected terrorists, they simply go through a revolving door; they are locked up, but then simply go back out again. One suggestion that I made earlier, and which remains, is that the international community could easily police the situation once those people are arrested and detained properly.

We have to look for imaginative ways of dealing with some of the key issues; otherwise, the suicide bombings will continue, the reprisals that the Israelis take will continue and the hatred and bitterness will get worse. One must ask how we have got to a stage where the bitterness is so deep that teenage Palestinians are wiring themselves up as suicide bombers and blowing themselves up. That is an indication of how deep the hatreds are. Unless there is a political vision that people can aim for, together with some minimum security steps, into the vacuum comes mindless and terrible violence, which is what we have at the moment.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

I totally understand the reluctance that Israel, in particular, has regarding the involvement of outside people. I also understand its frustration at the fact that the Palestinian Authority has not been, or was not, taking proper steps to deal with terrorism. In the end, however, unless the situation is to continue, with many innocent Palestinians dying as well, we have to find a way of unblocking the current situation and putting together the minimum security steps and the long-term process. Otherwise, I fear that the situation will get worse, and I do not think that people have yet contemplated quite how much worse it could get.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to add our expressions of gratitude to all your colleagues and the House authorities for doing, with great dedication, such an efficient and characteristically courteous job with regard to the events attending the death and the funeral of Her Majesty the Queen Mother. We are all very grateful.

I am also grateful to the Prime Minister for having taken the decision to come to the House to make this statement and to take some questions. He is discussing a dangerous and deadly global situation. The loss of a British soldier from the first battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment, killed accidentally yesterday in Kabul, brings home to all of us in the House just how dangerous these international commitments are for our service personnel.

The Prime Minister has reported back thus far in his discussions vis-à-vis Iraq. He will acknowledge that we must all be honest. This situation crosses the political spectrum—there is genuine unease in the Labour party, among the Liberal Democrats and perhaps in sections of the Conservative party. We must acknowledge that that unease is a reflection of genuine and sincerely held shades of opinion throughout the country. Therefore, as a result of his discussions with President Bush, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that no country can conduct a foreign policy on the basis of "my ally, right or wrong"? Although I am not implying that the Government are seeking to do so, there is a need for discernment. Many of us hope that the Government may be able to temper some of the ideas of the American Administration as the situation unfolds.

I welcome the fact that if decisions on Iraq have to be reached at some point in the future, the Prime Minister has confirmed that the House will have an opportunity to debate the matter fully. Will he confirm that if we reach that stage, incontrovertible evidence will be presented publicly, preferably at the level of the United Nations Security Council? That will be most important, not just for the legitimacy of any action under international law, but for maintaining a political consensus, not least with neighbouring Arab states. If the Prime Minister can continue to make a valued and valuable contribution in that direction, the whole House will thank him and his colleagues.

On the middle east and the appalling tragedy that is happening between Israel and the Palestinian people, we strongly support the Prime Minister. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has said that he is personally appalled by what is happening, and President Bush has called for Israeli withdrawal on three occasions. I hope that the Prime Minister will be assured that all parties in the House will join him in sending that signal to all the combatants involved. I hope that some sanity will be restored.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that meeting force and violence with still more force and violence will never provide a solution? It does not even provide the framework for a solution. That signal must be sent with increased resonance, and this is a very good opportunity for us to do that.

The Prime Minister: I join the right hon. Gentleman in expressing our condolences to the family of the soldier who was killed yesterday in Afghanistan.

On Iraq, what is important is to put into play all the different issues that arise here. Some people will be against taking action in respect of Iraq no matter what it does, but I accept entirely that there are many people who are concerned, for example, whether that action will be sensible, whether it will have the backing of international law and whether proper thought has been given to the consequences for the wider region. Those are all perfectly sensible questions. All I say is that of course those are questions that we shall consider very carefully, which is why I have constantly said that we are not at the time of decision making.

In addition, most people would accept—again, not everyone, but the vast majority—that Saddam Hussein does lead a despicable regime, that he is a threat in respect of weapons of mass destruction and that it is important that we deal with that threat. Those are all the things that are in play in debating the issue. All I can say to people is that I hope that the way in which we have proceeded in respect of Afghanistan shows that we are prepared to proceed in a reasonable and measured way, consulting with key allies and not taking action precipitately. Again, we will not do that.

But it is the case that Saddam Hussein poses a threat. That is why the UN resolutions are there. If this was somebody who, in all the time that he had been leader of Iraq, had behaved responsibly, but we were worried about certain weapon systems that he was now developing, I could understand even more so the hesitation that people might have. But this is somebody who has a track record of absolutely extraordinary aggression on his neighbours, on his own people, on everyone that he sees advantage in being aggressive towards. That is why the UN resolutions are there. That is why British pilots are still flying over the no-fly zone in order to protect people in Iraq. That is why the inspectors went in, could not do their job properly and then came out.

I hope that in the same way as I understand the need to respond to the concerns that are being raised, others will understand the need to respond to the genuine concerns about Saddam Hussein and realise that in the end we can all respond to concerns but we have to take decisions on them. I can assure people that those decisions will be sensible and that the House will have a proper opportunity to debate them before we act upon them.

I have never taken the view that we support the US right or wrong. In relation to steel or an issue such as Kyoto we make it clear where we have a disagreement. But I do believe in this country's relationship with the

United States. I do believe that that relationship is special and I do believe that it is a fundamental part of British foreign policy and should remain so. All I can say is that in my dealings with the Administration and with this President, we have found them immensely open and consultative, and where they have acted they have acted not just with consultation but in what I would regard as a sensible way.

Finally in relation to the middle east, of course we should send out the signals that we are sending out as the international community, but I come back to the point that I do not think that the signals are enough any more, because if the signals were going to work, they would have worked before now. What is necessary is to help both sides to sit down and plan a way through this. That cannot be done simply by leaving the situation as it is or by UN resolutions, although those are important. It has to be done by getting down to the detailed work in order to make sure that, step by step, we have the necessary measures that can allow us to find our way out of the current situation and to give the political process a chance to restart.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Everyone should condemn the suicide bombers without any qualification, but is not the core of the issue the need for a viable and genuine Palestinian state, not a statelet, without which all the indications are that the sea of blood will continue and so many innocent people on both sides will lose their lives?

How far is the United States really committed to such a Palestinian state? We should bear in mind the fact that time and again Sharon has indicated his strenuous opposition—indeed, all his political lifetime, at least in the last 35 years—to giving up the territories occupied since 1967. Only the terrorists will triumph if we do not bring about the sort of state to which a Palestinian people are entitled.

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend: in the end, it is the political solution that will count. I believe that America is committed to the two principles that I described. Indeed, President Bush's recent statement made that very clear. The engagement of the United States now—especially the visit of Colin Powell—is extremely important. All the way through, my plea to everyone involved in the situation is that we must stay with it to get a result. The current situation has gone down so far—it is so bad—that only by continuous engagement, which I am sure the US will offer, will we have any form of solution. My hon. Friend is right to say that in the end it is the political solution that will work.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I speak as chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel. Like the Prime Minister, I have many links with the Jewish community in this country. He knows that among the principal concerns are guarantees for Israel. It is of course within the power of the Israeli Government to cease their military activity forthwith—Israel is, after all, a democratic state—but if they did, what guarantees would there be that the terrorist attacks would cease? Who is capable of delivering those guarantees? This afternoon, the Prime Minister hinted that there may be international policing and monitoring of the situation, but, for me, the nub of the problem is the question of guarantees.

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Lady puts her finger on what is understandably the issue for Israel. The only truthful answer is that no absolute guarantees can be given about anything in this situation. However, what we can do is to look back two or three years when the current level of violence was not happening and a real political process was on track. I happen to believe that the offer made by Prime Minister Barak at the time should have been looked at in a different light—but it was not. We have to get back to a situation in which that political process is under way. The only reason why I offer the prospect of outside help in the initial stages is that I think that the thing is so bad now that I cannot see that there is even the basic minimum of trust for guarantees, which cannot be made without that. I totally understand—I have held this conversation many times, which is why I do not take the view held by some others. For example, some European leaders would probably take a less sympathetic view than I do towards the position of Israel. Knowing that its people are subject to suicide attacks and terrorist bombs—we know what that is like; we went through it ourselves in the 1970s—the pressure on Israel to act is enormous.

I understand all of that, but I come back to the basic point: unless there is a political process, the violence continues. Although the guarantees that can be given may not be absolute, we have a better chance of delivering security if there is a political process and if there is some outside help simply to make sure that the Palestinian Authority are actually doing what they said they would do.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): A former Israeli Cabinet Minister said of Mr. Sharon, during their last election, that he was a serial arsonist. That was because of the experience of Lebanon. Again, Mr. Sharon seems to be wedded to a purely military solution. Today, we heard from the secretary-general of the council of ministers of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Ahmed Abdel Rahman, that the only option left to any Palestinian was

"to become an explosive bomb wherever he goes".

That appears to be a clear incitement to suicide bombers and is wholly irresponsible. Given the gravity of the situation and the fact that it is getting worse, how can one force both sides to the table? Has my right hon. Friend, with President Bush and our US allies, considered using the threat of forms of sanction to force both sides to the negotiating table, which is the only way to find a resolution to this appalling problem?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that in these circumstances that would provide the solution. In the medium term, we need agreement on basic security measures with, if necessary, outside help to monitor them.

I totally agree with what my right hon. Friend said about the remarks that have been made, but in the end the only way through is to restart the political process. I am repeating myself, but that is true. The trouble is that the political process cannot restart until minimum security steps are taken. My worry is that the two sides are so far apart that there is no prospect of a political process or of putting the parties round a table until we have begun a bridging process towards that, based on security.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman please tell President Bush that many in this country are not yet persuaded that the threat posed by Saddam Hussein is sufficiently great to

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

justify military action, especially when the middle east is in such a turbulent state? Will he also tell Prime Minister Sharon that although suicide bombs are a particularly horrible way in which to carry out murder, from the point of view of the victim there is not much difference between a suicide bomb and a rocket, a tank shell or an air-launched bomb discharged from afar? They are equally undiscriminating in their consequences.

The Prime Minister: I really cannot add much to what I have said on Iraq. On the last point, that is precisely why the situation is as it is, and in a sense that is what the terrorists want. The original terrorist act is designed to produce a reaction; inevitably in the reaction that follows, innocent people die as well as those who may be terrorists, and the situation spirals downward from there. The only way out of that situation is the one that I have described.

What is happening on both sides is absolutely appalling, and what always strikes me about such situations is that both sides get themselves into a position where they cannot see that innocent blood is being shed on the other side as well as on their own. That is why external assistance is necessary to bring the parties closer together.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Going back to the Prime Minister's opening statement, he referred to his discussions with President Chirac. Did President Chirac tell him—I bet he didn't—that in 1977, when he was Prime Minister of France, he had as a guest the thuggish young vice-president of Iraq, and he took him on a detour in Provence to, of all places, Cadarache, the French equivalent of Aldermaston? It is to my discredit that I, like many others, turned a blind eye to the huge amount of arms being poured into Iraq in the 1980s by our country and others.

As late as January this year—between 26 and 30 January—Iraq was given a clean bill of health by the International Atomic Energy Agency. I concede that that is different from the inspectors. Nevertheless, the IAEA gave Iraq a clean bill of health on nuclear capacity. In those circumstances and given the fact that the Defence Secretary had an invitation to send a scientific delegation of his choosing to Iraq at the beginning of March, would it not be wise at least to go and talk to Iraq? If nothing comes of that, so be it, but is it not high time that we started serious discussions?

The Prime Minister: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I do not think that I will comment on President Chirac and whoever he may have had as a guest in the 1970s.

My hon. Friend's point is serious on two levels. First, in respect of sending a team out to Iraq, in my view that is best done through the United Nations. Saddam Hussein has the opportunity to prove that he has nothing to hide by letting the inspectors back in unconditionally; he should do that.

My hon. Friend says, fairly, that he and everyone else turned a blind eye to what was happening in Iraq in the 1980s. There is some truth in that, but what we are learning about our international community is that when we turn a blind eye, sooner or later the problems come back to us full frontally. That is precisely what happened in Afghanistan, and it is one reason why, although we must act carefully and sensibly, we should certainly not turn a blind eye to what Saddam Hussein is doing.

As for my hon. Friend's point about nuclear capability, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is still trying to acquire nuclear capability and ballistic missile capability. Furthermore, although we do not know what has happened, we suspect that the piles of chemical and biological weapons remain.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): When I met Chairman Arafat in the last few days of Binyamin Netanyahu's Administration, we spent about an hour and a half discussing all the outstanding problems in bringing a peace process to a conclusion. He said that there was at that time nothing that could not be resolved with good will, and that the main obstacle was the personality of Binyamin Netanyahu. When I asked him how that could be overcome, he said that if only he could deal with Ehud Barak, a deal could be achieved. It is therefore tragic that when he got a deal with Barak, he did not take it.

I am extremely worried that the documents that the Israelis claim to have captured in Ramallah and elsewhere, which were mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and which I saw yesterday, appear to show that at the highest level the Palestinian Administration have been sponsoring, organising and even funding terrorist acts. As a result, it will be all the more difficult to build confidence in any future arrangements. What does the Prime Minister think may be done to overcome that problem, and can he flesh out his ideas about the possible involvement of other, sensible Arab Administrations in that process?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's point about the proposals made by Ehud Barak is a good one: it is a tragedy that they were not acted on properly at the time. As for what can be done now, if the Israelis can be persuaded to withdraw and the Palestinians to take the necessary action—with outside help if necessary—to control terrorism, the principal thing the Arab states have to do is get behind that initiative. In other words, they have to make it clear that they do not support terrorism; the states that are, either tacitly or openly, supporting terrorism must cease; and they must explicitly recognise—as Crown Prince Abdullah's plan does—Israel's right to exist.

Sometimes, people do not sufficiently understand Israel's sense of insecurity in circumstances in which a significant part of the Arab world overtly does not accept its right to exist. That is why it is important that we act on Crown Prince Abdullah's proposals. If there is a ray of hope in this ghastly situation it is that increase in recognition. All countries have moved their position. Countries that were hesitant about accepting the notion of a viable Palestinian state are now saying that they want it, including the United States of America. The European Union and the United Kingdom have stated it explicitly. Secondly, the Arab world is prepared to recognise Israel's right to exist. Those two principles are now accepted.

As the hon. Gentleman says, rightly, the problem is that mistrust is so great—how on earth can negotiations ever start again? That is why the minimum security steps are vital.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Since Saddam Hussein is the spectre at our debate, will the Prime

Minister put the subject with which we are dealing into context? He will recall that in 1988, Saddam Hussein rained down chemical weapons on Halabja, that 5,000 people died within half an hour, and that thousands of others were blinded or suffered severe side effects. For 17 months, poisonous gases were used on outlying villages, and 4 million people living in northern Iraq and Kurdistan were affected. Can we not remind ourselves of how important it is that Saddam Hussein lives with UN resolutions, and the sooner he does so the better?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind us of the nature of Saddam's regime and the way in which it deals with its political opponents, with routine political executions. We should remember that. When they think about it, most people realise that this person constitutes a threat. We must be careful how we deal with it.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): First, on behalf of my colleagues, I endorse everything that has been said in appreciation of the work of the Serjeant at Arms and his colleagues over the past few days.

On the middle east, I agree that there must be an end of terrorism, that there must be Israeli restraint and withdrawal, and that there is a need for a political strategy. However, I am a little concerned about some of the parallels that are drawn with Northern Ireland. Between 1970 and 1995, we had many different political initiatives, none of which succeeded. Among the reasons why the process after 1995 was more successful—there were many—were two that seem to me relevant. First, the terrorists became convinced that their campaign would fail. Secondly, there was a change in the underlying ideology. Even Irish republicans realised that the blood and soil nationalism that they had been attached to was wrong.

I do not see any sign of a similar ideological change in the middle east. We cannot look at Palestine apart from the rest of the Arab nation. While I appreciate what Prince Abdullah has done in recognising Israel's right to exist, the situation would be much more hopeful if the Saudi authorities were to start to try to redefine the particular brand of Islam that is the ideology of their state, because that has provided many of the wellsprings of the violence and the particular forms of terrorism that we have seen.

Of course we must deal with the symptoms, but until there is a willingness among the Arab states to get to the ideological roots of the problem, we cannot have very much optimism.

The Prime Minister: I always understand the right hon. Gentleman's hesitation about the parallels with Northern Ireland. However, I believe that there is a parallel. I do not believe that it would ever have been possible—everything that the right hon. Gentleman says is right, of course—to have a process unless there was continuous engagement in a detailed proposal to work our way out of the impasse, and a political vision to go alongside that, which was there in the Belfast agreement.

It is worth pointing out that two and a half or three years ago there was not the present level of violence. What has changed, first, is that a political solution was rejected. There then appeared to be no political strategy. In some ways the situation is not entirely dissimilar. Leaving that aside, I think that the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must judge the situation in the round.

I think that the Palestinians know perfectly well that the state of Israel will not cease to exist. The Arab world knows that Israel is not going to go away. Whatever the Arab world says and whatever ideological hangover there is from the past, it knows that that will not happen. The trouble is that while no political process is under way, it is reluctant to say that. That is why Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative was important.

If we could envisage a situation, difficult as it is now, where real progress was being made and where the Israelis and the Palestinians were working through a proper process, I think that a series of things would start to change in the middle east. For a start, many of those countries that have effectively reared their people on fairly poisonous anti-Israeli and often anti-Semitic propaganda would have to change. I think that there is a recognition among some of those Governments that people who are reared on that type of propaganda often turn into the sort of political extremists who ultimately come looking for the Governments of those very states.

There is a clear sense in which the region could change. For example, if people like Saddam Hussein were not in power any more, the situation could change. There are these prospects but they all depend on the basic political strategy being reinvigorated. Until that happens, the hatreds just get worse.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Everyone will agree with my right hon. Friend on his view of the Saddam Hussein regime: the world would be better off without it. Nevertheless, on 27 September last year, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), stated that the objective of British foreign policy was to remove the threat of Iraq's weapons and not to replace the Iraqi Government, which was described as a matter for the people of Iraq. On the other hand, as long ago as 1997, President Clinton stated that sanctions against Iraq must remain for as long as Saddam Hussein lasted. What is the current view and policy of the British Government? If they take the latter position, there is no incentive to get the current regime in Iraq to change tack and allow inspectors in. I happen to remember that, initially, the inspectors left of their own accord; the difficulty now is to get them back in.

The Prime Minister: Of course, the policy is to protect ourselves against weapons of mass destruction, but obviously that cannot be divorced from the regime, because it is the regime that is responsible. In respect of the comments made by President Bush, and indeed President Clinton before him, regime change in Iraq has been the policy of successive American Governments, but that is the case precisely because of the fear of weapons of mass destruction. All I would say to my hon. Friend is that it is for that very reason that the international community has said to Saddam Hussein, "Let the inspectors back in." That is what I am saying, but it must be done unconditionally.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In wishing the Prime Minister well in his immense task, may I ask him to consider two points? First, will he tell Mr. Sharon clearly and unambiguously that the way in which he has conducted his regime has not helped his cause and has made many friends into doubters, and that while we are

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

all committed to the existence of the state of Israel, we do not believe that the current regime is acting in a very civilised manner?

Secondly, to reinforce the bipartisan nature of the approach, which has been very evident in today's exchanges, will the right hon. Gentleman consider asking his predecessor John Major whether he would be prepared to play a part? He could perhaps act as a roving envoy and go to the middle east to talk to people. He has immense experience and a little more time than the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister take on board that suggestion?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly happy to consider that suggestion. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, which was about Prime Minister Sharon, I think that I have said all that I have to say. I understand the concerns that are being expressed. My view now is that the important thing is to try to get the process re-begun. Frankly, I am more interested in doing that than in condemning particular people for what they have done. The position that we have set out in respect of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories is very clear.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to the House to make the statement and support him in calling for an end to suicide bombings and for withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied towns. I should like to put two points to him. First, the sort of action that is being taken by Sharon and the Israeli Government has not brought, will not and cannot bring an end to the appalling suicide bombings. Secondly, while the international community has called for Israel to withdraw, it has not done so. It has been flouting the will of the international community.

It is not only mistrust that is a problem, but the fact that an illegal occupation is going on. On Saturday, I spoke to a Palestinian friend in Ramallah who had not been able to step outside her front door for more than a week. If she had done so, she would have risked being shot. Food and medical supplies were short; indeed, even ambulances could not get to the sick and wounded. Is there any other part of the world where, faced with such circumstances, we would think it suitable or sufficient only to call for withdrawal rather than ensure that that is backed up by some form of action? While I am unaware of the west supplying any arms to the Palestinian Authority or, indeed, to any Palestinians, an awful lot of military hardware is being supplied to Israel. May I call for an arms embargo on Israel while it is behaving like this? Secondly—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking far too long.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is drawing attention to the fact that some 1 million Palestinians are now living under curfew, and that is precisely what is happening. Many hundreds of the Palestinians who are losing their lives are innocent. The problem, however, is that innocent Israelis are dying, too, as the bomb at Haifa showed. The Israelis believe that these people are coming from the occupied territories to commit acts of terrorism. We have to recognise, therefore, that we are required to be even-handed, and that means being genuinely even-handed. It means saying that the Israelis have to withdraw from the occupied territories, and that the Palestinians have to take the necessary action to stop the violence and the terrorism.

That cannot be done simply by condemning one side or the other. Who could possibly see the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem being treated in the way that it is being treated and not feel a sense of tragedy about what is happening? All I will say to my hon. Friend is that, on the other side of the argument, he must realise that if, in his constituency—or that of any other hon. Member—people were going into cafés where families were sitting having a meal, and suicide bombs were going off and children were being killed by a deliberate act of violence, the anger of that community would be huge and intense as a result. We can take a position, one way or another, in condemning this side or that side. We have said what should happen on both sides, but I honestly believe that it will not happen until the things that I have described take place. I promise my hon. Friend that no amount of pressure will resolve this properly without external assistance to get over the problems.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I welcome most warmly the Prime Minister's statement. Would he not accept, however, that while terrorism—from wherever it comes—must be not only defeated but eradicated, the perception at the moment is that Prime Minister Sharon has declared war on the Palestinian people as a whole, not just on the terrorist organisations Islamic Jihad and Hamas? Is there no opportunity to get an international world community coalition together to guarantee a meaningful Palestinian state—not one involving Bantustans—and to guarantee the state of Israel within its traditional boundaries?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely that to which the United Nations resolutions are supposed to give effect. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need both those things to happen. My point is simply that, unless the Israelis are sure that there is at least some means of being secure from terrorist attacks, it will be very difficult to get them to stop doing what they are doing. That is why it is so important that we put both things together. Some external assistance is necessary precisely to allow each side the confidence that someone objective is trying to assist them to do the things that they both know they must do.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): May I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that the maintenance of the breadth of the international coalition against terrorism remains an important priority for him and for President Bush? On the point that my right hon. Friend made at Question Time about Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons attacks on the Kurds, may I say that it is important to try to ensure that those who have already been victims of Saddam Hussein will not suffer a second time in any action against Iraq? Indeed, we should not repeat the mistakes of the past, in which one evil regime was replaced by another, but try to create as far as possible the conditions for a multi-ethnic, religiously tolerant, representative regime in Iraq, if and when Saddam Hussein's regime is changed.

The Prime Minister: I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend about the international coalition. It is

important that we build as much support as possible for any action that we may undertake. She is entirely right that, if the regime in Iraq is to change, it is important that it changes to one that is genuinely broad based. I hope that we have provided some symbol of our good intentions in that regard by what has happened in Afghanistan, where we are genuinely trying to produce a broad-based regime. I am sure that, like me and many others, she would be one of the first to say that many people in Iraq would rejoice at Saddam Hussein's departure. I hope that at some stage we shall be able to furnish the House with details of the way in which his regime operates, because its brutality is scarcely believable.

It is important to proceed in a measured way. As I said in my speech in Texas, I have been involved in three regime changes—Milosevic, the Taliban and the gangster group that took over Sierra Leone—and I can honestly say that we should not regret any of them. Let us proceed with care, and pay attention to my right hon. Friend's sensible warning that we must ensure that, if we ever get a regime change in Iraq, what follows is an improvement on what is there now.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the impending visit of Secretary of State Powell, despite the length of time he has taken to arrive. The Prime Minister spoke of seeking an early United Nations Security Council resolution, which is most welcome. Will one be sought before any further action is taken against Iraq?

On the humanitarian side, is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the 400,000 people currently without running water in Ramallah, Nablus, Bethlehem and other areas? Will he spearhead a humanitarian effort to ensure that the lives of those people, who are being denied their Geneva convention rights as non-combatants, are not at risk due to a lack of basics, including running water?

The Prime Minister: The time for debating any legal basis of action against Iraq is when we take such action. The Foreign Secretary will speak to Shimon Peres later today about the situation in Ramallah. It is important that basic facilities are put back in place for the people there, and that the wounded, some of whom are seriously injured, are given proper medical attention.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I welcome my right hon. Friend's evenhanded approach to the middle east. Given the Israeli attack on the university in Bethlehem, and given the specific British interests and concerns, have discussions been held with the Israeli ambassador in London? Have instructions also been given to our ambassador in Tel Aviv?

The Prime Minister: I understand from my right hon. and hon. Friends that that is indeed the case. We are in close touch with the Israeli authorities about these issues the entire time.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Will the Prime Minister keep in mind at all times the fact that it is now 35 years since the Security Council passed resolution 242, and that the failure of the international community to impose that UN territorial demand has inevitably led to the present tragic and dangerous situation? Until something along the lines of resolution 242, which is not dissimilar to the new Saudi initiative, is imposed, the situation will go from bad to worse. Nothing will be achieved by sending messages to Mr. Sharon or Chairman Arafat, or by sending envoys on tours of the middle east. What is needed is for the international community to impose a settlement on the area by military force, and to put in a permanent United Nations intervening force, such as that which has kept the peace in Cyprus for many years. Did the Prime Minister discuss that possibility with President Bush?

The Prime Minister: No, I did not discuss that particular possibility, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, without a political solution based on resolution 242 and the other UN Security Council resolutions, there will not be lasting peace. The question is how we get to the position in which negotiations take place to ensure that that happens and is successful. I am afraid that at present that is a very long way off.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Although I welcome today's statement by my right hon. Friend, the real significance of the past few weeks has been the commitment offered by the American Government—and, more importantly, by the President—to a Palestinian state. Those of us who have been involved in the middle east for more than 30 years know that the Israel-Palestine question is the core of the middle east problem, and that only a resolution of it will provide general peace. We have been hoping for an American President who recognises the need for a Palestinian state, and the significance of the recent statement cannot be overstated. If Colin Powell arrives quickly and the Americans remain truly engaged, the Palestinians will begin to believe that the President and the American people really do recognise their right to a state. That would go a long way towards building peace.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right about that. The commitment of the entire international community to a viable Palestinian state is, as I have said, one ray of hope in this ghastly situation.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Some people view Yasser Arafat as being opposed to suicide bombings but unable to prevent them; others see him as being in favour of them and unwilling to prevent them. The Prime Minister has access to better sources of information than most of us: to which of those views does he subscribe?

The Prime Minister: I subscribe to the view that, if there is a proper peace process, the Palestinians are willing to engage in it. Although I concur with criticisms of the Palestinian Authority's inability, or refusal, to control terrorism properly, we have to recognise that we will be dealing with them, and that we cannot choose which of their members we will deal with. The truthful answer to the hon. Gentleman's point is that the real danger is that, as long as the bloodshed and violence continues, a growing indifference will come about—in fact, it is happening—to innocent blood being spilt on both sides.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that early next week a full day's debate will be held on this subject.

Point of Order

4.37 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The very welcome news emerged on Monday that Sinn Fein-IRA have undertaken a second act of decommissioning. I am well aware that a great many people, including me, had been predicting for some months that such an act would take place in advance of the Irish elections; indeed, I first said so in this House in December. Nevertheless, this is an important event, about which Members on both sides of the House would like to question the Government. That desire will have been greatly enhanced by the Prime Minister's refusal during Question Time today to give straight answers to questions about the important and disreputable proposal for an unconditional amnesty for terrorists in Northern Ireland.

I do not know whether you, Mr. Speaker, have received a proposal from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that he make such a statement to the House—I hope so. If not, I fear that the Government's refusal to come before the House and discuss the matter will be interpreted throughout the country as evidence that they have something rather shameful to hide in their dealings with Sinn Fein-IRA.

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has not approached me, but he will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Children (Safeguards for Unaccompanied Travel)

4.39 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a tracking system to safeguard the welfare of children travelling to the United Kingdom without their parents.

The Bill is intended to enable parents to register their arrangements with immigration authorities at the entry application stage and to enable registration to serve as a referral to agencies such as social services, health and education, so as to ensure that children receive the services to which they are entitled and that their circumstances receive proper attention. Establishing a tracking system would address an existing gap in immigration procedures when children travel to the United Kingdom without their parents.

The recent Victoria Climbié case demonstrates all too clearly how children who enter the United Kingdom without their parents can fall through the net provided by health, education and child protection services—with tragic consequences in some cases, as in that one.

In some countries, such as those in west Africa, it is common practice for children to be cared for in the extended family. Over the years, that practice has developed to include children travelling abroad to be educated in the care of family members and others. When a child travels abroad, as in Victoria Climbié's case, parents rely on relatives or friends to keep in touch and to provide them with information about their children.

The limited and expensive communications systems in some countries, such as those in west Africa, coupled with poverty, make it difficult for parents to monitor their child's welfare away from home, which increases the child's vulnerability. That practice is also vulnerable to corruption, as traffickers obtain children through deception, often with offers of education and employment, as was identified in the Home Office police research series paper No. 125.

Children's charities, such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, believe that children unaccompanied by their parents are particularly vulnerable to child trafficking when they leave their country of origin and on arrival in another country. They are aware that children are trafficked into the United Kingdom and other European countries for the purpose of prostitution, child pornography, organised begging and benefit fraud.

Children are vulnerable to traffickers because of poverty in their country of origin, the low status of girls, unstable family life and child abuse. By its very nature, trafficking and the commercial exploitation of children is largely a hidden activity, so it is very difficult to investigate abuse, track victims, prosecute offenders and assess the extent of the problem.

My local authority admits that many children may enter the country in that way and arrive in Luton. It believes that such invisible children represent an important issue. The extent of the problem is emerging. A Home Office report on trafficking identified the former eastern European countries and west Africa as the main countries of origin. A significant number of children, especially from west Africa, are brought into the United Kingdom

as unaccompanied asylum seekers and are trafficked onwards to other European countries for the purpose of prostitution.

West Sussex social services report that, between 1995 and 2000, 59 unaccompanied asylum seekers disappeared from children's homes. In September 2001, the Government published a national plan on commercial sexual exploitation, in which trafficking was highlighted as an urgent area for action. The White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", sets out a number of proposals to address the problem, including a new criminal offence for trafficking and preventive action in the countries of origin, all of which is to be welcomed.

The EU communication, "On a Common Policy on Illegal Immigration", is also welcome. It recommends financial support for action in the countries of origin and transit to help to strengthen their capacity to combat trafficking. That includes developing public registration structures, improving document security and deploying liaison officers. It also recommends introducing uniform visa and security standards to improve the security of travel documents, including incorporating photographs to link the person to the visa or entry clearance certificate.

The United Kingdom could take the lead in the EU to ensure that the European Commission's proposals are implemented. However, the NSPCC and other children charities believe that the issue of children who travel into the United Kingdom without their parents remains a problem. The protection of those children must be prioritised. Children entering the UK who are not ordinarily resident here and do not travel with their parents should be safeguarded by a tracking system.

The recommendations made by Mrs. Justice Bracewell in the case of R (2) 1999 highlighted those concerns. The case involved a five-year-old Romanian girl who had arrived at a port of entry accompanied by an adult unrelated to her. Summing up, Mrs. Justice Bracewell said that the case was a matter of serious concern with implications far beyond the circumstances. She suggested that whenever a child accompanied by a non-related adult arrived at a port of entry in the United Kingdom, the immigration service should inform the Department of Health within 72 hours. The Department would in turn inform the relevant social services department of the presence and address in the UK of a privately fostered child under section 66 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), then Home Secretary, recognised the advantage of immigration officers' informing the Department of Health of the arrival of such a child. Unfortunately, however, he rejected the proposal, largely on grounds of cost. In the light of the Victoria Climbié case, I believe that the recommendation should be reconsidered.

Tracking all newly arrived children in the United Kingdom would be an enormous task, and it is not a realistic option. I propose that children entering the UK who are not ordinarily resident here and do not travel with their parents could and should be safeguarded by a simple tracking system. It need not involve the creation of a new administrative system; it could be built on existing immigration processes. A simple flag system could provide an indication on travel documents that a child was not travelling with its parents, and that details of the arrangements were available. In addition, there should be a UK requirement for all children entering the country to hold their own passports. Visa or entry certificates should incorporate photographs, and demonstrate a link between adult and child, for example by adding the child's passport number and fingerprints to the adult's visa.

An awareness campaign is also needed in west Africa, and in other countries where there are a large number of unaccompanied children, to alert parents to the risk of child trafficking, and to inform them of the existence of a tracking system and the necessary immigration procedures involved in entering the European Union.

Such a system might not deter the most determined traffickers, who use forged travel documents. That is a complex problem requiring sophisticated systems of detection. The system could, however, safeguard the majority of children who travel without their parents. Child trafficking is a despicable activity, and ending it must be a Government priority. This relatively simple measure could make an important contribution to the protection of vulnerable children from the crime.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Margaret Moran, Mark Tami, Ann Keen, Fiona Mactaggart, Helen Jackson, Mr. Hilton Dawson, Kevin Brennan, Ms Meg Munn, Ms Debra Shipley and Ms Oona King.

CHILDREN (SAFEGUARDS FOR UNACCOMPANIED TRAVEL)

Margaret Moran accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a tracking system to safeguard the welfare of children travelling to the United Kingdom without their parents: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 117].

Point of Order

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, at the beginning of each parliamentary Session we pass a number of Sessional Orders, which are not controversial and are normally agreed without a Division. One states that

"the passage through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House."

You may not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that today there has been utter chaos outside this building, creating severe traffic delays and impeding the work of many Members. The reason appears to be the closure of Victoria street where it becomes The Sanctuary. Having made inquiries, I understand that the road closure has nothing whatsoever to do with yesterday's events, nor with the demonstration by Greenpeace that took place earlier today, but is the result of roadworks that are being carried out.

That is a clear breach of our Sessional Orders. I can think of no other Parliament in the world that would allow democratically elected Members to be caused such disruption by roadworks, which could easily have been scheduled for when the House was not sitting.

[Mr. Greg Knight]

I understand that the roadworks may continue for the rest of this week or into next week, so will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, draw the matter to Mr. Speaker's attention and ask him to look into it and report back to the House tomorrow?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The right hon. Gentleman is obviously greatly concerned about the matter. I understand that, and I am sure that Mr. Speaker will also note the points that he has made. I think that the correct procedure is to ask the Serjeant at Arms to look into such matters, and I am sure that that will be done.

Orders of the Day

Enterprise Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In our first term in government, our economic priority was to establish macro-economic stability—the essential precondition for business success and wider prosperity. As a result of the decisions that we took nearly five years ago, we now enjoy low inflation and the lowest long-term interest rates and highest levels of employment that we have had for many years.

In this second term, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I explained in our joint statement in June last year, our economic priority is to build on that foundation of stability by promoting higher productivity and greater enterprise. To achieve that, we will match the independence that we gave our monetary authorities with independence for our competition authorities, and alongside tough rules for public finances we will put tough rules for competitive behaviour and consumer protection.

Our ambition is greater prosperity and world-class public services for all—for every individual and family, every community and every region and nation of our country. To achieve that ambition, we need dynamic, competitive businesses that generate wealth, create jobs and provide the tax revenues that we need to invest in public services. The Bill strengthens the foundations of an enterprise economy by promoting competition, protecting consumers and establishing an insolvency regime that will encourage honest but unsuccessful entrepreneurs to try again. It builds on our considerable achievements to date—the Competition Act 1998, recent insolvency reforms and the measures that have already been implemented from the 1999 consumer White Paper.

Just as we are creating the right market framework for business in Britain, so we continue to press ahead with economic reform in Europe. We made solid progress in Barcelona, where, with our European colleagues, we set a timetable to complete the single market in financial services and achieved the long-awaited, if not yet sufficient, breakthrough on energy liberalisation.

The Bill has been widely welcomed. For example, David Lennan of the British Chambers of Commerce said recently:

"There is nothing more frustrating as an entrepreneur than finding you are unable to compete because other businesses have cheated and we therefore wholeheartedly support what the government is trying to achieve via this Bill".

Sheila McKechnie of the Consumers Association said that the measures will

"put an end to the billions lost to consumers each year from rogue traders".

Digby Jones of the Confederation of British Industry said:

"We support—

the Bill—

"in the round and we value a very tough competitive regime because it will enhance productivity".

The extent of support for the Bill reflects the fact that at every stage in formulating policy we listened to the views of business, consumers and insolvency and competition experts. In 1999, we consulted on the measures in the consumer White Paper. In 2000, we consulted on personal bankruptcy and reform of the merger regime, and last year we consulted on competition and insolvency. As a result, we have developed proposals that improve the competition, consumer protection and insolvency regimes for all concerned without creating additional burdens or regulation for business.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Before the right hon. Lady moves away from her references to the Competition Act, will she tell the House on how many occasions actions have been successfully taken for infringements of the chapters 1 and 2 prohibitions since that Act came into force?

Ms Hewitt: There has been significant use by the competition authorities of the new prohibitions in the 1998 Act, which will continue to be an extremely important part of the competition regime.

As a Government, we are unashamedly pro-competition. The best protection for consumers is choice—the choice that is provided in open and vibrant markets. Effective competition is a powerful incentive for firms to innovate, to improve their customer service and to become more productive. Of course, it also provides opportunities for new firms to enter markets and to grow. Strong, fair competition contributes to innovation and productivity growth and to the diffusion of economic power. It maximises opportunities for all.

The United Kingdom therefore needs a modern, world-class competition regime and a regulatory framework that is designed to promote competition rather than perpetuate regulation. The more effective the regulatory framework, the more markets will work efficiently and fairly, and the less regulatory intervention will be needed in the long run—competition where possible and regulation where necessary.

Before 1997, the competition regime had remained largely unchanged for almost 20 years, even though, for most of the period of Conservative government, it was clear that our competition laws were out of date and byzantine in their complexity. We have already made progress. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, introduced the Competition Act and, with it, a modern, more streamlined regime that addressed anti-competitive agreements and abuses of dominant position. However, further improvement is needed. The mergers and markets regime needs to be modernised, and we need a step change in competitive pressures to help us close the productivity gap between the UK and our key competitors.

Our reforms are based on a number of key principles set out in the competition White Paper. The first principle is that we need strong, pro-active and independent competition authorities that are able to deal with anti-competitive behaviour. The Bill therefore provides that, in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of national security cases only, decisions will be taken by independent competition authorities, free from political interference. Although the Conservative party did not make that change when it was in power, I hope that it will support us in making it now. An overwhelming majority of respondents to our consultation supported the policy of taking the politics out of mergers and monopolies decisions. In removing those decisions from Ministers, we are removing a layer of regulation and streamlining the competition regime. Consistent with this new approach, I can announce today that, from September this year, UK competition views on merger cases that are being dealt with by the European Commission will also be a matter for the Office of Fair Trading, and not for the Government.

For mergers and markets cases, the authorities will apply a focused competition test rather than the current, less precise, public interest test. The result will be more transparent and predictable decision making. There will also be more transparency in the operation of the competition regime. The OFT will be required to publish an annual plan. Alongside its annual report, that will provide a clear basis on which Parliament and others will be able to assess its performance. The competition authorities will also be required to publish guidance on how they will approach the consideration of cases under the new regime, and to publish reasons for all their key decisions. Provisional conclusions in mergers and markets inquiries and the remedies for dealing with them will be discussed openly with the parties.

The Bill will also create better procedures for decision making, with statutory maximum timetables and a new right of appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal in mergers and markets cases. The effect will be a regime that operates more predictably, more consistently and more proportionately—better regulation.

Mr. Lansley: Before the Secretary of State leaves the matter of the independence of the competition authorities, will she confirm that those authorities will not be subject to the same accountability procedures as apply to other public bodies? Will she take this opportunity to say that the OFT should have accepted in full rather than in part the views of the parliamentary ombudsman regarding the compromised investigation of the Colorvision case?

Ms Hewitt: I am afraid that I am not aware of the details of the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. However, he raises an important point, and I shall have a look at the matter. The Bill will establish that, in future, the OFT will be supervised by a board, so that its decisions will not be made solely by the director general. As I have said, we are also ensuring that there will be a new statutory right of appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal in mergers and markets cases. Those reforms, and the others made by the Bill, will establish a much stronger and properly independent system of competition decision making, but one with proper accountability to the law and to the House.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Secretary of State clarify the status of the boards of the OFT and of the Competition Commission? What plans does she have to ensure that the composition of the boards is representative? When a specific inquiry is in hand, what will the right hon. Lady do to ensure that the Competition Commission board has the relevant market expertise? There has been considerable concern about the number of

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former Government officials who are placed on such boards. That renders somewhat suspect their ability to scrutinise markets.

Ms Hewitt: I am aware of the concern to which the hon. Lady refers. We will ensure that the boards of the OFT and the Competition Commission contain members with the competition expertise necessary to deal with competition cases. We will also continue to have available the broader panels, which can be drawn on for specific investigations. Together with the increase in resources for the OFT and the Competition Commission, our reforms will ensure that the bodies have the range of expertise that will enable them to arrive at well informed and robust decisions in their investigations.

The second principle of our reforms is to establish a strong deterrent effect for anti-competitive behaviour. The Competition Act 1998 introduced fines for firms that operate cartels, but did not provide a deterrent for those individuals who dishonestly engage in hard-core cartels.

As I hope that the whole House will agree, those hard-core cartels do serious harm to consumers, businesses and to the economy as a whole by forcing up prices or keeping them high artificially, and preventing new entrants from gaining access to markets. Recent cartel cases include the price-fixing arrangements in the global vitamins industry, which cost consumers in the UK and the rest of the European Union millions of pounds, and the Sotheby's-Christie's price-fixing cartel, which was the subject of considerable publicity. Indeed, American competition authorities believe that cartels raise prices by some 10 per cent. on average.

We therefore propose in the Bill to introduce a new criminal offence of dishonestly entering into cartels, backed by sanctions that include the possibility of up to five years' imprisonment. We regard forming cartels as very serious offences, and the threat of imprisonment is important to deterring them. The new criminal offence will send out a strong message to the perpetrators, their colleagues in business, the general public, and the courts. We envisage that a prison sentence would be imposed in cases of serious cartel activity. Alternative sanctions, such as a suspended sentence or a fine, would be available to deal with the less serious cases where there are mitigating circumstances.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Who will police or monitor those cartel activities and how they will be brought before the courts? Which agency will be responsible?

Ms Hewitt: The Office of Fair Trading will continue to investigate cartels. Indeed, it has 25 alleged cartels under investigation already. In general, prosecutions will be the responsibility of the Serious Fraud Office, as is the case with other offences of dishonesty.

In the Bill, the offence is tightly drawn and properly so, but it will create a real deterrent effect. Again, I quote David Lennan of the British Chambers of Commerce, who said

> "I do not believe that many business people will end up in jail as a result of the goverment's proposal. But introducing a criminal sanction should provide a strong disincentive, which will focus minds and help to create a competitive environment in this country."

So, not only is this measure vigorously supported by consumers, as one would expect, but it has business support too.

Our third principle is that people who are harmed by anti-competitive behaviour—whether other businesses or consumers—should have a genuine opportunity to obtain redress. The Bill will enable harmed parties to bring claims for damages before a specialist body—the Competition Appeal Tribunal. That will establish a cheaper, more streamlined route to obtain redress from companies that have broken the law.

In the Bill, we are also providing that representative bodies will be able to bring claims for damages in front of the tribunal on behalf of named and identifiable consumers. That will help consumers to bring claims where a large number of parties have each suffered a relatively small level of harm.

I shall turn now to the measures in the Bill specifically designed to protect consumers. As strong competition is the best form of consumer protection, all our competition reforms are good news for consumers. In particular, we are putting consumer interests at the heart of the new system with our new super-complaints, where the OFT must make a considered response within 90 days to properly investigated complaints from designated consumer bodies.

As a strong competition regime is not always enough by itself, however, we are also introducing specific new powers to empower and protect consumers. The stop now orders that we introduced last year were widely welcomed by consumer organisations.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that, by pure coincidence, my first ten-minute rule Bill concerned those orders, which shows that lowly Back Benchers are taken into account when legislation is drawn up. The measure is welcome, but there are concerns that it may cover not all rogue trading, but only that covered by existing legislation. So practices that are designed to get around the law may be excluded. I am referring specifically to pyramid money gifting, such as the women empowering women scheme, which extracted large amounts of money from women in my constituency and throughout the country and left many of them in grave debt. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that the Bill will deal with those sorts of schemes as well as the consumer protection issues that are covered by the law?

Ms Hewitt: Of course, the stop now orders, which were indeed initiated by my hon. Friend, are designed to deal with rogue traders and others who are in breach of existing statutory provisions that apply to their sector. She raises an important matter and I am sure that we can deal with it in Committee.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Before the Secretary of State leaves that matter, will she confirm that, despite the urging of such bodies as the National Consumer Council, the Government have apparently set their face against introducing a general duty not to trade unfairly, which would be a catch-all method of dealing with exactly the matters raised by the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran)?

Ms Hewitt: We have looked carefully at the proposals for a general duty not to trade unfairly, but as I hope the

hon. Gentleman will accept, we have decided that such a duty—particularly if it is cast in negative terms—would be so vague and general that it would create real uncertainty for business and difficulties for enforcement. For that reason, we have not included it in the Bill. Instead, we are extending the protection of stop now orders to other areas, in particular in the service sector, where consumer interests are harmed by traders who do not meet their legal obligations.

I guess that all of us in this House, and our constituents, have suffered from cowboy builders, incompetent plumbers, poor car servicing and so on. The reformed system of stop now orders, and the extension proposed in the Bill, will be clearer for businesses to understand and will create a single, coherent enforcement structure that will replace the parallel regimes that currently exist for different issues.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The proposals on rogue traders will be generally acknowledged and respected. However, the key to the effective enforcement of the Bill will be to ensure that trading standards bodies within local authorities are improved. I do not understand their omission from the Bill, and I should be grateful if the Secretary of State explained it.

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the extension of stop now orders and he is right to draw attention to the vital role of trading standards officers. There is some variation in the quality and resourcing of trading standards officers around the country. That is why the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), the Minister responsible for consumer protection, is using funding from the modernisation fund, and working with the OFT and trading standards officers, to ensure that they are properly resourced and able to implement their extremely important responsibilities towards consumers.

The National Consumer Council—to which reference has been made—has said in relation to the stop now orders and more general matters:

"These measures will complete the crackdown on anti-competitive practices that for too long have damaged the interests of consumers."

The Bill also includes measures to enable the OFT to give formal approval to voluntary industry codes of practice—provided that these are effective in protecting consumer interests and meet core criteria—and to promote the benefits of those codes to consumers and business. In that way, we will help consumers to identify reputable traders and benefit businesses by increasing consumer confidence in their products and services.

I should now like to turn to the measures on insolvency and the insolvency reform proposals within the Bill. Failure, as well as success, is an integral part of an enterprise economy. But the fear and consequences of failure should not be so disproportionate that they act as a disincentive to entrepreneurs. We need to encourage honest risk-takers, while dealing with the minority of bankrupts who are thoroughly dishonest.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I welcome the proposals in the Bill on insolvency, a matter that the Select Committee investigated three years ago, when we went to the United States and saw what was being done there. Will my right hon. Friend address the concerns of the TUC about consulting employees and protecting workers in cases of insolvency?

Ms Hewitt: It is extremely important to take account of the position and interest of employees in cases of insolvency. The provisions and the reforms of administration, to which I shall turn in greater detail in a moment, will ensure that, in the case of a failed business, there is more money available to the creditors, who may well include employees; either directly, because wages or holiday money are due to them, or indirectly, because national insurance contributions have not been paid on their behalf. Employees will benefit, along with other creditors, from our proposed reforms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) referred to the experience of the United States, upon which the Select Committee drew in formulating its recommendations. It is noticeable that, in the United States, there is much less fear of failure. Only one in five people in America say that fear of failure would deter them from starting a business. Indeed, it seems that if people do not have one or two failures under their belt in America, they are hardly regarded as serious entrepreneurs.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend is assuaging the fears of some of those who have seen the Bill. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), I greatly welcome the proposals on insolvency and the consultations with insolvency practitioners that my right hon. Friend has undertaken to provide. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that she will look carefully at the provisions on the possible impact on voluntary organisations such as citizens advice bureaux and the debt advice sector? That would do much to generate widespread acceptance of these measures.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our regulatory impact assessment draws attention to the possible increase in the need for advice and an updating of the advice given by citizens advice bureaux and money advice centres to take account of these provisions. So we are already aware of that issue.

It is important to encourage entrepreneurship by addressing this fear of failure and supporting business start-ups. The Bill contains a number of measures to address that.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): My right hon. Friend knows that I have an interest in industrial and provident societies. She, as a champion of social enterprises, will be aware that many use the industrial and provident society legal form. Given her comments about insolvency and the attractiveness to companies of the new regimes in the measure, will she ensure that Government officials keep under close consideration the possibility of applying the benefits of these measures across industrial and provident societies at some point?

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the private Member's Bill that my hon. Friend has introduced to modernise the statutory framework for industrial and provident societies. I know that colleagues in the Treasury who are working with him

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on the Bill are considering the best way to ensure that the present regime for mutuals that go into administration can be updated in the light of the reforms in the Bill.

We are getting rid of the present "one size fits all" regime for individuals who become bankrupt and introducing a differentiated regime that takes account of the circumstances of the case. The Bill reduces the period before which a bankrupt is discharged from restrictions to a maximum of 12 months for those who have failed, through no fault of their own, and who co-operate with the official receiver. However, for those bankrupts who have acted recklessly, irresponsibly or dishonestly, the Bill introduces a new court-based bankruptcy restrictions order regime under which they will face much tougher restrictions lasting between two and 15 years. So there will be tougher penalties for the minority of dishonest bankrupts but a much lighter regime to encourage the honest but unfortunate entrepreneur to learn from his mistakes, try again and go on to business success. The Bill also removes many of the irrelevant and outdated restrictions that apply to bankrupts.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I welcome, to a large extent, the thinking behind the changes on insolvency. However, the right hon. Lady's talk about the dichotomy between honest bankrupts and dishonest traders exposes the Bill's backward-looking and traditional British thinking on insolvency. As has already been said, there is an entirely different outlook on insolvency in the United States, where people do not see it in black-and-white terms of honest and dishonest bankrupts and insolvents.

Ms Hewitt: I do not really accept the hon. Gentleman's point. The new regime that we are putting in place—the fact that there will be a maximum of 12 months for those who have failed through no fault of their own and co-operate with the official receiver as well as a set of restrictions that can last for between two and 15 years—will enable the courts to graduate their response according to the circumstances of the case.

The reforms have been widely welcomed, not least by the Prince's Trust, which has done so much to encourage entrepreneurship among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It says:

"We welcome the proposal to distinguish more clearly between those who have made a genuine attempt to succeed in business and those who have become bankrupt through reckless or fraudulent practices."

That is a distinction that we are right to make, but by giving the courts a proper time scale over which restrictions can be imposed they can make their judgment on an individual case.

Mrs. Browning: Will the right hon. Lady clarify how the difference is to be determined? Clearly, in some cases it will be obvious that people have become bankrupt through no fault of their own, but in the case of a company which is up against it in the tail end weeks and months, it is often the practice to pay preferential creditors in order to keep stock coming in. That is illegal, but one can understand why it is done. Would such a person or company be deemed to be on the two-to-15 year track?

Ms Hewitt: Each case will have to be decided by the courts on the individual facts, but the new administration procedure will encourage companies to come forward earlier once they get into difficulties rather than going up against the wire in the way that the hon. Lady describes and behaving in a way which, on the face of it, could be regarded as dishonest. That system of administration which, as I say, has been so widely welcomed, will encourage company rescue rather than insolvency wherever possible.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Having been involved in business, I welcome the fact that someone who has become bankrupt through no fault of their own is to be given the chance to start again, but how shall we define "through no fault of their own"? There has to be some error of judgment in the management of a company for it to go down. The right hon. Lady's words have a good spin to them, but the practicalities on the ground might be slightly different.

Ms Hewitt: I cannot help feeling that the hon. Gentleman is making rather heavy weather of this. We have consulted insolvency practitioners, and the British Bankers Association wrote to me a couple of weeks ago expressing its appreciation of the constructive dialogue that it enjoyed with the Department's officials and their willingness to listen. I have no doubt that in individual bankruptcy cases the courts will be able to make common-sense judgments based on the evidence before them and having heard from the individual concerned.

Mr. McWalter: My point is similar to that of the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), in that there is a clear distinction between the malevolent bankrupt and those who have done their best, although perhaps not doing everything according to the book. I hope that my right hon. Friend might consider changes in the Bill's terminology to reflect that distinction more clearly. In particular, the odious word "bankrupt" really should not be used for those who are in the basically honest camp.

Ms Hewitt: In Committee and at other stages in the Bill's passage, we shall of course see whether we can improve the wording. I welcome the support of my hon. Friend and others for the principle here. The Federation of Small Businesses, which has extensive experience of the problem, has also said that, clearly,

"where it is obvious that the bankrupt has fallen on hard times through sheer bad luck, it is only right that they be allowed back into the system at a much earlier stage".

It goes on to say:

"We do not see anything controversial in these proposals and would urge all party support and speedy implementation through Parliament."

I hope that our discussions can focus on the details of how we implement the principle rather than on any disagreement about the principle itself.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Will the right hon. Lady clarify the concepts of dishonesty and recklessness that are, I understand, at the heart of the culpability test? Will they be defined according to the criminal standard of proof—that is, beyond reasonable doubt?

Ms Hewitt: This part of the Bill deals with civil proceedings, so we are talking about a civil standard of proof. The same applies to the new bankruptcy restriction orders.

I stress that we also want to ensure that companies do not go to the wall unnecessarily. That is why the Bill would restrict in future the use of administrative receivership, which places effective control in the hands of a single secured creditor. Instead, we shall shift the balance in favour of the new streamlined administration procedure that aims, as I said, to facilitate company rescue and to produce better returns for creditors as a whole. The reforms will ensure that account is taken of the interests of all creditors, including small firms and other trade creditors whose claims are unsecured.

The Bill will abolish the Crown's preferential rights to recover unpaid taxes ahead of other creditors. That, too, will bring real benefits to unsecured creditors. We are also including measures that contribute towards reforming the Insolvency Service's financial regime, to bring increased transparency and simplicity. That will ensure that money does not flow, in effect, from the coffers of the creditors into the coffers of the Treasury. The reforms will ensure that the maximum possible return goes to insolvent estates. Together with the abolition of Crown preference, those two provisions will make up to £110 million available for distribution to all creditors.

The measures in the Bill are radical and bold, but based on careful and extensive consultation. They will benefit businesses and consumers by hundreds of millions of pounds. They will boost productivity and enterprise, help our international competitiveness and make the United Kingdom an even better place in which to do business and to be a consumer.

As I have emphasised, the Bill has attracted widespread support which will, I hope, be reflected in our discussions today and during its passage. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.27 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): The measure has been described as the flagship Bill of the Department of Trade and Industry. It consists of 269 clauses and 26 schedules, running to 333 pages; and there are 139 pages of explanatory notes.

It is true that many of the main principles of the Bill are not matters of controversy between us. However, I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that the effects of the Bill are likely to be far reaching—across the whole of industry; and that the measure represents a major change in the law governing commerce and business in the UK which is likely to affect every company in the land.

Given those facts, it is extraordinary that a Bill of such complexity is to be pushed through Parliament with so little opportunity for detailed scrutiny and debate. In her speech, the Secretary of State made much of the fact that business had welcomed the amount of consultation that had taken place while the Bill was being drawn up. I think that she specifically referred to the CBI, so I draw her attention to a speech given a few days ago by the deputy director general of the CBI, especially the section entitled "Lack of real consultation". He said:

> "Many CBI member companies have expressed serious concerns to us about the inadequacy of the consultation period, given the complexity and novelty of many of the proposals. Nine weeks for the White Paper—four of which were during August—was hardly sufficient, especially since so much of what was being proposed was new and unexpected."

The innovation for which the Government are responsible—subjecting Bills to pre-legislative scrutiny—has undoubtedly improved the process of law making, but if ever there was a Bill that would have benefited from such scrutiny, it was this one. Instead, however, its publication was delayed and delayed until finally it appeared on the very day that the House went into recess for Easter. Just 15 days later we are giving the Bill a Second Reading, with almost no time for those with an interest to study it and make comments. Worse still, the motion on the Order Paper requires its Committee stage to be completed by 14 May, less than five weeks from today. By any consideration, that gives remarkably little time for proper scrutiny of what the Government themselves claim is a measure of great importance.

It is not entirely clear why there is any such need for haste, as only a few years ago the Government passed the Competition Act 1998, which was described at the time as the most radical overhaul of our competition laws for 50 years. Indeed, on Third Reading, the then Minister of State said:

> "Reform of the current regime is long overdue. The Bill will give us a really modern and effective competition regime at last."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 1209.]

Here we are, however, a few years later, debating a Bill that overturns several of the principles contained in the Competition Act and establishes new rules and powers that go far further than those allowed for under that Act.

Can we conclude, therefore, that the regime established by the Government, which has only recently come into force, has proved to be neither modern nor effective? If so, what is the evidence for that? Will the Secretary of State tell us which anti-competitive practices have continued to occur that the powers contained in the Competition Act 1998 have proved inadequate to prevent?

Lest there be any doubt, I should say that we are strongly in favour of a strong and effective competition regime. Although I am a believer in free and competitive markets as the ultimate protection for the consumer, I fully accept the need for tough laws to prevent abuse of market power and anti-competitive practices. Just as the vast majority of people in this country are law-abiding, so are most firms happy to win business by offering customers what they want at the best available price. However, there will be some who try to take advantage of their market strength to seek to eliminate their competitors by predatory pricing or by collusion with competitors to fix prices or markets behind closed doors.

The purest free market thinkers, with whom I have traditionally had some sympathy, believe that the market will always win, and that when a firm seeks to take advantage of its elimination of its competitors or a price is fixed by a cartel of producers, a new entrant will always come along to undercut it. However, that takes no account of the damage suffered in the meantime by competitive companies and consumers as a result of market abuse. Therefore, I agree with the Secretary of State that legal sanctions are required to deter such practices, and I do not oppose measures designed to achieve that.

There are several specific measures in the Bill to which we are happy to give unqualified support. The first is the decision to remove Ministers from the decision-making process on the clearance of mergers. I should declare that I had some experience of such matters when I worked as a special adviser to Norman Tebbit, the then Secretary of

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State. Lord Tebbit established the Tebbit guidelines, which required that merger references should be made primarily on competition grounds, rather than on any of the wider considerations contained in the Fair Trading Act 1973. The proposal to remove Ministers from the equation entirely and to leave matters to competition authorities is in some ways the ultimate application of the Tebbit guidelines, although knowing that may not increase the Secretary of State's enthusiasm for her policy.

Mr. Lansley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am delighted to give way to my hon. Friend, who had the same experience as I did at that time.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although for accuracy's sake I should point out that I was a civil servant at that time, not a special adviser. However, I did have the same experience. Would my hon. Friend agree that, whereas the Secretary of State implied that the measure should have been undertaken earlier, the whole point of the application of the Tebbit doctrine by subsequent Conservative Secretaries of State was that competition was given primacy? A degree of predictability in the market place was therefore engendered, which has been lost in recent years by the apparent unpredictability of decisions made by Labour Ministers. Is it not an implied criticism of her predecessors that the Secretary of State is taking this step?

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a matter of some sadness that subsequent Secretaries of State did not apply Lord Tebbit's guidelines with the same rigour as he always did.

Having welcomed some parts of the Bill, I shall explore some of the concerns that have been expressed, in particular by the CBI, about some aspects of the new competition regime—concerns that I think should be addressed. The new powers to be given to the Office of Fair Trading to investigate markets to identify and root out anti-competitive practices are considerable. Supporters of the Bill argue that those who are innocent of any such behaviour should have no reason to be concerned, but it is not true that those who are investigated and cleared of any wrongdoing face no penalty. The truth is that those who are subject to investigation are required to devote huge amounts of time and resources to proving their innocence. In some cases, they have had to do so repeatedly, as no sooner are they cleared of any malpractice in one investigation than they face another investigation—one that seeks to uncover evidence that the previous investigation failed to find.

That has certainly been the case in the record industry, which has repeatedly been accused of rigging the market to maintain an artificially high price for compact discs. In 1993, the industry was subjected to an investigation by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which lasted for a year and which cleared the industry of any wrongdoing. The MMC's subsequent report ran to 350 pages, and the total cost of that investigation to the industry in terms of professional fees and management time was estimated to have been between £17 million and £20 million. None the less, in the past three years the industry has had to contend with five more separate investigations, none of which has overturned the MMC's original conclusions.

There is genuine anxiety that the OFT might come under pressure from consumer groups and the media to hound particular industries such as supermarkets, newspaper owners, petrol retailers, or indeed record companies, if there is a popular view that anti-competitive practices are rife, even when previous inquiries have found no evidence to support that view. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the representations made by business about the need to set stricter criteria that have been satisfied before an investigation can be launched. I hope, too, that she will consider the case for allowing businesses that are subject to an investigation in which no evidence of inappropriate behaviour is found to seek compensation for the costs that they have incurred.

The provision of the Bill that has given rise to most controversy is the proposal to impose criminal sanctions on those found guilty of anti-competitive practices. I share the Government's view that those who participate in cartels or other anti-competitive practices are guilty of theft, both from consumers and often—and just as important—from other, small businesses. I therefore agree in principle that the penalties must be sufficient to act as a strong deterrent, and it may well be that fines—even at the punitive level provided for by the Competition Act—are not enough. However, we want the Government to tell us why they believe that that Act is failing in that respect, and why they think the fines now available to the courts are an insufficient deterrent. So far, only one fine has been imposed by the OFT under the Competition Act, so it seems a little early to conclude that it is not working.

The Government must also explain why they are now departing from the European model, in which criminal penalties are usually not available, and seldom applied if they are available. On Second Reading of the Competition Act, the then Secretary of State criticised the existing law, saying:

> "UK companies that are large enough to be affected by the EU regime face differing laws, a differing approach and potentially differing judgments on the same competition issues."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 25.]

Yet that is precisely what might now result from the Bill. If a company is found to be in breach of EU competition law it may be subject to a civil administrative fine, while those found guilty of the same offence in the UK face criminal proceedings and imprisonment. As one European official has pointed out, that might mean that a double glazing salesman who fixes prices in the local pub can be sent to jail, while the biggest pan-European cartels risk at most administrative fines on their companies.

There is also concern that the provisions recently introduced by the Commission to encourage whistleblowing might be undermined if the Commission is unable to guarantee immunity from prosecution in the UK. The creation of a leniency regime allows this issue to be addressed, but the process lacks transparency and appears to give considerable discretion to the prosecuting authorities. We shall be looking to the Government to provide certainty in this area and for assurances that they will be willing to work with other competition authorities to ensure that whistleblowers are not deterred.

In large part we welcome the provisions that deal with consumer protection laws, but the increased powers for consumer groups give rise to some concern. The

super-complaints provision should allow malpractice to be dealt with quickly, but it must not allow consumer groups to set the priorities of the OFT. Such complaints clearly merit urgent consideration, but the OFT must retain the right to decide whether immediate action is justified. It is clearly essential that such complaints be subjected to the same degree of scrutiny by the OFT as any others.

Perhaps of greater concern is the power to allow consumer groups to bring representative actions for damages. This risks turning consumer organisations from lobbying groups into prosecuting authorities, thus supplanting the role of the OFT. Should such actions be successful, it will be hugely difficult to quantify damages, and even harder to decide their distribution.

In the United States, which we are told is the model for the Bill, the original Sherman Act gave injured competitors the right to seek treble damages for any violation of anti-trust laws. Consumers, too, are able to bring actions in the US if they are directly and adversely affected by a price-fixing conspiracy. However, the power proposed in the Bill goes considerably further than that which exists in the US, and risks creating huge additional burdens on business.

The final part of the Bill is intended to reform and modernise the UK's insolvency and bankruptcy laws. Not being a lawyer, I admit that it is something that I struggled with when researching the Bill. However, it is of huge importance and a matter about which we have the most concerns. The Government's stated objective is to encourage a climate of entrepreneurship along American lines where business failure is not a mark of shame but evidence of economic dynamism and risk taking.

That is an aspiration that we understand and share. However, it is not possible to legislate to transplant an American-style entrepreneurial climate into the UK. There is a real danger that the Government's proposals may end up making it harder for fledgling businesses to attract support, while at the same time encouraging reckless personal behaviour.

We give an unqualified welcome to the abolition of Crown preference, which is long overdue. It is both absurd and unjust that the Government, who are better placed than any other creditor to absorb any losses incurred when a company becomes insolvent, should somehow take priority over ordinary trade creditors, many of whom may depend on being paid for their very survival. The provision has been widely welcomed by business organisations and lenders, and it is one that we are happy to support.

The case for the abolition of administrative receivership, except in specific circumstances as set out in the Bill, is less clear. It was not contained in the recommendations of the review of company rescues and business reconstruction mechanisms, which was set up by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State and published in November 2000. Yet the Government's intention to abolish ARs was announced by the Chancellor only seven months later.

The Government's justification for doing so is that the AR procedure puts too much power into the hands of one group of creditors at the expense of those who are unsecured. It is claimed also that it gives the administrative receiver a primary obligation to recover the debts of the appointor rather than an obligation to treat all creditors equally. Yet there is considerable evidence that the AR procedure has worked quite well and that it has proved successful in many instances in rescuing companies in difficulties rather than burying them.

The ability of a lender to impose a floating charge, together with the power to appoint an administrative receiver if necessary, has encouraged lenders to be more flexible and to support companies that run into difficulties. By removing this power, the result may well be that lenders will be less flexible and more risk averse. It is therefore not only the businesses that go into administrative receivership each year that will be affected, but potentially every business that is seeking financial support. There is a real danger that as a result of this measure banks will be less inclined to lend, or will lend more expensively, and that the businesses that the Government are seeking to help will be the ones that suffer as a result.

Mrs. Browning: I hear what my hon. Friend says. However, he will be aware also that the small business sector—especially small and medium-sized business—has been lobbying about the abolition of the floating charge for a long time. The genesis of the process goes back to the days when banks tended to lend not on the basis of a proper evaluation of a business plan presented to them but on the capital assets and collateral of the company concerned. Is it not incumbent upon the banking sector to start to do what it should be doing, which is to give good business advice and a proper evaluation of a business plan, not only when the initial application is made for the loan but in terms of the on-going cash flow and management of the business concerned? I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me that there is an incumbency on the banking sector to carry out that role in its relationship with the business sector.

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is strongly in the interests of banks that they help businesses to stay in business, and to give them whatever support they feel able to give if they run into difficulties. To that extent, I share my hon. Friend's view. I think that banks now are much more careful in their lending practices than perhaps they were some years ago.

I have outlined my concerns. It is not the banks that will suffer, because they will simply adjust their practices. Ultimately, small businesses may suffer if banks are less inclined to adopt flexible practices when making loans and decide to charge more for them. We must seriously address that danger when considering what the Government propose.

The other main concern which has been expressed by a number of those who have examined the Bill's provisions is the extent to which the work load on the courts is likely dramatically to increase. In many instances it is essential, if a business is to have a chance of survival, that action is taken by the administrator quickly to salvage whatever is available. If the courts have to be involved in every case as a result of the change, and that means that letters have to be written to creditors and papers have to be filed with the courts, and a case has to take its place in the queue, there may be nothing left to rescue in the business by the time that those things have been done.

We will be looking to the Government for assurances that extra resources will be given to the courts to allow them to handle cases quickly, especially those that have a

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habit of arising at about 5 pm on a Friday. Administrators need to know the time from when they have the power to act and they need to be able to act quickly without having to revert to the courts.

We understand and welcome the main thrust of the Government's intentions to help those setting up in business who may fall into difficulties. However, the Government's proposals for reform do not discriminate between business bankruptcies and personal bankruptcies. While their proposals are well intentioned, it may be that they will prove counter productive.

The wish to remove the stigma of bankruptcy, which has been spoken of by the Secretary of State, and to encourage risk taking is admirable, but at a time when consumer debt is rising sharply, this measure risks sending exactly the wrong message to those who may be reckless and irresponsible borrowers.

The distinction between so-called honest and culpable bankrupts, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members on both sides of the House, will be extremely difficult to draw, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) made clear. I have no doubt that the vast majority of bankrupts reach their position through personal incompetence or recklessness—in some cases, they will have become bankrupt through no fault of their own—rather than through deliberate malice. However, it should not be forgotten that whatever the causes of their behaviour, they will leave victims who are often not the banks, but friends or family who have acted as lenders of last resort. Creditors are often small businesses that may be unable to survive if they are not paid. Meaningful consequences are needed in respect of bankruptcy, with a minimum period set for it by law.

It is worth bearing in mind what happened in America, as it is the American model to which the Government constantly refer. In the United States, 95 per cent. of bankruptcies are suffered by consumers and are unrelated to any business activities. The relaxation of bankruptcy laws in the United States in the late 1970s led to a fourfold increase in consumer bankruptcies, while the number of business bankruptcies fell. Some people in the United States have even said that bankruptcy is now regarded as an easy way of supporting social welfare, as a consumer can run up large medical bills and then go bankrupt, passing the cost on to the credit or health industry and ultimately to other consumers.

The Bill fails to distinguish between consumer and business bankrupts. In seeking to encourage a small number of risk-taking entrepreneurs, the Government may end up merely encouraging a far bigger number of reckless individuals who run up substantial debts that have nothing to do with enterprise. Those that may end up suffering in the longer term are the businesses that will be left to pick up the bill and the consumers who will suffer restricted access to credit and higher costs.

Although the Bill has been introduced today by the Secretary of State, it is not her creation. It was conceived in the Treasury and has been promoted at every stage by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We know that raising the UK's productivity is his big idea for Labour's second term. It is an objective that the Government have so far been singularly unsuccessful in achieving. In the five years since the Government launched their productivity agenda, progress has been virtually non-existent. Output per head in the UK remains way below that in not only the United States, but Germany and France. Whereas productivity here rose faster than in the United States in 1992-97, since that time, growth has been slower. As a result, the productivity gap is getting bigger, instead of narrowing.

The Government may be correct that strengthening our competition laws will help improve productivity, but it will not put right the damage that has been done to our competitiveness by the relentless increase in tax and burdens on business that has taken place under them. The CBI has calculated that the amount of extra tax paid by business amounts to £29 billion. The British Chambers of Commerce, which the Secretary of State has quoted so approvingly on several occasions, estimates that the cost to business of the extra red tape and regulation under this Government is now more than £15 billion. It is that burden that is eroding our international competitiveness, crippling business and destroying jobs.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am just about to finish.

This Government do not understand that one cannot regulate one's way to economic success. They seem to think that they can support enterprise simply by introducing a Bill with the word "enterprise" in its title. Sadly, it does very little to tackle the real problems that are affecting business in this country today.

5.54 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): In welcoming the Bill, I should like to refer back to the Competition Act 1998. It is significant that the 1997 and 2001 Labour Governments both found time in their first year in office to introduce Bills that improve competition policy. That is in stark contrast to the work of the Conservative party during its latter years in office, when despite pressures to introduce improved competition legislation, it put the matter to the bottom of the list and introduced different measures.

I welcome the Government's decision to give up the power to intervene in merger policy; at least, they have more or less given it up. However, I would like some reassurance about their ability to intervene when mergers are considered to be in the national strategic interest. I was interested in the BAe-Marconi merger a few years ago. If similar proposals were to arise in future in relation to mergers of major transnational defence companies, I should like to feel that a Minister was involved.

The Government's decision to give up the power directly to intervene in merger policy means that they are giving up the power to establish national champions. That is good in terms of economic theory and competition policy, but it prompts this question: if the UK's competition policy is synchronised with that of its EU partners, should not those countries also operate a competition policy that precludes them from supporting national champions? It is also important, especially given the Prime Minister's recent visit to the United States and his discussions with the President, to ask whether the bastion of the free market, the US, will also give up a

policy of promoting national champions and perhaps reconsider its policy on the steel industry and its promotion as such a champion.

The introduction of criminal law in respect of cartels is welcome. It is crucial that penalties for cartels be commensurate with the severity of the deed that is done. We have too often assumed that cartels are a minor issue and commit only small misdemeanours that do not matter. However, the crime in question is theft either from the consumer or other businesses and should be treated as such, so strong penalties should exist and I welcome those provisions.

In broadly welcoming the provisions on insolvency, I wish to make a number of points. The issue of the Crown giving up its preferential creditor status is crucial not only to many employees in companies that currently lose out because the Crown takes the first cut of any resources that are left in insolvency, but to many other small businesses that are dependent as creditors on the business that is going into bankruptcy. If the Crown had not been a preferential creditor, some failed companies in my constituency might have received enough from businesses that went into liquidation to enable them to survive, instead of finding that the scale of the loss incurred was just enough to push them over into bankruptcy. Serious issues are involved, so I welcome very much the proposed removal of Crown preferential status.

A number of bankruptcy issues have been raised by citizens advice bureaux in a briefing circulated to many hon. Members. They relate in particular to the problems of poor debtors who cannot use existing law on bankruptcy because of the fees that are involved in initiating bankruptcy proceedings. I know of cases that have been reported by citizens advice bureaux in Lancashire in which people with large debts who are on very low incomes are unable to move towards clearing their debts and sorting out their lives. They do not even have the necessary £250 to sort out their affairs through the bankruptcy arrangements, whereas people who are better off can use that procedure to get things sorted out.

There is also an issue relating to married or unmarried couples who have joint debts. They would need a minimum of £500 to sort matters out and, for many couples in that situation who are poor and have no prospect of paying off their debts, the bankruptcy option is one that should be considered. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reconsidered the fees involved, when the Bill goes into Committee.

Another issue that has been raised concerns people whose period of bankruptcy has run out. Under these proposals, that could happen more quickly for someone who is regarded as an "innocent" bankrupt. Such people often have great difficulty in getting access to banking facilities, and I would like my right hon. Friend to consider whether there are ways of ensuring that people get their lives back into some sort of order once a bankruptcy period has run out, by being able to access banking facilities so that they can get wages paid into a bank account, take on a mortgage, or whatever.

In too many cases, the fact that people have been bankrupt remains on a credit reference agency's files for up to six years, so that, even if their bankruptcy order has run out, they are still shown as having been bankrupt, so far as financial institutions are concerned. That is a major barrier to their moving on, and goes against the thrust of the Bill in that area.

I want to concentrate on consumer protection, and the proposed power under the Bill to give the Office of Fair Trading a supervisory role over trade organisations' codes of practice. There is a real problem in this area. There will be few hon. Members who have not heard their constituents say, "I thought I was covered, because this trade association's logo is on this letter, and it said it would look after me if things went wrong." Things have gone wrong, and the trade association has not been there to help.

A constituent of mine came to see me recently with a very tragic case. With a bit of luck, we might be able to resolve it, but it serves to illustrate some of the problems that can occur. My constituent, Mr. Norburn, from New Longton, purchased a piece of land a few years ago and wanted to build a house on it. He looked around for a builder, and was obviously keen to ensure that the builder was registered with the National House Building Council so that he would be covered if anything went wrong. He employed a firm called Foys (Builders) Ltd., which was based in Preston, to build the property. It had all the necessary NHBC certificates.

The house was not built correctly; there were things wrong with it. My constituent went to the NHBC to register a complaint and to see whether it could sort things out. Shortly after that, the builder started legal proceedings for non-payment of the remaining part of its bill. The NHBC decided that it could not continue to be involved while legal action was outstanding because the action was against one of its members. Eventually, the case went to court, and my constituent was awarded £155,000 to cover the cost of putting the house right and the legal costs. The builder promptly went into liquidation.

The NHBC has since said that, according to the fine print of its certificate, its liability is limited to 10 per cent. if the house has not been completed. Because it had not intervened when my constituent approached it when the house was not being completed properly, and because the builder then went to court, this loophole means that my constituent is probably the best part of £150,000 out of pocket. He is very dissatisfied with the way in which the NHBC has dealt with his case.

We may yet be able to resolve that case, but it illustrates the importance of the OFT being involved in a supervisory role with trade organisations that have similar schemes. Such schemes will, occasionally, go wrong, but having the OFT actively involved will be crucial in ensuring that people have more faith in them, and that they are better regulated. I have some concerns, however, about whether sufficient resources will be made available under the Bill for the OFT to carry out such duties properly. It will need resources and time to do that kind of job, and I will be interested to hear whether my right hon. Friend can give me some assurance that sufficient resources will be made available.

Stop now orders will be extended under the Bill to areas that were not included in the Competition Act 1998. That is welcome, but, as one or two colleagues mentioned earlier, there is concern that this will not be sufficient and that the provisions will not cover the whole range of rogue traders who operate in this area. I would like the Standing

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Committee to examine ideas for extending the stop now orders to areas about which organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux are concerned.

I note that the citizens advice bureaux are also concerned about the differences between trading standards offices. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned this in her speech, and has given assurances that resources are being made available to improve the quality of trading standards offices, and to ensure a more level playing field. This, too, will need to be discussed in Committee.

I welcome the Bill, but I have sympathy with the comments made by some Conservative Members about it being very long, with 120-odd clauses.

Mr. Waterson: Two hundred and sixty-nine.

Mr. Borrow: I stand corrected. It is certainly a major piece of legislation. I think that it will be possible to deal with it within the Government's proposed time scale, but it will be important for Ministers to be prepared to listen constructively to the comments on various clauses from different sides of the Standing Committee. Many hon. Members will have concerns about whether we have got the definitions right—particularly in relation to insolvency, and about the issue of whether someone is an honest or dishonest bankrupt. Having seen the Bill, there are certainly issues on which I would like to seek clarification before it reaches Third Reading.

6.9 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): There is a great deal to agree with within the philosophy of the Bill. We fully endorse the principles of competition, of encouraging entrepreneurship and of strengthening consumer protection, as the Conservative spokesman did. There are also specific proposals with which we agree, such as political independence, the competition test, and the use of stop now orders to protect consumers. They represent admirable advances, though they will all need much clarification when the Bill is scrutinised. The point that was made about stop now orders shows the uncertainty that still hangs around, and I noted that the Secretary of State did not answer it, although I am sure that she will do so in Committee. Other elements of the Bill are attractive in principle, such as the bankruptcy reforms and the criminalisation of cartels, but they could fall victim to the law of unintended consequences. I agree with many of the reservations that have been expressed.

By way of introduction, I shall address what I think is the central logic of the Bill and what the Government are trying to achieve. The proposal is that we need to stimulate productivity growth, that the best way to do that is to have a more intensive and aggressive competition policy, and that the best way to achieve that is to import competition policy ideas from the United States. I do not disagree with the basic logic, but it is being massively hyped and exaggerated.

An enormous political investment is being put into the Bill that I suspect will not be realised. The Chancellor and his advisers, and perhaps the Secretary of State, have probably been to the United States and been star-struck by people such as Joel Klein, who introduced the innovative competition policies during the Clinton Administration. They may have jumped to false conclusions about the ease with which those policies could be applied on this side of the Atlantic.

I shall make a few points about the American system and the difficulties of applying it in this country. Their system is immensely litigious: ask any American business man about the problems of doing business in the United States. A speech about such problems in this country would be all about red tape, but in the United States it would be full of complaints about lawyers and tort costs. That is the fundamental problem with their system, and importing it uncritically here—adding a new layer of legal costs—would not help business, innovation and productivity.

I do not want to appear anti-American, because I am a great admirer of the way in which the American economy has performed, but we were in a similar state in relation to Japan 10 years ago. There was a Japanese economic miracle, and we were urged to copy everything that they were doing. A similar situation exists with the United States today, so a cautionary note should be sounded. Recent work suggests that productivity growth in the United States is almost certainly exaggerated by a factor of two, because of how national accounts in the US deal with depreciation in the rapid-growth computer industry. We should not get too carried away with the US experience.

We should also be aware of intellectual fashion. I am a little older than the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). In the 1970s, when I did my stint as a special adviser in the Department of Trade and taught economics students the principles of competition policy, the intellectual fashions were very different from those of today. There was a tremendous belief in economies of scale, large-scale firms and large-scale plants. Such ideas were seen as the way to productivity growth. We had the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, mergers in the car industry, and the idea of national champions, to which the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) referred.

In retrospect, we realise that that approach was probably not very smart, but at the time, there was consensus in politics and business that it was the way forward. In the 1980s, during the Reagan years, we drew on the Chicago school and the belief that we did not need a competition policy because excess profits bring new competition into the industry, provided that there are contestable markets. That idea prevailed for a while, and now we have a new fashion following the reforms in the United States in the 1990s.

However, as the Americans are discovering, the position is difficult. One of the big problems that they have, and that the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission will have with our merger decisions, is striking a balance between competition and monopoly in high-technology activities. On Friday, I am bringing back my private Member's Bill, which has wide support. The principle behind intellectual property rights is that a monopoly is deliberately created in which innovation can develop.

The United States has had enormous problems getting to grips with the problems of Microsoft—the case is still bouncing around in the courts, for very good reasons. How do we deal with the balance of competition and

monopoly in such a case? The US Administration, despite their activist policy on monopoly, have still not determined how to deal with Microsoft. They have not tried to attack the underlying monopoly, which is the MS-DOS operating system. They have gone for the unbundling problem, which is a secondary issue. There is a genuine difficulty about how much competition should be allowed in the interests of innovation and growth.

The United States policy is, in the Government's language, the gold standard, but there have been important changes in Europe. The European Union's competition policy has advanced considerably, and some of the toughest actions, such as those involving GE and Honeywell, have been taken by the EU. One of the concerns expressed by the Confederation of British Industry and the Law Society is that the Government are developing an American-based competition policy when the EU's own policy through the merger directive and the cartel legislation is developing independently.

I do not want to get into an argument about whether the American or European approach is best: they just happen to be different. From the point of view of British companies, it is important to have consistency. If the Government are not consistent and do not take into account the European trends, the legislation will get into trouble in the courts. We have seen that already with one or two key cases, such as the Interbrew case, in which the Competition Commission was humiliated by being overruled by the court. One of the key lines of Interbrew's defence was that British law and European practice were at odds. The Government must be careful, because uncritically adopting an American approach to competition policy when the European Union is trying to refine competition principles for the single market will produce some difficult inconsistencies.

I want now to address some of the specific points in the Bill, the first of which is on political independence. I think that we all agree that merger references should no longer be determined by Ministers. I had an open mind on that issue, until something that the Secretary of State's predecessor did finally persuaded me of the need to remove such decisions from the political world. The right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) made some excellent speeches on this subject, and strongly defended political independence until the NTL and Cable and Wireless case came along, which coincided with the interests of the Murdoch group. It was out of character, but he intervened, and although his motives may have been entirely innocent, it persuaded many people concerned with competition policy of the need for Ministers not to intervene politically, and not to be seen to be intervening. I support what the Government have now done.

We must bear in mind the need for checks and balances. I am not sure how many hon. Members realise that, under this legislation, it will no longer be possible for them to go along to the Secretary of State every time a merger takes place that threatens jobs in their constituency and ask her to do something about it. She will not be able to do anything. There is a radical change in that policy area, and checks and balances must be built in.

When the Bank of England was made independent of day-to-day political interference, checks and balances were provided, in the form of parliamentary accountability through the Select Committee on the Treasury. I was part of that process, and it worked admirably. One of the key elements was confirmatory hearings. I would be interested to know why the Government have not proposed that in this area. Mr. Vickers and the four members of the OFT board are immensely powerful people, although Mr. Vickers is probably less powerful now that he has a board behind him. In their own way, they are just as powerful as the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. Their appointments should be vetted and scrutinised by Members of Parliament as a necessary part of the discipline. The same should apply to Mr. Derek Morris and the Competition Commission. That element of political accountability is missing from the legislation as it stands, and we would like more action taken on that front.

The second element on which there is general consensus is the competition test. It is right that we should move away from the vague public interest test to a competition test. I am not entirely sure that the Government or the House have appreciated how radical that step will be, because as I understand the legislation, it will now become almost a matter of course for large mergers to be referred for examination. Almost by definition, a large merger reduces competition. Unless there are extenuating circumstances such as national security or palpable consumer benefits, or unless the companies involved are very small, there is no good reason why mergers should not be referred for examination. There is an irony here. A few years ago, the City called for the political independence of merger decisions because it did not like the interruption of merger processes by "Mrs. Blockit", as it described the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It howled with pain and rage at the loss of its fee income, and asked politicians to keep out of the process.

Ironically, there will almost certainly be many more merger references, because mergers will infringe on competition, and because of the growing volume of evidence that they do not add value. Many studies have been undertaken, but according to the KPMG study that I saw a couple of days ago, half of all mergers subtract shareholder value, let alone anything else, and a third do no good whatsoever. There is no good reason, therefore, why the Office of Fair Trading should ever stand aside and not refer a merger. We are entering into a totally different culture, which the City will probably have to get used to, whereby mergers will be constantly referred and investigated much more actively. I welcome that, but the implications have probably not yet been thoroughly thought through.

I want to say a few words about a third issue—the criminalisation of cartels. I have no particular objection to that principle. It seems perfectly sensible that, if businesses behave in a very damaging and collusive way, their representatives should go to jail. Indeed, they already go to jail for offences such as fraud or the adulteration of meat. There is nothing particularly problematic about that.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does the hon. Gentleman share my surprise at the call for harmonisation with Europe on this issue by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale)? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a concern more for cartels than for consumers?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Member is right. I, too, was a little surprised by the comment of the hon. Member for

[Dr. Cable]

Maldon and East Chelmsford; in fact, I was encouraged by it. Perhaps it illustrates the reformist tendency that we are told exists in the shadow Cabinet.

The point about criminalisation is not whether it is wrong, but whether it is necessary. Is the problem a lack of powers, which we discussed earlier? As I understand it, only one case—involving Arriva and FirstGroup—was subject to massive fines under the Competition Act 1998, and that was thrown out by the courts. It is not a lack of powerful sanctions, therefore, that has deterred the authorities from dealing with cartels.

One big problem in dealing with cartels, to which the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford rightly referred at length, is that of whistleblowers. Unless somebody blows the whistle on a cartel, it is impossible to track it down. By accident, I uncovered a cartel operating in my constituency. A constituent of mine, who was a leaseholder in a block of flats for which the council was the freeholder, challenged some building work on the roof that cost £5,000. On obtaining the tenders submitted to the council, we discovered that they were all within £5 of £5,000—a clear, prima facie case of a cartel.

I asked for a proper investigation, and although there was clear circumstantial evidence, nothing could be proved. All who were involved denied ever having spoken to each other. Of course, such a case would not stand a cat in hell's chance in a cartel investigation, because it would not meet the standard of criminal proof. There has to be whistleblowing, and a culture in the British and European systems that encourages it. Criminalisation of itself will not solve the problem.

One must also bear it in mind that, whenever cartel legislation has been significantly toughened, as it was in the 1950s, the response has been merger activity among small companies. Many companies will take cartels in-house, thereby preventing action under the law. Useful work by Mr. Simionides, a British academic, demonstrated a big increase in such activity in the 1950s, in response to the then Conservative Government's action against cartels. It is possible, therefore, to escape criminal sanctions through obvious business strategies.

My basic point about cartels is rather different, however. What is a cartel? In her introduction, the Secretary of State said that she will provide a very tight definition, but there is a commonsense one. A cartel involves companies getting together to raise prices and restrict services. In addition to the highly proscribed cartels that the Government are going to act against, others are operating under their noses. I wonder whether the Government or the competition authorities have thought of looking at the Association of Train Operating Companies, which meets next week to take a collective decision to increase the price of the network card by £10, thereby devaluing it for anybody who lives within 35 miles of London. A group of business men is acting together to raise prices collectively and restrict a service—a cartel by any definition. However, it is operating under the Government's nose; indeed, I believe that the Government talk to it.

Another example—in many ways, it is more topical and important—is the banking system. As I have repeatedly pointed out in debates with the Secretary of State and the Chancellor, and as the Cruickshank report showed, in effect, the banking system operates as a cartel. However, I doubt whether anybody expects Mr. Barrett to go behind bars. The banking system is accepted as a legitimate structure, but the Government need to be more careful about distinguishing between small cartels—gentlemen in dirty macs in the back room of a pub who are subject to criminal sanctions—and legitimate cartels that operate in the heart of the business establishment and are totally free not only from criminal sanctions but from effective regulation. That gap in credibility needs to be bridged.

On bankruptcy, I agree with many of the comments that have already been made. The hon. Member for South–West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), among others, pointed out that distinguishing between good and bad bankruptcy could become virtually impossible, and certainly unworkable. Such problems are always difficult in law. One thinks of the problems associated with trying to discover the guilty party in a divorce case. We are importing into bankruptcy the same subjective judgments. Many people will be wrongly judged from their point of view. They will launch legal appeals and the process will become very complicated. The administrative system will lose much of its flexibility and become much more expensive.

In respect of bankruptcy, I want also to endorse the point that was made about Crown prerogative. In that regard, a welcome and positive step is being taken, but we need to be careful. In many ways, we are talking not about the law but the spirit of the law. If the Inland Revenue loses its Crown prerogative but continues to operate in the same way, regarding itself none the less as driven by a need to get at assets before other creditors, the same problems will arise. The issue is as much about the way the Inland Revenue functions as it is about the law.

I endorse the importance of personal bankruptcy. It has yet to be pointed out that many very poor people would benefit from personal bankruptcy, but cannot get through the bankruptcy process because they cannot afford the £250 fee. If the legislation is going to deal with personal and corporate bankruptcy together, we should devote time and thought to how the bankruptcy law affects the socially excluded, who are right at the bottom of the social scale.

I want to reinforce the comments of the hon. Members for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) and for South Ribble about the stop now provisions. They constitute an important innovation, but it is unclear how they will operate. I fully agree with those hon. Members who emphasised the need to apply stop now orders not just to illegal activities, but to activities specifically designed to get around the law. Pyramid selling was mentioned, but there are many other examples, such as time-share and the jobbing contractor scandals. Such scams are often cleverly designed to get around the law, and it is important that the stop now provisions be applied to them. It may well be that, as the Secretary of State said, the general legal powers that were discussed do not apply, but we must find some other way to deal with the problem.

Many of the consumer powers depend on the capacity of trading standards departments. Stronger consumer action powers are all very well, but if trading standards officers are severely under-equipped and resourced, as they are at present, much of that action will not be taken locally. Local councils' trading standards departments have to be beefed up so that that aspect of the legislation can be effective.

In conclusion, I welcome much of the philosophy behind the Bill, which is big and complex. It will require a great deal of scrutiny, and we shall certainly table a good many critical amendments to it.

6.30 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I want to make a small contribution, but I am grateful to have had the opportunity to listen to the debate because this is clearly a very far-reaching, complex and highly technical Bill that will affect our constituencies and the businesses in them in many ways. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) made clear in his thoughtful contribution how far reaching the Bill is, and I hope that those hon. Members who are fortunate enough to serve on the Standing Committee—I do not include myself as one of them—will have an opportunity to give it the full scrutiny that it clearly deserves.

I have briefly looked at schedule 25 and reckon that about 36 measures on the statute book will be affected by the changed powers of the Office of Fair Trading, as opposed to those of the previous Director General of Fair Trading. I hope that hon. Members will consider the way in which the Government are developing competition policy and the fact that there is more liberalisation.

The Communication Workers Union lobbied Parliament earlier today. It is concerned that Postcomm might be taking forward its proposals too hastily, and perhaps not in the right direction. It is crucial, therefore, that we carefully consider how the Bill will affect other Acts on the statute book. I remember going to the OFT with other hon. Members to make representations about football coverage under the Broadcasting Act 1990 and football club mergers. Clearly, we need to understand how the Bill will affect such issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) mentioned some of the concerns that were expressed by citizens advice bureaux. I have had almost Herculean battles with firms facing bankruptcy in my constituency—usually manufacturing companies—especially when there have been real fears about what will happen to their employees. We have to consider the proposals very carefully, because perhaps they will bring about some changes.

I welcome the Bill, which will bring real benefits to unsecured creditors, including many small businesses. People say to me, "Joan, I don't understand why the Inland Revenue always has the first call when a firm is about to go under." Many people may be owed money, which they need to be paid, but because they are not top of the queue they too go under. So the Bill will increase and enhance competitiveness in a way that benefits constituencies throughout the country, not just Stoke-on-Trent, North.

Citizens advice bureaux have already circulated their concerns to many Members of Parliament. They are concerned about whether those on means-tested benefits and in hardship will be exempt from the bankruptcy deposit fee. I hope that the Minister will consider that issue in responding to the debate. Many of our constituents cannot afford to take advantage of some of the Bill's proposals. We should consider whether there should be an option to pay by instalment and perhaps reduced fees.

As well as having talks with trading standards officers about guidance and consultation, I hope that the Government will have further talks with citizens advice bureaux, as that might provide a way forward. Many of my constituents face debt and bankruptcy, and they need to be included. The Bill needs to be inclusive, especially in relation to the disadvantaged sections of our communities.

I speak as a former chairman of a local government health and consumer services committee, which had responsibility for trading standards officers, and in doing so I should like to echo the concerns that have been expressed about trading standards officers. A consistent approach must be taken throughout the country. What happens in each part of the country—including Northern Ireland and so on—must reflect what happens elsewhere, so the guidance should be consistent. I hope that there will be proper consultation on that.

I also hope that the Bill will continue to enable trading standards officers to act against rogue traders. The opportunities that it provides to act against rogue traders represent a real step forward and will be warmly welcomed by many people. I hope that the Minister will consider the guidance that will be issued to trading standards officers on the new extended stop now regime.

For many years I have tried to get answers about unfair competition and barriers to enterprise, especially in relation to independent petrol retailers and the newspaper industry, which Select Committee on Trade and Industry and the OFT have investigated. A lot of Members have been approached by independent petrol retailers, many of whom have gone under during the past five or six years because of unfair competition. In swathes of the country—not in my constituency, where there are some excellent ones, I hasten to add—many of them have closed because of such unfair competition.

In the time that I have had to consider this lengthy and hefty Bill, I have tried to consider whether that long-standing concern can be addressed. I hope that the Minister will consider the issue in detail in his reply or in a follow-up letter to me. Those retailers are buying fuel wholesale, but the wholesale suppliers are selling oil and petrol at less than cost price in parts of the country because they can gain an advantage elsewhere in the supply structure. The independent petrol retailers operate at a loss because of unfair competition in the buying and selling of petrol. That is grossly unfair.

Many small businesses are severely disadvantaged by the power of the larger conglomerates that provide them with goods and services. Small businesses in rural areas and areas of high unemployment are particularly vulnerable. The Bill presupposes that the consumer is an ordinary member of the public, but small businesses are also consumers—they receive goods and services from larger businesses. Will the Bill afford them adequate protection? I know that clauses 5 to 8 refer to the issue, and I hope the Minister will pay close attention to it.

Currently, a monopoly is deemed to have been brought about if a supplier dominates 70 per cent. of the market. In the oil industry, three players dominate 80 per cent. of the fuel-supply market. No individual company will cross the magic 30 per cent. threshold and thus trigger an investigation, but collectively they dominate the market. All their prices at the pump move either up or down in unison. What protection from such predatory action will the Bill provide? Those running independent garages in my constituency—I will not name them—will listen closely to the Minister's reply.

6.41 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Although I broadly welcome the Bill, I do not consider its title entirely apposite. It could have been the "This is the other half of the insolvency legislation that we should have produced in the last Parliament" Bill, or the "These are the OFT changes that we have been promising for years and years and have just got around to" Bill. What we have, however, is the Enterprise Bill. A more truthful title would be the Enterprise Regulation Bill: this Bill has precious little to do with enterprise, and an awful lot to do with the regulation of industry.

I am not against that, in fact, but I think that the Government carry spin a little too far. When their time is up and the pundits engage in a critique of their activities, the one word that will sum up those activities will be "spin". It will run through them just as the word "Blackpool" runs through a stick of rock.

Nevertheless, as I have said, I support the Bill. I am not in favour of rushed parliamentary reform: in many instances, it is a case of "Legislate in haste and repent at leisure". However, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that the Bill should have been scrutinised before being presented to Parliament. It contains 269 clauses and 26 schedules. In Committee, if the Minister speaks for only 10 minutes on each clause, it will take just a tad less than 3,000 minutes—50 hours—to give the background and the Government's reasoning. The House should realise how much those involved in industry and commerce want to hear ministerial explanations that may help them to interpret the Bill. Pre-legislative scrutiny could have taken place at its own pace, allowing us to deal only with items prompting interest or contention.

This is a huge Bill. That pleases me in some ways—we shall be dealing in primary legislation with many matters that are normally contained in secondary legislation—but we are trapped in a savage timetable that will prevent us from devoting enough scrutiny to the Bill.

I had some mischievous thoughts when reading the Bill. It seems that various designated organisations will be approved. I wondered whether a political party would be deemed a consumer group. Would the Conservative party be deemed to represent consumers? I must tell the Minister that I think we do a splendid job representing consumers, and I think we should be allowed to make representations to the OFT as a designated body.

The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), who has left the Chamber for a moment, raised an important point about trade associations, with which the Bill does not deal. I took a great deal of interest in the subject before 1997. I think consumer representation could be hugely advanced if leading trade associations were recognised, and if that recognition required appropriate insurance and certification. Government would recognise and deal with only those associations that wrote that requirement into their constitutions. Anyone dealing with, say, a builder who saw that the builder had that trade association accreditation would know that the insurance was there. The Association of British Travel Agents implements such an arrangement to a degree: it is one of the leaders in that regard. I can only commend it, and suggest that further thought should be given to the idea.

I experienced a moment of panic when my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) mentioned clause 254, which refers to bankruptcies among Members of Parliament. For a dreadful moment I thought we were going to remove the rule that an MP who became bankrupt could not remain in the House. It flashed through my mind that if we had removed that barrier, the noble Lord Archer would not have had to resign all those years ago. He would not have gone to the United States and written all those books, and none of the ensuing drama would have taken place. He would probably still be in the House, entertaining us in some other way, rather than in his current abode.

I listened to the Secretary of State's arguments in favour of the Bill with a good deal of attention, and at some points almost with enthusiasm. The repetition of the words "competition", "consumer" and "enterprise" from the Government Front Bench had a mesmeric effect on me. The Secretary of State's emergence from the chrysalis of clause IV socialism as a butterfly of enterprise is one of the more remarkable political transformations of the last 20 years or so. I welcome it: it is a definite step in the right direction.

As I have said, I am happy to support some aspects of the Bill. The distancing of various Ministers from decisions about competition and mergers is highly sensible, and has clearly received a general welcome in the House. I also support, in principle, the proposals to reduce the problems of those who become bankrupt through no fault of their own—although, as I said earlier, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what constitutes "no fault of their own". The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) summed that up rather well. As he agreed with me, I think I should agree with him. This mutual admiration society suggests that between us we must have got something right.

As a former small business Minister, I know that when people become bankrupt it is seldom through no fault of their own. Amazingly, there is a horrendous failure rate among those who start up businesses simply because it seems a good idea at the time. According to statistics I have seen, about one business in nine is still operating after a couple of years, but a much higher percentage of businesses whose programmes and financial statements have been vetted by various bodies, such as Business Links, are able to survive. We must consider that carefully in Committee.

Let me give a small piece of advice. I hope that the Bill will help in this regard. I have observed that if a company is going to go bankrupt, the faster it does so, the less cost and pain will be involved. Companies should not hang on until the bitter end, running up more and more debts. That just means that more people outside are hurt. Those lending money to such companies are hurt far more than they would be if the companies had closed weeks or months earlier.

I welcome the fact that the Crown will be put on an equal footing with other creditors of a failed business or a bankrupt person. That is long overdue. However, we must take care to discover whether the actions of the Crown will precipitate a more rigorous collection method, which may in turn cause businesses to have to close much sooner. I hope that in Committee the Minister will give guidance on how Crown organisations will behave.

Although, over time, the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues have adopted the rhetoric of saying that they want competition and consumerism, too great an extension of regulation seems to be taking place. They believe that there is too little competition in our domestic markets and that consequently British consumers suffer unnecessarily high prices. Their solution is to make even more stringent an already tough competition regime by creating a new corporate authority in the Office of Fair Trading and establishing new penalties for failing to comply with the enforcement regime. I support the measures to establish codes of practice for business and consumers. In case the Minister takes me seriously, I am only joking when I suggest that the Conservative party might become a designated consumer body. *[Interruption.]* I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford is asking me to rethink that, but it would not be right for a political party to act in that way.

Is not Ministers' initiation of their "super complaints" system redolent of the approach of traditional old-fashioned socialists? The Secretary of State, who tries to make out that her new political colours are a tasteful pink, may be a tad redder than we like to think. I was intrigued to read a recent interview in which she claimed that she wanted the Department for Trade and Industry

"to be run more like a well-rounded business"

and said that she believed that

"entrepreneurs who take risks"—

should—

"get exceptional returns".

If she had more business experience, she would know that running a business is nothing like running a Department. Ministers should not think that they can run businesses—they make regulations, not play in the game. As soon as they start to do that, we face problems similar to those that arose in the past. I remember the success achieved by the National Enterprise Board, which was set up to bring several organisations together to gain the benefit of socialist leadership and direction. Every single one went pear-shaped and cost the people of this country a small fortune. We should ensure that any additional regulation reduces, or keeps to a minimum, costs on business.

I shall illustrate the confusion that lies at the heart of the Bill by considering two of its provisions. I fully understand why organisations such as the Consumers Association have enthusiastically welcomed the proposal to allow designated consumer bodies to complain to the OFT that one or more features of a UK market is harming consumers' interests—they have lobbied for years for the Government to honour their promise in that respect. All the consumer body has to do is to follow the OFT's guidance on how to present its case. However, neither hon. Members nor businesses are being told what criteria will have to met by complainants. For example, will they include exceptional profit levels? If so, the risk-taking entrepreneur whom the Secretary of State wishes to encourage will think twice about operating in this country.

I am a practical person, not an academic economist or a lawyer—I live and operate in the real world—but it seems to me that the criteria are so widely drawn that any UK market of any kind could be open to investigation. In the Bill, the Government largely fail to appreciate that there are two sides to a market: supply and demand. Over the years, I have had a degree of experience in industry and I have declared all sorts of interests for hon. Members who are paranoid about such matters. If one has a desirable product, there is a natural tendency for it to be in short supply and for its price to rise. Will the fact that a product is particularly desirable—other products are available, but they are not as nice—be subject to regulation and investigation by the OFT?

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford, I believe that the free market is the best system for providing the goods and services that any advanced commercial and industrial society requires. That system works best when the supplier of goods and services can respond rapidly to the changing demands of consumers. Perfect markets exist—dare I say it?—only in the minds of economists, civil servants and Ministers who are not of the real world. The idea that markets can be dragooned and regulated by criminal penalties to work better offers only a partial solution. When we consider the Bill in Committee, we must be given clear guidance about all the rules and regulations so that businesses know exactly where they stand.

This massive Bill needs to be examined in detail, but as we shall have insufficient time in Committee to do so it will pass largely unchallenged and undebated. That is part of the Government's relaxed approach to the role of Parliament. They are dragooning business through without enabling us to consider matters in the detail that is our task and duty.

I welcome the fact that the OFT will be structured as a board, not as a single person, and that rogue traders will face additional pressures. I also welcome the giving of more resources to trading standards officers. The Secretary of State made a lovely generalised comment about that, but those in local authorities would like to know—as would I—how many pounds will filter through to enable them to strengthen trading standards operations in their areas and in our constituencies. Several constituents have come to me with matters about which they have been told, "Sorry, we can't investigate it; we haven't got the resources." That is a common plea that will resonate with hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We should all welcome the completion of the insolvency legislation and moves to produce a cohesive consumer law to replace the current piecemeal approach.

This is a massive Bill, but we shall be in Committee for a very short time and it will not get the scrutiny that it deserves. As a result, consumers may ultimately be worse off rather than beneficiaries.

6.58 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who, although he is a distinguished commentator on such matters, confirmed an impression that I have formed while listening to Conservative Members—that they are trying desperately hard to find fault with the Bill, but are in fact embarrassed that they did not introduce it themselves when they had the opportunity to do so in government all those years ago.

The hon. Gentleman picked on a tried and tested piece of advice from the Conservative central office handbook—when in doubt, attack spin. He may find it worthwhile to quibble with the title of the Bill, but it is very relevant to my constituents.

[Andy Burnham]

Leythers have a history of enterprise and inventiveness. Indeed, Leigh has a strong claim to being the cradle of the industrial revolution. The spinning Jenny was invented there by a poor mill worker called Thomas Highs, but the design was pinched and patented by a wealthy mill owner from Blackburn. Some would say that that was the story of Leigh. We never got our rightful place in the history books.

Leigh was one of England's—if not Britain's—most enterprising towns throughout the Victorian period and until the 1960s and 1970s. It had a thriving economy with thousands of jobs in mining, the textile industry and manufacturing. However, like other economies based on traditional industries, it has fallen on hard times in recent years. Since I was elected, we have undergone the pain of two large-scale redundancies in manufacturing. Two hundred and fifty jobs were lost at Ingersoll-Rand, which manufactures portable compressors, in Hindley Green. A month ago, a further 220 jobs were lost at Volex Power Cords, which manufactures household plugs and cords—long a staple of the Leigh economy.

Beyond the headline redundancy figures, we have also lost jobs in countless smaller businesses that grew up around the companies and acted as suppliers to them. Such losses would be difficult to absorb anywhere, but they are devastating in a former coalfield area. I have set out the context because it leads to my main point: the Bill is most needed not in the City of London, but in our deprived communities.

Communities such as Leigh need help to rekindle enterprise and revive the economy, especially in the new sectors of industry. It is fair to say that people in such areas are acutely aware of the need to foster greater competitiveness and productivity in the UK economy and to help businesses survive when they hit financial difficulties. They should not be allowed simply to go to the wall; that has happened too often in the past.

The Bill will be welcomed by companies and employees in my constituency. Sadly, it will come too late for those who have already lost their jobs. However, I still believe that I can confidently say to them that since we came to government, Labour has made a huge difference through boosting our local economy and productivity. I am proud that the Government are introducing the measure.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) criticised the Government's economic and employment records. I simply do not recognise those criticisms. Despite the large-scale redundancies and the obvious problems in manufacturing, we have hard evidence of strong economic growth and increasing employment since 1997.

Yesterday, I was sent the latest labour market report for Leigh. Other hon. Members will receive such reports for their constituencies. The Leigh report shows that 1,602 people are unemployed—661 fewer than in May 1997 and a 29 per cent. decrease. The number of long-term unemployed people has fallen by 458—a cut of 69 per cent. since May 1997, and more than 500 people have been helped into work through the new deal.

Such achievements cannot be belittled in an area such as Leigh, which has struggled over the years under Conservative party policies. The Conservative Government closed down the mines and hit the textile industry. The Labour Government's achievements have a genuine impact on people in my constituency. That is testimony to the Government's measures to boost competitiveness and employment.

Our local economy is slowly transforming itself from one based on traditional primary and secondary industries. The Bill can only help us through that difficult process. At the end of March, I attended a reunion of former miners from the Parsonage colliery, which closed, coincidentally, almost 10 years ago to the day, on the eve of the 1992 general election. That move did not help the Conservative party's attempts to win votes in Leigh.

A manufacturing facility for Patak's—the Indian foods company—stands on the Parsonage site. Patak's is a startling British success story and I am proud that it is now based in my constituency. The fact that it is located on the site of a former pit embodies the transformation that the Leigh economy is undergoing. Although there is a long way to go, it points to a more hopeful future for our town.

On Monday, I met representatives of Barlo Engineering, the UK's leading radiator manufacturer, which has a plant in the centre of Leigh. It wants to modernise, increase employment at the plant and invest in new equipment that will enable it to produce leading edge radiators in Europe. It is another example of a company that is sufficiently confident in the UK competitive environment to invest and bring more jobs to our local economy. The company is looking for help to invest through the regional selective assistance grants. I make a plea to Ministers to continue to consider seriously using such grants to regenerate deprived communities, especially former coalfield areas. I have an eye on the comprehensive spending review, which will be concluded shortly.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman should relate his remarks to the contents of the Bill.

Andy Burnham: I shall do my best. I was trying to make the point that the provisions to boost productivity and competitiveness need to be complemented by resources to help companies expand and become more productive.

I want to consider the consumer protection provisions, and especially stop now orders. In recent weeks, some of the sharp practices that are used to sell gas and electricity to consumers have been brought to my attention. I am sure that that is true of hon. Members of all parties. This week, a constituent told me about a new policy that TXU Energi, which is trying to market its services in my constituency, has adopted. My constituent received a bill and an accompanying letter, which stated:

"From now on, if you choose not to pay your bill within 14 days of the bill issue date (including this one), you'll pay 9.5 per cent. more on your next bill. However, we do believe in being fair, so once you return to paying promptly, your next bill will return to the lower rate."

I readily own up to not paying all my bills within 14 days. The company is clearly attempting to get people on low incomes to use direct debit.

People could be in hospital or on holiday. There are several reasons why those on low incomes simply cannot pay a bill in 14 days and do not want to use direct debit.

Such company policy is a licence to add charges willy nilly to consumers' bills and continue to fleece them. I am not 100 per cent. sure whether such a case is in the scope of the measure, but it suggests a need to be ever vigilant against sharp practice. Stop now orders and the ability to introduce them quickly show that companies are making rapid decisions that have a direct impact on consumers in weeks. We therefore need measures that can be implemented with great speed to prevent companies from doing that and acting directly against consumers' interests.

Mr. Page: Does not the hon. Gentleman believe that the unfair contracts terms cover his point? Would not more funds for trading standards officers enable them to investigate such cases with more alacrity and thus prevent them?

Andy Burnham: I am grateful for that intervention. I agreed with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the valuable role of trading standards officers. I should like them to be able to increase their activities and the work load that they are able to take on. Whether that is principally because of lack of resources or lack of legislative power, I am not in a position to say. However, I would support the hon. Gentleman in saying that there is a need to boost the role of trading standards officers.

That brings me to the impact that the Bill may have on sport. That was touched on briefly by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). I must declare a relevant interest in this respect: I am the chairman of Supporters Direct, a publicly funded organisation set up to promote greater supporter and community ownership of football clubs through the establishment of mutual trusts or industrial and provident societies. The Bill is relevant in the context of the issues facing the football industry at the moment. I remind the House that the administration of ITV Digital has real consequences for football league clubs up and down the country. I am no expert in these matters, and I would be interested to hear how the measures in the Bill would have impacted on the ITV Digital administration and how creditors would perhaps have been better protected than under administration as currently constructed. It leaves football league clubs very vulnerable to loss of revenue, for which they had clearly budgeted. However, the measures on administration in this Bill are extremely interesting, as we are about to see football clubs across the country falling into administration. Indeed, several football clubs are already in administration—Swindon and York, to name just a couple.

Bad business practice or the asset stripping of clubs has endangered the very existence of football clubs in this country, many of which have a proud history and heritage. That is not at all the fault of football supporters, who simply want their clubs to survive and who want to keep them in trust for future generations to enjoy. Some would argue that the problems that football is currently facing are self-inflicted, and that high wages and bad business planning are largely to blame. I sympathise with those arguments, but that is not the fault of football supporters who face the prospect of their club going into administration, and who clearly want to do their best to guide the club through that process and enable it to survive and to thrive.

Two measures in the Bill are directly relevant to football clubs, because they are small, community-oriented businesses, and it is crucial that they be kept afloat for the well-being of the towns that we represent. Football supporters everywhere—particularly those of Brighton and Doncaster—will welcome the tougher sanctions against rogue directors introduced by the Bill, as they have suffered at first hand the effects of corrupt practice in the boardroom.

The second measure that will be warmly welcomed is the Bill's key aim to facilitate the rescue of companies when reasonable and practicable and not to drive them to the wall unnecessarily. The Bill seeks to do that through streamlining the administration procedures and restricting the use of administrative receivership. If that gives a company or a sporting institution the breathing space to get back on its feet and sort out the bad debts that are often bequeathed by bad boards, that is all to the good, and should be wholeheartedly welcomed by all.

I want to conclude on a note of concern, to which I should be interested to hear the Minister's response. That concern relates to how the powers and measures in the Bill can be used to impact on sport more generally, and how competition law might be used against the best interests of sport. I feel strongly that the competition authorities have been itching to get their hands on sport for many years. There has long been talk of cartels in premier league football—in a famous case, the Office of Fair Trading took the premier league to the restrictive trade practices court in 1999.

I would not like the issue of the collective sale of sports rights to be reopened by a challenge from competition law or a suggestion that sports cartels need to be broken. At the time, I was working as an adviser to the Government's football taskforce. Our report, "Investing in the Community", which was published just before the court case, argued strongly for an exemption for football and sport in general from the regulations covering restrictive practices on two public interest grounds.

The first of those is that collective bargaining, and the sharing of the revenue collected from it, is crucial to enable sports to maintain balance throughout their competitions. That is crucial to the television product—if leagues are well balanced and competitive, the uncertainty of the outcome remains and the television viewer remains interested and engaged in the product.

The second issue is that the collective selling of rights for sport can generate income that can be top-sliced and reinvested in the grass roots of every sport. The Lawn Tennis Association is well renowned for investing money in inner city communities from the proceeds of rights sold on a collective basis, as are the Football Association and the premier league. The case was won, and the special public interest attached to sport when faced with competition law was accepted when the judge quoted at length from the taskforce report. Currently, Wigan council is about to bid for £1 million of the proceeds of the premier league contract to invest money directly in public football facilities in our area.

In introducing tougher measures in the Bill, especially against cartels, I urge Ministers to consider building in safeguards to recognise the special nature of sport and to consider wider issues than pure competition. Sport is unique for the simple reason that companies in the sector

[Andy Burnham]

need each other. Without each other, they cannot carry on playing—they need competitors, which is not true of every other industry.

Several hon. Members have referred to the experience in the United States, and we should note that although the US has the strictest pro-competition and anti-trust legislation in the world, it exempts sport and sports franchises from those provisions because it recognises the special nature of sport.

I would support an amendment to the treaty of Rome to protect sport. In the knowledge that that will take some time, I hope that, in practice, the competition authorities will bear those points in mind when exercising their new powers under the Bill. With those provisos, I give my full support to the Bill.

7.17 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Much of the Bill is unnecessary, some of it is ill thought out, and very little of it is to be broadly welcomed. It will not make a major contribution to closing the productivity gap, which is the Chancellor's objective. That objective can only be delivered if Ministers use their time a bit more wisely and legislate to reduce red tape and to simplify the British tax system. I fear that those aims are beyond new Labour Ministers.

Instead, there is a flurry of press releases, White Papers and consultation documents inspired by a Chancellor whose misplaced sense of machismo about being pro-enterprise is just an excuse for one more headline. Never mind that the Competition Act 1998 has hardly had any time to bed in; the Chancellor wants another Bill to show that the Government are doing something. Never mind proper parliamentary scrutiny—we have already heard that the Bill will have a minimal amount of time spent on it in Standing Committee. But that does not bother the Chancellor in the pursuit of his big idea.

All the rhetoric and spin in the press, of which we have heard much in the debate, conceals one basic fact—at bottom, new Labour does not understand what enterprise and competitiveness truly demand. If the Government

"wants to draw a sustained cheer from business in this Bill it should tackle the explosion in red tape generated by Westminster and Brussels."

That is not a quotation from my admirable and excellent colleagues on the Front Bench. It is the judgment of the *Financial Times* with regard to the Bill, contained in its 27 March editorial. That view was also expressed in *The Independent* on the same day, when it stated that the Bill contained

"largely candy floss measures which fail to address the main problem facing Britain's enterprise economy—namely, the growing burden of regulation, especially as it concerns the labour force."

The Chancellor and I agree on one thing at least—that raising UK productivity levels is essential to driving better economic growth, keeping borrowing down and keeping price levels low and sustained. However, the facts since 1997 show that productivity has not improved. The December outlook figures from the OECD show that the average annualised rate of productivity growth was lower in the past four years than in the preceding four. That is all the more worrying and depressing because the Conservative Government bequeathed to the Chancellor an economy in fine fettle—the result, in large measure, of the decisions taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke).

Of course, the problem of UK competitiveness goes beyond the basic productivity numbers. Competitiveness has also deteriorated since this Chancellor took office. According to the International Institute for Management Development, this country was ranked 11th on the world competitiveness scoreboard in 1997. By 2001, under this Chancellor, we had fallen to 19th.

According to the global entrepreneurship report of January this year, the UK has a higher proportion than Ireland, the US, Mexico or Australia of entrepreneurs who feel that they are a low priority—or less—for the Government. Of the UK respondents, 75 per cent. said that cutting red tape would radically improve the state of entrepreneurial culture in this country. David Wilkinson, head of entrepreneurial services at Ernst and Young, has said, in relation to the global entrepreneurship report, that

"entrepreneurs are disappointed with the Government for continuing on the one hand to preach the benefit of an enterprise culture, whilst on the other burdening companies with an endless litany of red tape. It's not surprising they feel misunderstood and under-represented."

One figure—£15 billion—explains why the widespread dissatisfaction is growing, and why the Bill so utterly misses the point about international competitiveness. That figure represents the cost of the regulation that has been piled on British business since 1997. The British Chambers of Commerce calculated that figure using some very accurate numbers—the Government's own figures for regulatory impact assessments in each Department. Importantly, the figure excludes the financial costs of the national minimum wage: it deals with administrative costs only.

The Institute of Directors has also done some interesting work, as was evident in its survey published in the *Financial Times* on 25 March. The survey showed that 93 per cent. of the institute's members—not an insubstantial focus group of corporate players and business men—believe that excessive regulation is bad, and that it is getting worse every year.

The new Labour Government have done nothing to limit the colossal recurring financial costs of regulations, which are represented in the cumulative figure of £15 billion since 1997. I shall list the yearly costs of some of the bigger-ticket items. The recurring financial cost to British business of the working time directive comes to £2.3 billion a year. For the data protection directive, the figure is £0.6 billion, and for the pollution directive it is around £1 billion. The recurring costs of payroll burdens—where firms have to do the Government's work—have varied between £125 million and £210 million a year for student loan repayments. There have also been recurring costs of £105 million for the administration of the working families tax credit. However, I fancy that that is an underestimate.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ruffley: I am more than happy to give way to my colleague from the Treasury Select Committee.

Mr. Beard: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Phrases such as "general regulation" and "red tape" cover a multitude

of sins. Which of the items that he has listed would the hon. Gentleman abolish to reduce the so-called burdens that he is illustrating?

Mr. Ruffley: I am using the nomenclature of the British Chambers of Commerce, not my own. That body has added up all the costs set out in each Department's regulatory impact assessment, and come to a total of £15 billion. I think that the working families tax credit—soon to be the working tax credit and family tax credit—is a mess. I do not believe employers and businesses should be required to be outposts of the Department for Work and Pensions.

As for the other directives, some have not been argued against effectively in Brussels, from where many—though not all—emanate. That will be one of the priorities for the next Conservative Government. We will act in the interests of competitiveness, whereas the proposals in the Bill are strictly second, third or fourth order. The first-order question has to do with how we get to grips with the regulatory costs on business. I shall continue the litany of regulatory costs, although I shall not trespass too much on the House's time, as I want to get to the meat of the Bill and to deal with the specific clauses that worry me.

There are in the pipeline EU regulations that will add to regulatory costs, and they include the information and consultation directive. Before the general election, the Government talked tough about opposing that directive, but we do not know what they will do when it reappears before the Council of Ministers. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government will oppose it.

What will the Government do with regard to the proposed end of life vehicles directive, or the proposal regarding waste electrical equipment? Will the Government bother with the new framework agreement between social partners on temporary agency workers? Will they oppose those directives, or not? We need to know, as the answer is at the heart of competitiveness, and is much more important than the Bill.

The Bill purports to promote enterprise, but it deals with too many second-order questions. I shall deal with the proposals in the Bill that are defective, but I acknowledge that some are to be welcomed. I welcome the sensible removal of ministerial rulings on proposed mergers, and the fact that the Bill will put the new OFT board on a statutory footing. Clause 8, which gives the OFT a more direct and forceful role in setting guidance standards in various sectors of the economy so that trade associations can put rule books together, is important and will benefit consumers. Finally, criminal sanctions against cartel operators will be a useful deterrent. Although I do not imagine that they will be used very often, the sanctions will concentrate minds. I welcome that, and I believe other Conservative Members do as well.

However, part 10 of the Bill will require a lot of attention in Standing Committee. Reducing the stigma of bankruptcy is important in encouraging entrepreneurship, but the proposals have been put together in a rather misguided way. The Bill seeks to encourage entrepreneurship by reducing the bankruptcy period from three years to one year, or to less than one year, for non-culpable bankrupts—that is, people who are deemed not to have been reckless or dishonest.

Will the Minister tell us if resources will be available so that the existing number of official receivers can investigate every bankruptcy case? In the first instance, I fancy that they—not the courts—will have to determine whether dishonesty obtains in a particular case. Indeed, given the heavier sanctions that the Bill will introduce for the dishonest or reckless bankrupt—a bankruptcy period of up to 15 years applies—many commentators in the legal profession observe that the judicial review industry may get a shot in the arm. There could be more claims under human rights legislation, which could undermine enforcement of the distinction—assuming that one can make that distinction—between a dishonest or reckless bankrupt on the one hand and a non-culpable bankrupt on the other.

Under the Bill, an individual could be out of bankruptcy in 12 months or even less. Are the Government seriously inviting us to believe that individuals will have an incentive to enter into individual voluntary agreements? Traditionally, such agreements and arrangements mean that bankrupts can repay over a period of time several times more to creditors than would be the case if they went into bankruptcy straight away.

In addition, given the discretion that official receivers will have to reduce bankruptcy periods to less than 12 months—as low as two or three, it would appear—is it not likely that the public will get the impression that a rogues charter is being created? That is particularly worrying as, according to the Government's own figures, more than half of the bankruptcies this year are a result of consumer debt. Surely the proposals in the Bill may result in consumers racking up debt in the knowledge that filing for bankruptcy could mean that they are free in less than 12 months, provided that they have not been dishonest. Frankly, in those circumstances too little stigma leads to too much moral hazard. I cannot understand why the Government are proposing such slack and non-minimal periods for bankruptcy. Twelve months or less simply will not do, as the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has already said.

Equally, there seems to be a lack of clear thought and precision in the clauses that deal with corporate insolvency in part 10 of the Bill. Apparently, Ministers believe that administrative receivership is a very bad thing. The clichéd view, which the Minister probably shares, is that such receiverships are normally brought about by banks, which usually hold the debentures and floating charges. They pull the plug early when times are not so good and send businesses and their work forces into oblivion. Clearly, that is a bad thing.

The problem with that caricature is that receivership is not always like that. In many cases it involves a hive-down or a transfer of assets to a new company or management. That scenario is not captured by the business failure numbers.

Administration, which is what the Bill is pressing very aggressively and which will lead to the virtual demise of administrative receivership, is essentially a court procedure. While the Government ask us to believe that that procedure will not be as onerous as administrations at present, that the time and expense will not be as great and that there will be a fast-track procedure, I do not know any practitioner in the field who honestly believes that. Some businesses that do not have the opportunity to grant a floating charge or a debenture, and whose bankers do not have that facility, will have to go the administration route. They may face higher charges and more requests for personal security and guarantees. That is not what the Government want to achieve—a restriction in the ease of

[Mr. Ruffley]

accessing finance—but it could be a direct consequence of administrative receivership being kicked into touch by those clauses.

Is the Minister aware that there are four times as many cases of administrative receivership as of administrations? Logically, if all those administrative receiverships become administrations, the court system will be severely burdened. There may be a capacity problem. This is not a party political point; it is a question of strategic planning. Has the Minister any idea of the amount of pressure on the court system if administrations become the norm as envisaged in the Bill?

If there are blockages in the court system, creditors will take a particularly dim view of administration. They could ask for more onerous levels of security to counter the risk and uncertainty of a court procedure that might be overloaded or sclerotic and might damage their interests.

Having talked to people in legal and corporate insolvency in the square mile, I have gained the impression that the Government have not thought the proposals on corporate insolvency out. They will have to do a great deal more work to get their act together. I trust that they will spend adequate time in Committee to ensure that that is done.

The more I look at the Bill and its omissions, the more I realise that the Government do not understand what competitiveness and enterprise are about. The Bill completely misses the point—it misses it cubed. The Government and the Labour party do not grasp that more regulation, interference and complexity damage economies rather than strengthen them. The Chancellor, who is the true architect of the Bill, has got to understand sooner rather than later that the business of Government is not, and never can be, the government of business.

7.36 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I shall concentrate on the part of the Bill that deals with insolvency. I support the Government's enterprise agenda because it is a key part of job creation. Clearly, full employment is the best form of social justice and the Government's record is already quite remarkable.

When the Conservative Government left office, my constituency was well and truly the unemployment black spot of East Anglia, with unemployment of 11.5 per cent. Last autumn, it was down to 4.5 per cent. It edged up only a little over the winter and as we move into the spring it is starting to move down again. There are levels of optimism in my constituency that we did not see for many years under the Conservatives. I will not talk about feel-good factors, but things are much better than they ever were under the Tories.

Mr. McWalter: Would my hon. Friend like to remark on the idea put forward by the Conservatives that the Labour Government took over a golden inheritance?

Mr. Blizzard: The 30,000-odd people who voted for me in 1997 did not think that it was very golden. They were fed up with 11.5 per cent. unemployment and they threw out the Conservatives, who had held the seat for about 40 years.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) said how bad things are and whinged about competitiveness. As he will be aware, I know his constituency well as I was born there and it is my family town. I know that business is booming there at the moment and that employment is as near to full as it can get in that town, so I do not see the local basis for all his moans and groans.

Having said that, however, we must be careful that rogues cannot take advantage of the greater freedom that the Bill would introduce in the insolvency laws. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between responsible risk takers and culpable bankrupts. I am certainly pleased that the Government intend to extend the penalty for culpable bankrupts—or outright rogues—to a disqualification period of up to 15 years. I hope that it will be possible to distinguish clearly between the two types and to take firm action against those who need such action to be taken against them.

I feel strongly about this matter because of some events in my constituency last autumn. Those events showed the inadequacies of existing insolvency law and how rogues can get away with appalling practices again and again. The people who suffer in such situations are not only those who are owed money; the work force, their families and the wider community suffer, and the taxpayer ends up picking up some of the costs—in particular, redundancy payments.

The company in my constituency was called Zephyr Cams and employed 100 people; we call that a large company in my constituency. It became clear in the autumn that the company was in trouble. The people who worked there knew that, and strange things were happening. The management would not speak to them. There was no communication or meeting and employees were kept in the dark.

Understandably, the workers contacted me. I wanted to speak to the management confidentially to try to be helpful. However, the management would not speak to the elected representative of the people of the area where the factory was based. I have never experienced that before; they did not want to know and did not answer the phone. When we obtained the mobile phone number of the man concerned and rang him, he turned it off to avoid facing up to his responsibilities.

When one experiences such behaviour, one can only suspect the worst and that something improper, suspicious or shady is going on. The staff in the accounts department knew that any income received by the company was immediately being shipped out and transferred elsewhere. However, the company was also having county court orders made against it for not paying its bills.

I then received information from the sheriff's office. By early September, writs against the company from the county court totalled £38,000. The sheriff's office has to recover that money, but its guidance is to try not to destroy companies in doing so. The sheriff reached agreement with the company over an item of machinery worth £9,000, which it wanted to seize as part of the repayment. However, the company said that the machinery was essential for it to struggle on. Agreement was reached that the company would pay the money by the end of September and that the sheriff would not take the machinery. But the company did not honour the agreement with the sheriff.

In October, the sheriff tried to remove some other equipment and received a letter saying that the company did not own the machinery, but that it was owned by a holding company. Therefore, legally, the sheriff could not get his hands on it. Clearly, this was a blocking device that would necessitate the sheriff going back to court.

Staff then had to watch while machinery was removed from the company, but there was still no communication or information from the management. The staff believed, and have evidence, that some machinery and other assets were taken by the management themselves and transferred up the road to another factory in Great Yarmouth, the Breydon Bay company. Certainly the person running Zephyr Cams in Lowestoft, Mr. Paul Harris, is now running the Breydon Bay company. However, he was so unwilling to be held to account that he would not speak to his Member of Parliament.

Once the story became public, I received all sorts of other information, and eventually learned the most worrying thing of all; that the process we had witnessed at Zephyr Cams—of assets being stripped out of a failing company and put into another—had happened four years earlier with the same people. Two companies in Weston-super-Mare—one called QEP Camtec Ltd, and the other called Quality Engineering Parts Ltd—went down owing £2 million, including one individual debt of £100,000. Again, assets and money were taken out of those companies to acquire Zephyr Cams in my constituency.

The man behind it all was an American called Mr. Kenny Joseph, of Wells Industries, New Jersey. He was the ultimate owner; he was the so-called "holding company". He had a record of doing this kind of thing over there as well.

There was misery for the work force, who all lost their jobs, with the taxpayer having to pay redundancy payments. However, Mr. Joseph has got away scot-free. He is not exactly hard up; I understand that he has an apartment in New York valued at about $12 million and a nice little house in the Hamptons, worth about $40 million.

There is something deeply unfair about this. We do not begrudge people earning money legitimately. However, someone who has acquired such a fortune should observe decency and propriety in running a business over here without putting hundreds of people out of work. We have made attempts to get the matter investigated, but there are problems with the current receivership procedures. I am pleased that the Government want to reform them.

Mr. Djanogly: I am not exactly sure what proposal in the Bill the hon. Gentleman is suggesting would solve the problem to which he has referred. The Insolvency Act 1986 provides for preferences for fraudulent trading and wrongful trading, but I am not sure how the example he gives in any way relates to the insolvency provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Blizzard: I understand that the Bill will lead to cases being properly investigated, and the case to which I have referred has not been properly investigated. We have been in contact with the economic crime unit, because we have all sorts of evidence. However, the unit can only investigate a company in administration on matters relating to fraud if the company dealing with the receivership makes a formal request to the DTI, or the creditors make a formal complaint to the economic crime unit. That has not happened in this case. It should not be at the discretion of the receiver as to whether the matter is investigated if there is evidence—I have evidence in my possession regarding this case—that should be investigated. I am asking Ministers to take note of these proceedings to ensure that the Bill's proposals regarding receivership and investigation can deal with such cases.

There are also questions about the treatment of employees. I do not know whether these must be dealt with in other legislation or in the Bill. Some of the workers concerned had worked for the company all their lives, and they deserve better treatment. Sometimes companies fail and one must give bad news to employees. I have described what has happened to the company in my constituency as a smash-and-grab raid, while employees were left in the dark. People should not be allowed to do that.

I hope that the Bill will be tight enough to identify and punish culpable bankrupts. How does the Bill relate to foreign owners, such as the American chap to whom I have referred? Will such people be able to be caught if there is evidence against them? People like that are simply rogues who give business and enterprise a bad name. There are some who think that big business is awful because of these incidents. That is not the case—most people run their businesses properly and well, but some play fast and loose with other people's money and employees' livelihoods.

People have spoken of the different culture in the United States regarding risk and failure. That culture has spawned a successful and dynamic economy. Unfortunately, not all Americans, as we can see from the case to which I have just referred, are the kind of entrepreneurs that we want to encourage here. People such as Mr. Joseph do not deserve another chance—they simply deserve to be dealt with.

Finally, it is the view of some in the economic crime unit that it is still too easy for companies and individuals to take everyone for a ride. I hope that the Bill will address these issues and ensure that people taking a genuine risk and trying their best have other opportunities while rogues, who treat people badly, are well and truly dealt with.

7.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I come to it, I confess, with a strong recollection of the passage of the Competition Act 1998, on whose Standing Committee I served. Starting from that point, I want to explore why some parts of the legislation are being introduced in this form and the Government's justification for introducing the Bill now.

The Secretary of State talked earlier about the damage that cartels can do and the theoretical calculation of the extent to which cartels could increase prices to the detriment of consumers. All that is true. However, four years ago, the Secretary of State's predecessor, now the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett), said on Second Reading of the Competition Bill [*Lords*]:

"The Bill will radically reform and strengthen our laws to deal with cartels and with abuses of a dominant position in the marketplace".—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 23.]

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

In concluding the debate, the then Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry—now the Minister for Pensions, the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney)—said that the Bill would

"give the Director General of Fair Trading the powers that he needs to uncover cartels, abuses and other anti-competitive behaviour. He will have effective powers to stop anti-competitive behaviour quickly and to impose stiff financial penalties that provide an effective deterrent."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 117.]

Just four years ago—two years ago, considering that the legislation came into force in March 2000—the Government believed that they were taking the necessary powers to identify and act against cartels with an effective deterrent. Only two years down the line and the Government have clearly concluded that they did not have effective powers for that purpose and do not have an effective deterrent against hard-core cartels. However, we do not have the evidence.

The simple proposition that I put to the Secretary of State was that she might tell us on how many occasions the Director General of Fair Trading has brought actions for infringement of the chapter 1 prohibition so that we could examine it. The right hon. Lady does not seem to know. She refers to 25 cartel investigations, but an investigation is not an analysis of whether a cartel exists. We heard evidence from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and others that the Director General of Fair Trading, quite rightly in some cases, investigates and acts on complaints, but that is not the same as determining that cartels exist.

The simple question that should start any examination of the legislation is: what is the evidence of the mischief to which the Bill is a necessary remedy? At no point did the Secretary of State justify the Bill or examine where the mischief that has to be remedied in this way lies. That leads me to the same conclusion reached by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley). This is a demonstration of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's macho approach to policy making. The time has come for an Enterprise Bill and he wants to account for not having achieved what he set out to do in terms of relative productivity increases in this country compared with our main competitors. He wants to show that something will be done about it.

I share the view of colleagues who have made it clear that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State have not addressed themselves to the issues that are of most importance to industry in dealing with the relative productivity gap between ourselves and our competitors—skills, capital intensity and the use of capital equipment in manufacturing, the relative impact of regulation and the complexity of the tax system. Such matters are at the heart of our productivity and our relationship with our competitors. It is clear, in both a theoretical and a practical sense, that if the competitive intensity of our industry can be improved, it will improve our economic performance. However, I suspect that it would be hard to demonstrate—it has not been demonstrated in the evidence that I have seen so far—that there is a substantial gap in the competitive intensity of economic activity in the United Kingdom compared with France and Germany, yet there is a substantial productivity gap between ourselves and France and Germany. It has not been narrowed since the Government came to office in 1997 and if one were to look to a time when it was being narrowed, the evidence probably best supports the period in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That was to do with labour market reforms and the ability to employ more effectively in this country than in continental European countries, and that difference is being substantially reversed by the Government.

The Secretary of State talks about narrowing the productivity gap with competitors, but that is not at the heart of the Bill. It is about competition and insolvency, and I want to confine most of my remarks to whether it is a sensible measure in terms of competition. Of course, the Bill should probably have been called the competition and insolvency Bill.

As far as competition is concerned, I confess that I am not wholly opposed to the legislation. It contains some good aspects and some about which I have questions. However, I am surprised by the nature of this approach compared with what the Government were insisting on only four years ago. Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry were then insisting on the necessity of bringing ourselves wholly into line with European Union legislation. It was all about bringing articles 85 and 86 straight into UK domestic legislation so that companies would not have to deal with two different types of competition law.

In relation to the criminalisation of the cartel offence, we are to be presented with something different. The UK approach to the treatment of hard-core cartels will be different from the EU legislation. I admit that some EU countries have criminal sanctions available, but they are rarely enforced. If the Government believed that criminal sanctions were necessary, it strikes me that as a matter of policy it would have been better to bring forward evidence after a longer period of seeking to implement the penalties and sanctions in the 1998 Act. They could also have worked alongside the European Commission to ensure that by 2004, when the EU competition regime is modernised, if criminalisation is seen as a necessary sanction, it can be introduced on an EU basis rather than on a UK basis alone.

The second point relates to structure. The Government consulted on two possible structures for the cartel offence. One related directly to the chapter 1 prohibition and the other to an offence of dishonesty. The Government have chosen the latter structure. That may well be easier to justify and to implement and enforce in the UK courts, and it will narrow and focus the nature of the criminal offence that is to be created, but it moves away from the effects-based regime that was at the heart of the 1998 Act. It looks at intention rather than effects, whereas previous competition legislation looked at effects.

I do not want to go on too long as other hon. Members wish to contribute and probably have more and better things to say than I do. Leaving aside those general points of principle, the question is whether the Bill will in practice promote enterprise. With regard to the Bill's overall structure, the Government must recognise that there is a threat—I hope that they will try to reduce it in Committee—of a chilling effect upon enterprise because of the extent of regulatory intervention that will be undertaken using the powers in the Bill.

The purpose of competition legislation is to remedy market failure, not to have an actor out in markets trying to impose a competitive regime by the determinations of

bureaucrats rather than by the actions of markets themselves. As the hon. Member for Twickenham rightly said, there is a risk that, if there are too many regulatory activities and too many investigations, the regulator will move from being focused on genuine market failure with substantive evidence into becoming—himself or herself, or the board collectively—an actor in those markets so that the markets respond to regulatory signals more than to market signals. Market signals must be at the heart of this.

I shall not dwell on insolvency. Clearly, if the Bill fosters a sense of responsible risk taking, that will be to the good rather than to the ill. In respect of risk, Lord Hanson, who was—and still is—quite a business man, once told me that his approach was to say, "Look at the downside risk on a deal. If you can live with the downside, start to look at the upside." We need to think above that. This legislation is based around the idea of the greater the risk, the better, but the matter is not as simple as that. Business men should look for asymmetric risk where there is a limited downside with which they can cope and a greater upside benefit. Those probabilities have to be worked out. It is not a case of simply saying the more risk, the better. We do not want a risky culture, but an enterprise culture, and that means getting the risks right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) talked about the implementation of the Tebbit doctrine. Further to the points made by my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Twickenham, I have two points to make on mergers and changes in the merger regime. First, we should think not just about the competition test—the Bill is structured in this way—but also, where a substantial lessening of competition occurs, about whether, in the Bill's terminology, a relevant customer benefit can be demonstrated. Transparently, that would mean that the lessening of competition implied by a merger in the context of that particular market makes it justifiable.

The Tebbit doctrine was always based around competition as the primary consideration, but we are not trying to create a perfect market by applying the competition test because the perfect market would mean that the greater the number of actors in the market—the greater the number of enterprises in a given market—the greater the competition. However, we cannot necessarily legislate for that. There will be a degree of concentration in markets and we must be prepared for that, but we should look for the customer benefits to be transparent, and for them to be customer benefits not benefits to the political system, which is essentially what has sometimes intruded in the form of other public interest considerations.

The other point that I am prompted to make by the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham is that if we go down this path—the Government, probably rightly, are choosing to go down the path of independent competition authorities looking at mergers on the basis of the competition effects and the customer benefits—why do the Government not have a parallel consideration in relation to market investigations and anti-competitive actions? Why do the Government create a structure in the legislation that allows not only the Government to make references in relation to market investigations, but to make references even in circumstances where the Office of Fair Trading would have said that it does not see a case for such a reference? There is a strange lack of complementarity between the Government's approach to independence in the merger regime and the direct power, untrammelled as far as I can see, for Ministers to intervene where market investigations are concerned. It will be good for the Government to think hard about that.

If some of those matters are remedied in the legislation, perhaps we can hope for a Bill that is generally supportive of enterprise rather than otherwise. It will be if the effect of things such as super-complaints and the application of the new regime are geared to examining substantial examples of market failure that have significant anti-competitive effects. It will not be if the market investigations are lengthy and costly. Some serious thought must be given to timetabling market investigations so that they do not become politically motivated and are not arbitrary, too lengthy or too costly. We cannot have super-complainants acting on the basis of press and public agitation rather than of evidence. We must look carefully to make sure that the super-complainants and the consumer bodies themselves are not represented directly in the Office of Fair Trading. There must be a separation there if they have the power to make complaints.

With regard to the criminalisation of cartels, I have substantial reservations not just about the principle in relation to EU legislation but about how it will work in practice. The Government consulted about, for example, whether prior EU findings that are based on civil proceedings in the EU would be admissible evidence in criminal prosecutions in Britain. They have concluded on the basis of those consultations that they should not be. That begins to demonstrate precisely the problems to which the Government referred in the consultation—that the OFT will therefore have to secure evidence to a criminal standard before trying to bring a criminal prosecution and will have all the procedural difficulties associated with that as well as possibly trying to pursue a criminal prosecution in the UK at the same time as there may be civil proceedings in the UK or the EEC. Those two matters operating side by side can clearly give rise to difficulties.

If some of those points could be ironed out of the legislation, there is no reason why we should not end up with a Bill which, on balance, is capable of supporting enterprise rather than constraining it. However, whoever is called upon to do that task in Committee will have to do a lot of work in an unreasonably short period. The Competition Bill had 74 clauses and 14 schedules and at the time I did not think that it was examined at any exaggerated length in the course of 17 sittings in Committee. The Enterprise Bill is more than three times that size. It has 11 parts rather than four and 269 clauses rather than 74. Yet, so far as I can see, the Government propose to deal with it in pretty much the same number of sittings—perhaps 18 rather than 17. Therefore, on the basis of my experience, the Government are giving the Committee about a third of the time necessary—perhaps, to be generous, a half—to do the job.

The Competition Bill had first been considered in another place and came here afterwards. The Enterprise Bill has started its passage here and will go elsewhere for revision. The Government should think again about the Bill's timetable and be prepared to be flexible in Committee in response to the arguments that are presented. I hope that the Bill will be amended in Committee so that it can deliver the principle that is intended—to support enterprise.

8.9 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Bill is being introduced against the backdrop of an extremely positive economic environment. Inflation is at its lowest for a considerable period; interest rates are low and the other great measure of the success of UK enterprises—unemployment—is also at a record low. I am sure that the whole House wants to celebrate that strong economic environment.

Given that backdrop, it is tempting to consider whether we really need the Enterprise Bill. In April 2000, *The Economist* intelligence unit reported that, judged against about 70 factors, Britain was the second best place to do business among the world's 60 largest economies. However, we still need the Bill. We cannot be satisfied with second best—although that is a good record.

The situation appeared to have improved even more by February, when Erkki Liikanen, the European Union Commissioner, published a report on the implementation of the small firms charter in each EU state. He confirmed that the UK was leading the way for the representation of small businesses. Nevertheless, we should consider what else we can do to foster the vibrancy of enterprise in the UK.

I was minded, in part, to contribute to the debate when I read the Barclays bank survey of new business starts by region for last year. It revealed that Harrow was one of the top 10 UK regions for business start-ups. When my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary replies to the debate, I hope that, apart from responding to the wider points that have been made, she will take the opportunity to join me in congratulating Harrow in Business, an agency funded in part by the excellent Harrow local authority—well led by the Labour party—and by a series of Government funding streams, and the north-west London chamber of commerce. Between them, they provide a range of support for businesses and would-be entrepreneurs in my constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) and for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner).

We are not only good at entrepreneurship in Harrow: larger businesses have also done well since the sun began to shine, on that wonderful May day in 1997 when Labour finally came to power. Ladbroke, the largest private sector employer in my constituency, has created more than 1,000 additional jobs since 1997.

May I be permitted to give a short advertisement for the enterprising nature of my constituents who work for Ladbroke? They now provide an extremely efficient betting service, of which Members may want to take advantage. Members may want to join sensible football fans and bet—with Ladbroke—on Arsenal winning the double this year. More courageous Members may want to take advantage of that betting service and back Wales to beat England in next year's Six Nations tournament.

Members may want to take a political punt. Having listened to the opening speeches in the debate, Opposition Members will, I am sure, find that the odds have lengthened on the chances of a Conservative victory at the next general election. Small and larger enterprises do well in my constituency.

Despite that generally good picture—in Harrow and nationally—it is right that we introduce further measures to celebrate and cement the effectiveness of the legislative environment for entrepreneurs and larger businesses. The various provisions to promote competition, to take tougher action on individuals who might be tempted to operate cartels and to increase opportunities for redress for genuine victims of anticompetitive behaviour, as well as the additional support and rights for consumers, are entirely justified.

As I suggested in my intervention on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I strongly support the Bill's provisions on insolvency, but I want to comment on one sector of the business world that may not be affected by those provisions but which should come within the ambit of the insolvency reforms: the 9,000 businesses registered as industrial and provident societies under various Acts between 1965 and 1978.

Unlike the traditional company model, with which all Members will be familiar, businesses registered as industrial and provident societies are either bona fide co-operatives or societies operating for the benefit of the community. Their business is regulated by the Financial Services Authority and they often operate in the same marketplace as companies. They run funeral services, travel services and retail businesses, such as supermarkets. Why then should not the same insolvency provisions that apply to traditional companies also apply to industrial and provident societies?

The problem is that the societies are governed by industrial and provident societies legislation and not by the Companies Acts. That is why discrepancies in the application of insolvency law have developed between companies and industrial and provident societies.

As a result of the Cork report, corporate insolvency law was reformed in 1986 and in 2000. It provides a range of procedures for companies that run into financial difficulties. There is the traditional liquidation, or winding-up, route, which, in effect, brings an end to the life of the company.

The administration order process tends to have a wider purpose—to try to rescue a business or to facilitate a more beneficial winding-up. There are company voluntary arrangements. The administrative receivership process has been mentioned several times.

Furthermore, at the time of the 1985-86 reforms, the encouragement of corporate rescue was backed up by a new regime under the process set up by the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986. That disqualified directors when it became clear that through their actions in the insolvency of a company they were no longer fit to hold office.

Sadly, industrial and provident societies are wholly excluded from the administration order and company voluntary arrangement processes; nor are their directors subject to disqualification under the 1986 Act. Why? They do not fall within the definition of "company" under the legislation. Unlike building societies and friendly societies, they have not had those rules applied to them, in whole or in part, in separate legislation. The Bill may provide an opportunity to remedy that deficiency.

If the Bill were to make its way through the House without an opportunity arising to amend insolvency provisions for industrial and provident societies, that legal model, which is important for many businesses and for many communities who run businesses, would fall even further behind the company model. I point out, in a non-partisan way, that not only have this Government

introduced reforms for other business models but previous Governments made sensible reforms of company law. In this Bill, only the abolition of Crown preference benefits industrial and provident societies.

I point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that the insolvency regime for those societies could be amended either by including them in the Bill or, as she knows, by making provision in the private Member's Bill making its way through the House. I seek an assurance from my hon. Friend that she and her officials will continue to have discussions across Government about how we can prevent the legal model of industrial and provident societies—a small but important part of the business world—falling further behind the company model. If we are serious about competition, we should ensure that all legal forms are modern and up to date and have the appropriate structure.

I congratulate my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry on an extremely sensible Bill, and I note the warm welcome that it has received. I hope that we can address the issue that I have raised in Committee or at a later stage.

8.22 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall deal mainly with the part of the Bill that deals with insolvency, but before I do so I want to express my support for the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley). He said that simply badging a Bill with the word "enterprise" does not necessarily produce an entrepreneurial culture. There is merit in many of the contributions that have identified the fact that, since 1997, the UK has dropped in the world competitiveness league, and that the burden of taxation and red tape, particularly on small and medium-sized businesses, has stifled the entrepreneurial culture that we cherish so much and which the Bill seeks to promote.

On insolvency, the second chance philosophy is something to which I can subscribe. Before I came into the House 10 years ago, I ran my own business for 10 years. For some time, I dealt with an American company that was in chapter 11, and although one had to be very careful about making sure that the invoices went out on time and got paid on time, month by month, just as a safeguard, the arrangement seemed to work very well and eventually the company came out the other side. I am signed up to the idea that there are ways of rescuing and maintaining companies to ensure that, ultimately, they survive and do not cause the damage to creditors, customers and consumers that the Bill seeks to avoid. I support that part of the Bill, but I am concerned about insolvency practitioners and liquidators and their activities.

The Minister will be aware—this is touched on in the regulatory impact assessment that accompanies the Bill—that small, medium-sized and, I think, large companies, have for some time been concerned about the way in which assets are disposed of and the lack of accountability of those responsible. They are particularly concerned about those responsible for winding up a company and those who are personally involved in disposing of assets on behalf of an individual or a company.

I notice that the regulatory impact assessment contains a lot of detail about individual voluntary arrangements. There is a breakdown in a detailed table at section 518 which shows the value of receipts, the nominee fee and the supervisor fee. We have heard tonight that many people avail themselves of individual voluntary arrangements because their personal and domestic finances are in trouble, but I am more concerned about the corporate sector, and particularly those small and medium-sized businesses that have assets to dispose of and where there is concern, not only about the proportion of the fee taken by those who wind up the business but about the way in which they go about their business and the lack of accountability. There are many well documented cases in which, despite the substantial sums involved, creditors received only a page of documentation giving them details about how the wind-up of a business was carried out.

Only on Saturday morning, I was visited in my surgery by a lady who had run a small textiles business in my constituency. I suspect that this case is typical of small and large companies throughout the country, because many textiles businesses have folded in recent years, not least because of relocation to other countries where labour costs are much lower. My constituent seemed to me a very good business woman who had tried desperately to maintain jobs for her staff, which was small but very important in a small town, and done her best to get new orders to keep the company going. What she found most distressing about the proceedings was the fact that although she leased her factory, she owned the capital equipment in it, and that was left for a very long time before it was disposed of. It included the sort of equipment that one would expect to find in a textiles factory, such as cutting tables, which are valuable assets, yet it was all disposed of locally for £500.

That is not best practice, and such behaviour is not acceptable. It is not good for the owner of the business; it is not good for the creditors and it is not good for the company's employees. I hesitate to call for more regulation, but I am disappointed that the Minister has not seen fit to include in the insolvency provisions statutory requirements on transparency and simplicity for insolvency practitioners and liquidators. They are key to insolvency practices. How those people go about their work and how long they take to do something is critical, and there is no mention of that in the Bill. They should be called to account because they have a duty of care to all the interested parties.

Even at this stage, when the Bill has been printed, I should like the Minister to consider very carefully improving the part on insolvency. Clearly, if a business had assets that could be disposed of in a timely manner, at a rate that was more advantageous to creditors, that would be to the greater good. I accept that the philosophy is that something is worth only what the market will pay for it at a given time, but some businesses have specialised plant, and it takes somebody with knowledge of the sector to realise the best price for it. It seems to me that my constituent, whose case is not untypical, has not been well served by those who were given the responsibility of winding up her business.

I suspect that the Minister will tell me that my next topic has more to do with the Companies Acts than with the Bill, but I consider it pertinent to the issue of directors. I refer, of course, to companies with limited company status. Concern persists about phoenix companies—companies that disappear and rise again, often with the second company having acquired some of the assets of the original one and with the same people involved.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

I know that the Companies Acts tried to disqualify directors who engage in such practice, but it appears to be continuing.

The matter is not unrelated to the Bill, although it may be other legislation that has to be amended. The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) touched on the subject when he gave a constituency example of the way in which directors can behave, and continue to do so, perhaps by using holding companies to asset strip before moving on. They leave behind a trail of damage and loss to the work force and others. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) was not present to hear his hon. Friend, as I suspect he might have been able to say something useful about running companies in such a fashion. Even if such issues cannot be covered in the Bill, they are pertinent to the general subject with which it deals. I hope that the Minister will take them on board as unfinished business connected with the Companies Acts.

That is all I had to say. I shall now sit down, in case I am put on the Committee.

8.31 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I was unable to be present for the opening speeches. I apologise to the House, to Ministers, and specifically to the shadow Secretary of State, who is in his place. I was unavoidably detained elsewhere.

I support the Bill. I shall concentrate on three aspects of it: the provisions on competition, consumer matters and insolvency. The competition aspects are very much a continuation of the Competition Act 1998, enhancing the provisions of that Act. The background in this country was one of an administrative system to deal with competition problems. Under that system, Governments sometimes actually promoted cartels, and we were not tough about promoting competition, so the 1998 Act represented a step change by, in essence, introducing to UK law articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome.

The Bill will take that step change further. It will enhance the role of the OFT and take politics out of decision making to a large extent, except in certain cases, for example, those involving national security. Unfortunately, in recent decades the public perception has increasingly become that politicians cannot make disinterested decisions. I do not accept that that is true of politicians on either side of the House, but that is the perception, so taking politics out of the matter, as was done in respect of the Bank of England, should boost public confidence in the operation of competition policy.

I can deal briefly with the first specific aspect of the competition provisions, which is the criminalisation of hard cartels. I welcome that provision, which has been in operation in the United States for a century, but I doubt that it will have a great effect in practice. More important will be the second specific aspect—the damages provisions. The damages provisions of the Competition Act, whereby private persons could seek damages for losses they had suffered as a result of anti-competitive behaviour, were not especially clear cut. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) asked for empirical evidence in that respect, so here is some: to my knowledge, there have been no successful private damages claims under the 1998 Act.

The Bill is designed to make it clear that damages can be claimed; that they can be coupled with action by, for example, the OFT; and that they can be brought before the appeals tribunal. That will have an important effect on behaviour in the market. That has certainly been the American experience. The United States has a system of treble damages—we are not adopting that specific approach—and experience there is that the threat of private action by other businesses that have been damaged by anti-competitive behaviour is a stronger incentive for businesses to behave properly than criminal penalties.

I should like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to give further consideration to the possibilities offered by representative actions, as set out in clause 17. I see that provision as an advance, but leopards, especially old ones, cannot change their spots. Although I have argued for many years for such a provision, I have gone further, saying that consumers on behalf of whom the action is to be taken should not have to be identified, Many consumers who are adversely affected by anti-competitive behaviour have no incentive to take action because the losses they suffer are extremely small. So there is an argument for someone, such as the OFT, to act as their surrogate and take action on their behalf.

As drafted, clause 17 requires that such consumers be identified, but in many cases it will not be possible to identify the whole range of consumers who are adversely affected by anti-competitive behaviour. Therefore, I want the Minister to consider the provision. Perhaps in the fulness of time, an amendment can be made to allow for the aggregation of non-identified consumers who have suffered loss as a result of anti-competitive behaviour.

One important consumer provision of the Bill appears in the competition part, in clause 8, which deals with codes of practice. That provision is an enhancement of one that has existed since 1973—in section 124 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, which was introduced by the Conservatives. Under that excellent provision, during the 1970s and early 1980s, many trade associations introduced codes of practice, which enhanced consumer protection.

The example of the Association of British Travel Agents is illustrative of what can be done in this regard. Clause 8 seeks to take the process further because it provides for approval by the OFT of the codes. It provides also for the OFT to promote the codes. Many of the codes that were drafted in the past are now little known about. For example, there are codes that apply to funeral directors and shoes. There is always a debate about self-regulation. In this context, however, when it is backed up by public monitoring by the OFT, it is to be welcomed.

As for stop now orders, the Bill seeks to go beyond the regulations that were introduced on the back of European Community directives. In the brief produced by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, it is suggested that the stop-now provision should be extended to behaviour that is not in breach of the criminal or civil law. I am not sure that the association argued in its briefing that persistent breaches of the codes might not constitute breaches of the criminal or civil law. However, they would be objectionable.

The National Consumer Council, with which I have been associated back to the mid-1970s, is arguing for a duty to trade fairly. Again, I cannot change my spots.

I have been arguing for that duty in writing for many years. Perhaps it is not for the Bill, but it is certainly something to be taken into account. If it is taken forward, it is important that it applies only to anti-consumer behaviour. In other jurisdictions, such as that in Australia, which have a general unconscionability provision, there is a lawyers' charter. That is good for lawyers but not necessarily good for others.

I support the changes in the personal insolvency provisions. It was suggested by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) that these will lead to a rogues charter, with consumers racking up debt and declaring themselves bankrupt. That is not the reality. People do not consciously incur huge amounts of debt that they cannot pay. They know that if they do so they will not get credit in future. They will have a black mark against them and creditors will take that into account and not lend. A stigma attaches to bankruptcy in this country that does not operate elsewhere, and the proposed change is to be welcomed.

With the abolition of Crown preference, we are following other jurisdictions. For example, Germany has abolished it, and it is altruistic of the Government to abolish it. It is often the poor old tax collector who is paid last by a business in trouble. It will pay other traders so that it continues to receive supplies. It might even be able to pay its bank loan so that the overdraft will be continued. However, it will not pay its taxes. The abolition is magnanimous behaviour on the Government's part. As I have said, it follows a trend in other jurisdictions, and I welcome it.

Corporate insolvency is a difficult area. The Insolvency Service produced a good paper in 2000, which considered the empirical evidence. A survey was produced by the London business school. There was wide consultation and it was concluded that there was a problem in some instances of banks pulling the rug too quickly. It was found that there was precipitate action by banks when dealing with companies that could be rescued. On the whole, however, it was felt that that was a problem of the early 1990s.

The Bill tries to address the problem and it will abolish administrative receivership. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds said that there would always be a court procedure, but anyone who reads the Bill will find that that is not the case. It will be possible for banks to appoint administrators out of court. Officials, Ministers and the Bill team have excelled themselves in coming up with a solution to the problem. A certain amount of tweaking still needs to be done, but they have carved out from the abolition of administrative receivership certain capital market transactions and project financings. Furthermore, as I said, there is the possibility of the banks appointing administrators out of court. The rationale is correct: we must promote the rescue culture. That issue was addressed by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), whose point about the behaviour of administrators was right. The Bill introduces an explicit duty for them to act in the interests of creditors, but there may be room for further work in Committee in that regard.

I accept that the promotion of an enterprise culture will not be achieved by the Bill alone, as it requires a range of measures. I agree that, as has been suggested from the Opposition Benches, there is a very good case for tax simplification. Indeed, I have been working with the Institute for Fiscal Studies, as have hon. Members from the two main opposition parties, on how it might be better effected. Support is required for a range of other measures, such as those that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is introducing to try to promote skills in schools and lifelong learning. Measures such as those introduced in recent years by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to promote research and development and science are also required, and we also need to promote a welfare state in which work is the primary avenue for getting people out of poverty. All those things are needed. The law can do only a certain amount, but inasmuch as the Bill makes a contribution, I welcome it.

8.47 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I am particularly grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as when I look around the Chamber at those who are present and have sought to speak, it seems that I will probably be the only Scottish Member to contribute. That is rather surprising; indeed, it is regrettable, given that all bar 13 of the 269 clauses of the Bill—not to mention the schedules—will apply to Scotland and have a profound effect on Scottish business and insolvency law. However, it appears that the only contribution to the debate from 56 Scottish Labour MPs will be the very brief intervention made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable).

I am afraid that I cannot speak with any great enthusiasm for the parliamentary love-in that we have heard hon. Members join today with regard to the merits of competition. I represent a part of the country where people view with some scepticism the notion that competition will be the panacea for all our business and enterprise ills—a point that I want to illustrate with one example. Recently, I met the director general of Oftel, who spoke at great length about the merits of competition with regard to the expansion of broadband access. I asked him what contribution competition would make to the £12 million project to lay a fibre-optic cable from mainland Scotland to Shetland. It is fair to say that the silence was deafening. There are some aspects of our enterprise development, particularly in remote areas, for which competition does not have all the answers. That is certainly true regarding the conduct of the Office of Fair Trading.

My experience of the OFT to date has been one of disappointment, and that view is widely shared in my constituency. It has examined once, if not twice, petrol pricing, a matter which was also raised by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). That is a live issue in my constituency, where we pay at least 15p a litre more for our petrol and diesel than people pay on the mainland. Obviously, a small element of that will be attributable to transportation costs, but I do not believe that that amounts to 15p a litre. The OFT examined the issue, and came to the conclusion that it could see nothing wrong with the way in which the market was operating.

Since I was elected, I have had further experience of the OFT, when Esso decided to withdraw its business cards from businesses operating in my constituency. Under that system businesses were given the opportunity

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

to obtain cards with which to pay for their fuel, enabling them to pay the average United Kingdom cost. That created more of a level playing field and was a valuable asset for a number of businesses in my constituency. I raised the issue of the cards' withdrawal from Orkney and Shetland with representatives of the OFT, but they merely shrugged their shoulders and said that there was nothing they could do. That withdrawal was, by any commonsense definition, an unfair trading practice, and if that is the best that the OFT can do, I am afraid that, viewed from north of the Pentland firth, we see the organisation as worse than useless.

Like other hon. Members, I am happy to give a broad welcome to the Bill in general. I have received briefings in recent days from bodies as diverse as the Law Society of Scotland and the Consumers Association, all of which have been broadly supportive. Any measure that can command support from organisations as diverse as those must have some significant benefit. I would, however, like to draw to hon. Members' attention a number of aspects of the Bill that cause me some concern, and which I hope will be given full consideration in Committee.

The first of those aspects relates to the creation of a cartel offence. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) raised most of the points that I wanted to make on this issue and I do not wish to rehearse them, but I associate myself with the reservations that he expressed. My particular concern on this matter, however, is one that I raised at a number of stages during the course of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, on whose Standing Committee I served recently.

The creation of a cartel offence of this sort, and the way in which it relates to the civil sanctions stemming from the Competition Act 1998, is a further instance of the blurring of the division between civil and criminal proceedings. It would greatly improve this part of the Bill if some guidance were to be given—either through a guidance note or in the Bill itself—on the circumstances in which evidence will be used in criminal proceedings, and those in which it will be used in civil proceedings. That is particularly the case as the OFT is to be the investigating but not the prosecuting authority in such cases.

While I am on the subject of prosecuting authorities, I hope that the Secretary of State's earlier reference to the Serious Fraud Office being the prosecuting authority relates only to England and Wales, and that prosecutions in Scotland will continue to be brought by the procurator fiscal and the Crown Office. I am not too narrow and nationalistic in these matters; I am quite happy to import the best of English criminal procedure into Scotland, but I am afraid it would be stretching that definition to include in it the Serious Fraud Office.

I have some concern about the definition of the offences that require proof of dishonesty. As a former criminal prosecutor and criminal defence solicitor, I can envisage problems stemming from a provision that requires proof of dishonesty beyond reasonable doubt. I understand why politically that may be desirable, but it may make it difficult to obtain successful prosecutions in the criminal courts. I suggest to the Minister that another form of words, such as "knowingly or recklessly" or "with culpable recklessness", would be preferable and would be more in line with procedures for similar offences.

I am also concerned about the powers of investigation that are to be given to the Office of Fair Trading. I flag up a particular concern about clause 184, which provides powers that could be quite intrusive and may not be compatible with the right to privacy under article 8 of the European convention on human rights. It would be sensible to have a procedure similar to what in Scotland we call commission and diligence, whereby application can be made to the court for the release of information by an investigated party before an order goes through that proper protection may be given to the rights of the individual in respect of that procedure.

With regard to the powers of the Office of Fair Trading, will the Minister explain to me why, under clause 185, warrants relating to the criminal investigation are to be obtained only from the High Court of Justiciary? That is bizarre. As far as I am aware, warrants for every other criminal offence in Scots law can be obtained from a sheriff. It is possible to obtain a warrant to investigate the circumstances of a murder from a sheriff, but for some reason a warrant relating to the operation of a cartel must come from the High Court of Justiciary. All other legislation on criminal procedure in recent years has extended the jurisdiction of the sheriff court, and I do not see why this Bill should be any different.

As for the insolvency provisions in part 10, I am not convinced that there is a great deal wrong with receivership as it operates north of the border. I am concerned that the significant differences in the way in which receivership and administration operate have not been reflected in the Bill. I am particularly worried that, unlike in England, administration orders in Scotland are not granted by Scottish courts on first application. The Bill envisages a three-month period for administration, and I suggest to the Minister that that is an unrealistic expectation. If the administration involved the disposal of heritable property, which poses a conveyancing problem of no great complexity, that might eat up the three-month period after the initial application granted by the creditors. It would require the administrator to go back to the court, and if for any reason it was necessary to do that on a number of occasions, it is quite conceivable that the proceeds and assets of the state would be significantly diminished, because of the cost of the lawyers' fees and the court proceedings, without the issue being properly resolved. I suggest that a longer initial period would be useful. The extra expense involved would defeat the Government's aim of streamlining the procedure.

I am happy to give the Bill a warm welcome in respect of several points, particularly the abolition of Crown preference, which has been welcomed by Members on both sides of the House. I hope that that signals a general shift by the Government in relation to Crown preference. With those few caveats, I am happy to support the Bill.

9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I appreciate that others wish to speak, so I shall try to be as brief as possible.

The Bill's enormous scope leads me to support the claims of other Members that the time allocated for its consideration in Committee is simply not adequate. The Government spent two years consulting on it, so why can they afford to allocate only five weeks in Committee? That makes no sense.

The Government clearly regard the Bill as a gateway to improving enterprise culture in this country, rather than as a means to improving insolvency, consumer and competition laws. The Secretary of State has said:

"Our goal is to make the UK the best place in the world to do business. The Enterprise Bill is a major step towards achieving this."

We must therefore consider not simply the legalities in isolation, but whether the Bill will help enterprise. That is a much more complex question, which requires us to view the Bill's likely outcomes in the context of the Government's overall position on enterprise. I believe that the Bill is particularly likely to fail in that regard.

On insolvency provisions relating to individuals, I have serious reservations about the proposal to reduce the period of bankruptcy to a maximum of 12 months. Presumably, some bankrupts, if not most, will be released within the first three to four months of bankruptcy. Not only will unfair discrepancies in release times arise throughout the country, but given that more than half of all current bankruptcies involve consumer credit, rather than business debt, it seems highly unlikely that the provisions will make any difference to improving enterprise. Instead, as other hon. Members have said, they may enhance careless risk-taking and excess credit.

The Government have missed the point. What bankrupts need most is the ability to clear the slate after the set period, and to make a fresh start. Shortening the period of bankruptcy is not the key; what is needed is the ability to declare a bankruptcy spent after a set period. As matters stand, bankrupts will still not get a loan because their record will remain for the rest of their life. It is also worth noting that one of the great successes of the Insolvency Act 1986 was the institution of individual voluntary arrangements. Time and again, IVAs have saved people from bankruptcy and saved creditors from losing their money.

Years of repayment under IVAs will become increasingly unattractive. Instead, why should one not simply go bust for a few months? The maximum 12-month period will apply to those who have failed through no fault of their own. I am still not sure what those provisions—they have been mentioned by other hon. Members—mean. Will the person who makes an illegal but small preference or transaction at an undervalue be at fault, while the sole trader who squanders millions through weak cash controls will not? To my mind, the whole approach reeks of future court cases and human rights claims.

I also have serious concerns about companies. The Government seem to be arguing that the procedure will in some way prove unfair to unsecured creditors, but at the moment there is transparency. A quick search on the Companies House register can reveal whether a floating charge is in place. In terms of the credit that they give and the size of the order, companies need to be careful when entering into contracts with their customers' suppliers. That is simply common sense. For larger loans, deals will be done with the creditor who has a floating charge, in terms of the preference that will be received in the case of insolvency.

The main point relates to the cost of receivership compared with that of administration. Receivership is relatively cheap and quick, but administration is very court intensive, slow and expensive. If any hon. Member does not believe me, I suggest that they ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about that. Most companies that go into administration are eventually wound up, but at vast expense and therefore greater loss to their creditors than if they had gone into receivership. That is why receivership is almost invariably used for smaller companies.

The Bill will involve more administrations, thus more costs and therefore less money will go to creditors. The key to realising value to creditors in the vast majority of insolvencies where creditors' voluntary arrangements are not possible lies directly with the speed at which the company's underlying business can be sold. Every hour of delay will lower the value of the goodwill and therefore the return to creditors.

We currently have a major problem in this country in getting banks to lend to start-ups and smaller companies, and the Bill will make the situation worse. If banks lend to small companies without significant assets cover on which they can take a secured, fixed charge, they will do so at higher interest rates and the use of personal guarantees will certainly increase. I can only speculate on whether that has anything to do with the Government's proposals to reduce bankruptcy periods, but I am sure that those proposals will not help competition, productivity or enterprise; they will act against them.

I turn now to the competition provisions, many of which will improve the current situation, particularly the decisions to take referrals away from the Secretary of State and to create an independent OFT board, which, as other hon. Members have said, will represent a dramatic improvement. Likewise, the scrapping of the public interest test in favour of the substantial lessening of the competition test will be of great benefit, backed up by a fair de minimis set of provisions that keeps small businesses out of the loop altogether. That makes perfectly good sense.

However, problems have been identified for those companies affected, such as uncertainty and the additional costs involved in what the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) recognised would be a more judicial system. Concerns have also been expressed about the new enforcement powers and, more importantly, how they will be used. As the director general of the Confederation of British Industry put it:

"Nobody will benefit from forcing good firms to defend themselves unnecessarily when their European rivals shelter under less rigorous regimes."

Some may suggest that the attitude that companies should be fearful of the DTI, its investigations and heavy-handedness is mere bluff. I wanted to give two examples, but they will take up more time than I wish to use, given that other of my hon. Friends wish to speak. However, that is a real concern for companies, which are often subjected to Kafkaesque inquires by the DTI at great cost to those involved. That is all very well for listed companies with big pockets that can defend themselves, but the vast majority of companies in this country—85 per cent.—are small with fewer than 10 employees, and they simply cannot afford the costs involved in defending themselves. That is why it will be necessary to ensure that we look out for smaller businesses.

All that is part of the existing enterprise culture, so I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I seem to be a little bit cautious, but they should please keep in mind those examples as I consider one or two other provisions.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

First, the super-complaints process will have to be considered very carefully to avoid its becoming a way to initiate witch hunts, as other hon. Members have said. The CBI noted that the 90-day period was too long, but that could miss the real threat: if the DTI requires a full investigation to take place in that period, how long will that full investigation take? That point was made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). Will the Government pay the company's costs if nothing comes of an investigation? What rights will the company have to question the outcome? Will there be provisions to ensure that its reputation is not damaged during the investigation? I can imagine a series of trials by tabloid springing up.

In October 2001, the OFT agreed to a Consumers Association referral involving a super-complaint against the dentistry profession. The outcome was interesting. The OFT said that it would undertake a full investigation, which is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The question is this: should it not be required to complete the investigation after a certain period? Indeed, many questions arise, which I think should be raised in Committee.

That case is particularly interesting in one respect. The Consumers Association noted that one reason for the referral was the existence of

"huge disparities in tariffs between dentists".

That seems strange. While I understand the association's wish to identify high-charging dentists, I had always assumed that price variations were a sign of an open rather than a closed market. I shall not predict the outcome of the OFT investigation—we must see what emerges—but it would be helpful if we knew the results before the Committee stage, in order to analyse the way in which they would be implemented. Unfortunately, that will not be possible.

Similar concerns arise in relation to proposals for actions against individuals. While acknowledging that some other countries provide for criminal liability regarding cartel arrangements, businesses note that it is rarely enforced, and that the more active enforcement in this country will put UK companies at a competitive disadvantage in Europe.

Others have commented, relevantly, that criminalisation should be delayed until we have reviewed the Competition Act 1998. Concern has been expressed about how criminal liability—in terms of culpability—will work. One of my own main concerns is this: it simply cannot be presumed that criminal sanctions are an effective way of remedying the problem when juries in criminal courts may have to decide beyond reasonable doubt on complex questions of civil competition law when considering a cartel offence. Incidentally, the same applies to insider-trading legislation—as can be seen in section 151 of the Companies Act 1989, which the Government now want to get rid of, and in clause 246 of the Bill, which deals with the new civil bankruptcy restrictions orders that will protect the public from dishonest people.

The Government's White Paper states:

"The high evidential requirements of the current criminal sanctions mean that very few bankrupts have action taken against them."

The same point can be made about the disqualification of directors and, indeed, about criminal charges.

Getting the Bill right will involve balancing the interests of consumers and those of businesses, and ensuring that timely, due and fair process is achieved for all concerned. I do not believe that that balance currently exists in the Bill. Over-regulation will cause companies to leave the marketplace, which will mean less choice for consumers and higher prices.

That leads me to the question of whether the Bill will meet the Government's objective of strong competition, productivity and increased enterprise. According to the DTI website, the Bill's aim is, among other things, to make markets

"work better for both businesses and consumers".

That is an interesting phrase. I understand why Governments, particularly this Government, want to regulate markets, but how can they make them work? Will the Prime Minister send a memo to them?

The Government are entirely wrong to believe that they can make markets work, although they can regulate them. The only thing that will make markets work is Governments' staying away from them as much as possible. What makes markets work—what increases productivity, competition and enterprise in small and large businesses—is freeing labour markets, reducing regulation and lowering corporate taxes.

9.14 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): One of the great joys of representing the City of London is the ready availability of a vast array of historic material about that part of our nation. As I recently ploughed my way through David Kynaston's excellent history of the City—I wonder how often any of us have the uninterrupted chance to read a book—I came across a passage that seemed as apposite today as it was when it was written in 1857 by a contemporary commentator on commercial life, who said:

"I gathered from them a strong idea of what commercial failure is, to English merchants—utter ruin, present and prospective, and obliterating all the successful past; how little chance they have of ever getting up again; how they feel they must plod heavily onward under a burden of disgrace—poor men, and hopeless men, and men forever ashamed . . . It is not so in America, nor ought it to be here."

Perhaps things have not changed much in the past century and a half.

I want to say a few words about cartels, then concentrate on insolvency. I realise that I may yet have a chance further to examine the Bill's 269 clauses and 26 schedules if I win the fierce competition to serve on the Standing Committee.

On cartels, the principle of open competition has been supported across the political spectrum—if not by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael)—but in recent years there has been increasingly wide divergence on the means by which that can be achieved. There is also universal acceptance of the commercial need, in certain instances, for regulation. However, all too often the Government have used regulation as a rough and ready tool to promote competition while effectively displacing consumer choice. That has been especially true in the newly privatised industries, where under the pretext of enhancing competition the Government have shifted nominally to allow private utilities the responsibility to ensure that their disadvantaged customers benefit from improved efficiency and greater fairness. Under the

disguise of competition, regulators have been given significant new powers of social engineering and, with that, an added burden on business that should properly be borne by the Government.

The importance of regulation dates back to the United States in the early part of the 20th century, when anti-trust legislation under Theodore Roosevelt clamped down on the protectionist power of big business. The undesirability of monopolistic power was deeply entrenched in the US's corporate psyche, and that played its part in the years ahead.

The domestic system was introduced about two years ago when the Competition Act 1998 came into force. The Bill goes a step further by proposing a maximum custodial sentence of five years for offenders. That creates a problem in relation to the complementary jurisdiction of European Union law. Where a cartel has an inter-state trade aspect, EU law will apply to the exclusion of national legislation. In view of the reluctance of many European countries to extradite their own nationals, it is difficult to see how the proposed new "get tough" cartel rules will work in practice.

On insolvency, I welcome the Government's clear commitment to grasp the nettle after so long. I suspect that many of the concerns pre-date even the comments from 1857 that I quoted. For as long as I can remember there have been plans to relax our insolvency laws. The Bill allows at least for a dispassionate analysis of some of the key issues, although I shall have time to do no more than set out a few ground rules.

During my experience as a junior corporate lawyer in the recession of the early 1990s, when I dealt with restructurings, administrations and liquidations, many UK lawyers cast an envious eye across the Atlantic at what appeared to be the infinitely more flexible regime under chapter 11. US insolvency legislation enables directors to continue in business well beyond the point at which a director in the UK would have incurred some personal liability for trading insolvently. Moreover, the mechanism allowing for the restructuring of older debts operates alongside a welcome breathing space for a company to reorganise without the ever-present prospect of creditors breathing down its neck. I accept the wisdom of trying in this country to emulate America's bankruptcy laws. However, we need to recognise that the stigma of insolvency is probably as strong as ever. It has been argued that, culturally, Britain is not sufficiently attuned to using insolvency to return a restructured company to the hands of its management. As a practical issue, that is as strong as ever. The commercial reality is that, without strong management and a distinct restructuring plan, no amount of tinkering with the insolvency law is likely to make a great difference.

The experience of Railtrack in the past six months seems to be adequate evidence that creditors should do anything that they can to prevent a business going into administration or any form of receivership, since the costs of that process are absolutely prohibitive. Railtrack is by no means an exception in that regard. All too often, the management of such companies is paralysed by having to concentrate on day-to-day rather than strategic concerns. That applies particularly to businesses in the service sector, in which the main assets of companies are often the middle-ranking and junior staff. A protracted cycle of administration is likely, as much as anything, to result in the rapid departure of that key staff asset in such businesses.

Before administrative receivership is consigned to the archives, it is worth pointing out that it is a quick, cheap and often effective mechanism, which allows businesses to be sold without interference from companies or their creditors. The unfettered power of secured creditors to appoint receivers makes them insufficiently accountable to other creditors, but that appointment puts paid to other potential rescue plans. Although the Bill seeks to water down the power of secured creditors to control an insolvency situation, a greater degree of certainty is needed as to its true replacement.

For all the Bill's much-heralded radicalism, these proposals are still founded—as I mentioned in my earlier intervention—on the traditional British insolvency distinction between innocent bankrupts who are victims of economic circumstance and more culpable cases, without recognising that there is often a very grey area in cases of negligence and recklessness. In its own terms, the Bill aims to improve enterprise and enhance responsible risk taking. However, I am concerned about the difficulties in relation to these measures, and I question whether they will make as much practical difference as the Government would have us believe.

9.22 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): As the last Back-Bench speaker in this debate, I feel that, although everything has been said, not everybody has said it.

I want to focus on the competition aspects of the Bill. First, from my experience of talking to businesses in my constituency, and on the basis of more than 100 responses to a business survey in my constituency, the main concern of businesses is not the competitive framework within which they operate, although that is important, but the burden of red tape and taxes that the Government have imposed on them. As colleagues have said, the costs of regulation since May 1997 have been £15 billion. That is the context in which the benefits that will accrue to business as a consequence of the Bill must be set.

As I believe that the Bill is peripheral to most businesses, I welcome much of its content. The removal of decisions on mergers from the Secretary of State to the Competition Commission is fundamentally right. It is a great strength to a country when it is perceived that decisions that affect business are made not on the whim of whoever happens to be in government at the time but on the basis of a clear, legal framework. Although I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who referred to the Tebbit test, were right in extolling its virtues, merger policy should not be dictated by the incumbent Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, especially as there have been four of them since May 1997. Business requires a more stable and consistent framework than such a turnover allows. In that context, it is also right to change the test for whether a merger or takeover should be referred from one of public interest to one of competition. That will enhance the certainty within which major companies can operate when they undertake what I know from experience to be complex, lengthy and expensive transactions.

It is regrettable that although they have taken themselves out of merger and takeover decisions, the Government have retained reserve powers with regard

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

to market investigations. Those powers allow the Government to override decisions made by the Office of Fair Trading, or to force the Competition Commission to investigate potential market abuses when the Government believe that the OFT will not act satisfactorily on evidence presented to it.

It is sad that the Government have not grasped fully the importance of taking competition policy out of Ministers' hands. They should accept that the OFT should not be second-guessed by the Government, and that, if the OFT has completed an investigation into supermarkets, for example, that should be the end of the matter.

It is sad that the Secretary of State has not learned from the experience of her predecessor, the present Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. His dealings with campaigns about "rip-off Britain" proved fruitless in many cases, but imposed high costs on British business. He distracted businesses from achieving their main goals, which are to grow bigger, to recruit more staff and to make profits. Such distractions force an unnecessary cost on business.

A further provision in the Bill will make matters even worse. Consumer organisations will have the potential to make super-complaints. Such organisations have their own priorities, and there is a grave risk that they will use that ability to press political agendas with a small "p". We need to make sure that more organisations can make super-complaints.

Moreover, the Confederation of British Industry has recommended that the powers to launch super-complaints be used sparingly to ensure that they retain credibility. Too many super-complaints launched by consumer groups to raise their profile, justify their existence and demonstrate a macho style of consumer self-interest will throw the system into disrepute and force companies to pick up the costs of defending the complaints. Those costs will eventually be passed on to consumers. It would be ironic if the competition measures in the Bill ended up increasing costs to consumers, rather than reducing them.

We must make sure that there is a prima facie case for each super-complaint made under the Bill, and that each such case passes a reasonableness test. I am sure that that will be discussed in Committee, as we must ensure that only fair burdens are imposed on business, and that businesses and consumers do not have to pick up the costs of fishing expeditions mounted by consumer organisations.

This is an important Bill for business. Many businesses will not benefit from its provisions, and most will not fall under its competition provisions. I hope that any businesses that take advantage of the insolvency changes will be those acting as creditors, rather than those that are insolvent.

I hope that the Government have listened to the comments made in the debate. The Bill is peripheral to most businesses. The Budget is to be announced next week, and the Government should accept that the real way to improve the competitiveness and productivity of business in this country is to lift the burden of regulation and taxes.

9.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): It is fair to say that we have had a wide-ranging debate on this large Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) made clear in his opening speech, the Opposition join with business and consumer organisations in welcoming much in the Bill and I will deal in more detail with the measures that we specifically welcome in a moment.

Many of the provisions are far removed from party politics, but much in the Bill is complex, technical and legal and needs careful and close scrutiny. We are far from convinced that the draftsmen have got it right first time. As has been pointed out more than once, this is precisely the sort of measure that cries out for a draft Bill and proper pre-legislative scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) made that point powerfully. What has happened? The Bill was published on the very day that the House rose for the Easter recess and this Second Reading debate is on the first day back after it.

The Bill contains no fewer than 269 clauses and 26 schedules. Myriad regulations will have to be made under it; I hope that we shall see drafts of at least some of them in Committee. However, we face yet another timetable motion and the Government's absolute insistence that the Bill be out of Committee by the middle of May. So, with the best will in the world, the Bill will not receive the detailed scrutiny that it deserves and that is no one's fault but the Government's.

I think that it was Bismarck who once commented that those who love laws, like those who love sausages, should not see how they are made. That comment is particularly apposite to this long and complex Bill. Of course, it is right that the Fair Trading Act 1973—legislation enacted under a Conservative Government—should be revisited. We support that, as do all the consumer organisations. However, we need to ensure that the functions and powers of the new Office of Fair Trading are properly defined and that it will have the resources to carry out those functions.

How will the so-called super-complaints and stop now orders work in practice? Will they really benefit the consuming public as the Government claim? Why has there been no attempt to reform consumer credit legislation, which also calls out to be revisited at this time?

Ministers should also be aware of the keen disappointment that consumer organisations feel at the failure to introduce a general duty not to trade unfairly as part of the promised replacement for part II of the 1973 Act. Only this morning, I attended the launch of the "Stop Shark Practices" campaign, led by the National Consumer Council with representatives of the Trading Standards Institute, the Federation of Small Businesses, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Consumers Association.

NACAB, for example, has some significant concerns, which it lists in its briefing for this debate: a series of rip-offs that it believes will not come within the scope of the legislation. Examples include pyramid money-gifting schemes, credit repair scams, time shares and holiday clubs, doorstep and distant selling, and pressure sales often to elderly and unwell consumers. It lists the case of a 90-year-old client with Huntington's disease who was sold an adjustable bed. The company would not refund

the £300 deposit and was guilty of all sorts of abuses of normal trading practices. There is also the story of jobbing builders. Is there an hon. Member who has not received correspondence about cowboy builders from some of their constituents? Another such issue is home working. Those are some examples of infringements that NACAB believes will not be affected by the legislation as it stands.

While we are on that subject, in clause 202, where is the list of so-called domestic infringements that are meant to be covered? How on earth are we meant to debate that clause and those powers in Committee if we do not have that list in front of us? Will the Minister assure us that it will be available in plenty of time, before the Committee reaches those deliberations?

Under existing legislation, stop now orders have not been the success some hoped that they might be. They are at present operated with a lack of clarity and predictability, which is worrying for business. The guidance required by the relevant regulations has still not been published. When can we expect to see it? We need to ensure that the new measures do not create unacceptable and costly burdens for business, as well as giving consumers the protection that they need.

Another point made by more than one hon. Member in the debate concerns resources. It is all very well passing all these new regulations and giving new powers, but what if the resources are simply not there for trading standards departments to enforce them? We all know from our own experience that, as it is, trading standards departments are overstretched in many parts of the country. If they are to have all these new powers and duties without a concomitant increase in resources, that is simply unacceptable.

As we have made clear, we welcome the end of ministerial interference in the competition and mergers regime, but that was on the cards anyway and, in recent times, Ministers have only rarely refused to follow the advice of the director general. We have a Conservative Secretary of State to thank for the existing guidelines that decisions on mergers should be based primarily on competition grounds. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) made some good points on this issue, based on his own hands-on experience.

The Opposition think that it is too early to revisit competition—the Competition Act 1998 has only been in force for a couple of years. More time should be allowed for the legislation to settle down in practice. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made that point powerfully in his knowledgeable and telling speech.

We note the concerns of business about criminalising cartels. Of course, no one is in favour of cartels—hardcore or otherwise—but is this the right way forward? The new regime will be out of step with most of the rest of Europe. In practice, it might make little difference and it seems to propose an extreme range of possible punishments for individuals. We also think that the new powers of the OFT to investigate markets could well be a massive extra burden on business. There must be some limit on how those powers are exercised and how the costs are dealt with.

On the Bill's insolvency provisions, we welcome the abolition of Crown preference—who would not? But we wish to ensure that the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise will not find other ways of securing their pound of flesh. In trying to remove the stigma of bankruptcy and making it easier, the Government seem oblivious to the fact that the dramatic rise in consumer debt is the real problem. How in the real world are we to distinguish between culpable and non-culpable bankrupts without making distinctions that are both unfair and arbitrary?

Sadly, there will always be the Maxwells and others who are genuine villains, but what about the pathological optimist who can often leave just as much wreckage in his wake? In short, we must ensure that there is no danger of this becoming a rogues charter.

We have concerns also about the cost of bankruptcy. Some people will still be too poor, literally, to go bankrupt. We have concerns about whether the official receiver will have sufficient resources to operate the new system. The question of resources will run through Committee.

We can all see the wisdom of giving innocent bankrupts a fresh start but, in the real world, credit reference data are kept for anything up to six years after a bankruptcy. That is bound to affect the ability of a discharged bankrupt to take on new obligations. The Government seem to have missed this point altogether, but it was dealt with powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly).

We also share the concerns of a whole range of organisations about the proposals for administration, which we think are unrealistic. They could be costly, bureaucratic and slow; these issues were dealt with by my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field).

Fundamentally, we all know that this is not really a Department of Trade and Industry Bill at all—it has the Chancellor's fingerprints all over it. We are told that he is impressed by the enterprise and productivity of the United States economy, yet he has completely missed the point in ignoring the role of light-touch regulation, low taxes and limited bureaucracy in the USA's success. We agree with the CBI when it says:

"The Bill is something of a misnomer".

It goes on to say:

"The Government is putting far too much weight on competition policy as a tool to boost productivity as opposed to other key policy areas, ie boosting investment, reducing the regulatory burden on business and encouraging greater enterprise and risk-taking."

The CBI also talks about the "chilling effect" on enterprise of the new powers to investigate markets.

The Institute of Directors has this to say about the Bill:

"We do not believe it will make any major differences to the way businesses are run in the UK . . . What is needed for enterprise to flourish is a serious attempt to cut the red tape strangling business."

We have already heard in this debate how the UK continues to lag behind countries such as the United States, Ireland, Australia and Mexico in overall entrepreneurial activity. During their first term, the Government imposed new costs of £15 billion on business. Those points were echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley). No wonder *The Independent* said:

"these are largely candy floss measures which fail to address the main problem facing Britain's enterprise economy—namely the growing burden of regulation, especially as it concerns the labour force . . . the Government's pro-business agenda is at odds with its social objectives, for business will always do best if the Government simply gets out of its way."

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

We agree with that sentiment.

It stretches credulity when the regulatory impact assessment accompanying the Bill claims that no significant costs will be imposed on business as a result of the competition and consumer measures. *[Interruption.]* I welcome back the Secretary of State, fresh from relaunching her website, no doubt.

The real irony of the Bill's timing is that we are debating it against the background of the Government's sharply deteriorating relationship with business and the City. Even after the humiliating U-turn of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions over Railtrack, it still seems likely that the shareholders will sue him and the Government. Even if the Government can raise the funding for their various projects, it is bound to cost the taxpayer more than it would have done. There will now be a premium to be paid for financing Government projects.

Among the large flock of chickens coming home to roost is the disastrous effect on company pension funds of the Chancellor's smash-and-grab raid on pensions. If we add to that the seemingly never-ending string of revelations about the Prime Minister's cronies such as Mr. Mittal and Lord Levy—the list goes on—we see a massive loss of confidence in a Government who, in opposition, went to enormous lengths to woo business.

Finally, is not the truth that the first super-complaint about the Bill should be about its title? It has about as much to do with enterprise as the Government's spinning has to do with the truth. I shall not invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against Second Reading because of the measures that I have indicated that we support and that are supported by business and consumers. However, we shall not let the Government get away with the preposterous notion that the Bill has anything to do with encouraging enterprise.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has set out how the Bill will promote a spirit of enterprise in the UK and, along with other Government policies, help to boost productivity. Without strong competition, business, consumers and the economy get firms that have little incentive to provide better goods and services or to innovate and improve productivity.

In developing our proposals for stronger and more independent authorities we have had the challenge of building in proper accountability, transparency and effective checks and balances. My right hon. Friend detailed how we have met that challenge.

The competition reforms and the consumer protection measures will ensure that markets work better for consumers. The insolvency reforms will help to address the fear of failure that is a significant barrier to enterprise and help to prevent companies in difficulty from going under unnecessarily. Together, the reforms will help to make the UK become a better place to do business and a better place to be a consumer.

Many interesting points have been made in this useful debate. I am pleased with the consensus among hon. Members today on a number of points. We agree on the benefits of strong competition and of taking politics out of competition decisions and the need to support entrepreneurs.

Several Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), argued that the Bill should have been given pre-legislative scrutiny, that it will have too little time in Committee and that it is generally being pushed through.

The Bill has been subjected to extensive consultation. We published White Papers last year and the Government's response to consultation at the turn of the year. As the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) remarked, over the past couple of years we have consulted in one form or another on many of the Bill's measures. We have also had continuing and regular dialogue with interested stakeholders throughout the process. The remarks of the British Bankers Association, quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier, reflect the fact that we have worked closely with a number of groups in building our proposals.

Today's debate has shown that many, if not most, of the Bill's provisions have wide support in the House. We shall work hard in Committee to examine the Bill thoroughly and carefully and I am sure that we will be extremely constructive.

My hon. Friends the Members for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) and for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) referred to stop now orders. There is no easy way of legislating against unfair practices that are currently legal. The Bill is about the better enforcement of existing consumer protection law. It will cover what is currently covered by the stop now orders, including the timeshare issue raised by the hon. Member for Twickenham and mentioned by the hon. Member for Eastbourne. Those will be extended to cover other areas too. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, they will include the breaches of contract for supply of services to consumers, such as those by cowboy builders, rogue planners, car repairers and others. We agree that those are important questions and we shall discuss them in more detail in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble referred to a constituency issue involving the NHBC. The Bill gives the OFT clear powers formally to approve codes and to remove approval from codes that are not working effectively to protect consumers. I shall write further to my hon. Friend in relation to the points that he raised.

Several hon. Members referred to the importance of trading standards, on which we strongly agree. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, there are variations between trading standards throughout the country. There are more than 200 of them covering different population levels and types of community. I recognise that that needs addressing in a way that will produce consistent standards, and we are doing so.

Trading standards are funded from general local authority funds, as hon. Members know, but, as my right hon. Friend said, we have introduced the modernisation fund to support trading standards further. That fund is providing £10 million this year, of which £5 million is devoted to effective enforcement and improving trading standards capabilities, and £2.5 million is specifically devoted to supporting the implementation of the current stop now order regime. That is in addition to the £10 million a year that we currently estimate trading standards departments will need to implement the Bill.

The issue is not just about money, however, as hon. Members know; it is also about planning and performance. We have worked closely with trading standards officers and other stakeholders to develop a national performance framework for trading standards. After a pilot last autumn, I launched the framework in January and it is being introduced by local authorities this month.

I was interested to hear the support for our proposals on competition, and I welcome that. I note that the main concern of Opposition Members seems to be that we should not rest on our laurels after introducing the Competition Act 1998. We are not saying that the prohibitions in that Act are not valuable. It was a major step forward, as the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pointed out, and was much quoted by Opposition Members.

The prohibitions are only against firms. We are building on that. The cartel offence will have a serious deterrent effect and that obviously relates to individuals. Merger and market reforms are sensible and have received widespread support.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) referred to criminal offences and the cartel proposals in relation to Europe. The criminal offence is compatible with the EC regime; it is narrower in scope and targeted at a different legal entity. The UK criminal offence targets dishonest agreement to run cartels by individuals whereas the EU civil regime covers a much broader range of competition breaches committed by undertakings.

The evidence for a criminal prosecution will, of course, have to be collected to criminal standards, following the safeguards in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. The OFT will collect the evidence separately from any civil proceedings. The Serious Fraud Office as prosecutor will take the decision on whether to prosecute in particular cases, in consultation with the OFT. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) about prosecutions in Scotland. Continuing close co-operation between the UK and EU authorities will be the key to avoiding difficulties in practice.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) asked about the organisation of particular markets—I think that they both mentioned the petrol and fuel markets. As they are aware, that matter is for the competition authorities and I cannot discuss particular cases for that reason. However, the Bill builds on the Competition Act, giving our competition authorities effective tools to allow markets to be investigated and to deter anti-competitive cartels.

Ms Walley: Does my hon. Friend agree that legislation is introduced so rarely that we need to find some way to address the genuine concerns that exist? Will she consider that point further in Committee?

Miss Johnson: I shall study the report of our debate and if my hon. Friend would like to write to me on the matter I shall consider it. However, without further consideration, I can give her no assurances as to what action I might take.

The hon. Member for Twickenham anticipated that a far larger number of mergers would be referred to the Competition Commission. I do not share that analysis. I expect that the proportion of mergers to be referred will be broadly the same as at present. In practice, the OFT has already applied a competition test to mergers, but in future the process will be more certain and transparent. That is an advantage of the changes that we have made.

Insolvency was raised by several Members. Our proposals have stimulated a great deal of interest and debate, which is healthy, and I have listened with interest. One point that I must stress before answering individual concerns is that there are two distinct areas of insolvency law, and flowing from that two distinct parts to our insolvency provisions.

The individual insolvency provisions will reduce the stigma of bankruptcy and provide a second chance for those who failed through no fault of their own. The company provisions will ensure that companies do not go to the wall unnecessarily and will ensure a better result for all creditors.

One area where we propose to apply the same provisions to both individual and corporate insolvencies is in the abolition of Crown preference. I am pleased that that provision has been welcomed by so many Members on both sides of the House.

A number of hon. Members suggested that we are looking to copy the US system of personal insolvency and that the problems experienced in America will manifest themselves here. In drawing up the proposals, we have drawn inspiration from the insolvency regimes in a number of countries. I point out that the fundamental principle of our legislation is that those who can pay should pay, and we are not changing that position. The US is in the process of amending its insolvency regime better to reflect that principle, and is moving closer to the system proposed in the Bill.

Our insolvency proposals fall into four broad areas. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford has raised concerns about the work load in the courts. I reassure the House that the intention in company insolvencies is to disengage from active involvement of the courts except in cases where there is dispute or complexity. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) pointed out, in future, both floating charge holders and the company itself will be able to appoint an administrator without a court hearing. The administrator will have extensive powers to deal with cases quickly without reference to the courts.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland alleged that the proposed time scales for the new administration procedure are unrealistic. We have taken soundings from a range of insolvency practitioners, and their feedback indicates that the time scales would be realistic in a significant proportion of cases, although obviously there will be cases in which extensions are needed.

The hon. Gentleman also raised concerns that the company insolvency proposals might affect the cost of lending to business. There is no evidence to support that; it is simply scaremongering. We are not affecting the right

[Miss Johnson]

of lenders to take a floating charge. We are simply providing for them to exercise their rights through collective procedures in which all creditors have a stake. We have liaised closely with all interested parties in developing these proposals, and, as the Secretary of State pointed out, the discussions, as the British Bankers Association acknowledges, were constructive. Secured lenders have nothing to fear from the proposals. I expect that many of those issues will be raised as the Bill progresses through the House.

The hon. Members for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and for Twickenham questioned how the distinction will be drawn between bad-luck bankrupts and those who have behaved dishonestly or recklessly. Obviously, that is a matter for the courts, and the Bill sets out some of the criteria that they may take into account. No matter what hon. Members think, people do find themselves bankrupt through no fault of their own. Those who are in business may fail because of the failure of a major customer, and others may be made redundant. At present the law draws no distinction between those individuals and those who set out to defraud their creditors, and that cannot be right.

The official receiver will take a view based on the facts before him, including those provided by third parties, and on whether it is in the public interest to bring a bankruptcy restrictions order application. The court will decide, according the facts of the case, whether an order should be made. It is likely, as in the case of company director disqualification, that case law will develop over time and judgments will provide guidance as to what constitutes culpability and on the length of the orders. Those are matters to which we will no doubt return in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble raised concerns about the costs of entering into bankruptcy. That point was raised by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Individuals with small debts can and do apply to the county court for administration orders, and a growing number of individuals with debt problems seek advice. Voluntary organisations will administer debt repayment plans on behalf of debtors at no cost to the debtor. I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns, and I will write to him with further details.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) that we will take on board his points about industrial and provident societies as far as possible, although clearly some of these policy areas are a matter for the Treasury.

Finally, I turn to the questions about stop now orders raised by the hon. Member for Eastbourne. I assure him that all the areas that he listed, including timeshare, doorstep selling, distant selling and consumer credit, are covered by regulations on stop now orders, and they will be covered by the Bill. We shall provide a draft list of legislation in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

ENTERPRISE BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Enterprise Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) (1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 14th May 2002.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) (1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in two days.

(2) Proceedings on consideration (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Eight o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Five o'clock on that day.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

Programming Committee

(5) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 185.

Division No. 204] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

nan, Ben *(Wirral S)*
r, David
am, Michael
Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Dr Lynda
dinburgh Pentlands)
Paul *(Gillingham)*
, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
, Tony *(Northampton S)*
nd, David
r, Vernon
, Ms Ann
n, Harry
an, Tony
arty, Michael
, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
on, Jean
ins, Jim
ston, Ross
sby, David
das, Jon
mings, John
ingham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
Copeland)
ingham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
ingham, Tony *(Workington)*
e–Thomas, Mrs Claire
ill, Tam
ng, Rt Hon Alistair
y, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
d, Wayne
dson, Ian
es, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
es, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
n, Mrs Janet
ham, Rt Hon John
nda, Parmjit
bin, Jim
ohoe, Brian H
d, Jim
le, Angela *(Wallasey)*
le, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
vards, Huw
rd, Clive
han, Mrs Louise
is, Jeff
d, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
ner, Mark
t, Caroline
nn, Paul
ett, Barbara
ikes, George
ncis, Dr Hywel
rdiner, Barry
orge, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
rrard, Neil
eson, Dr Ian
oy, Linda
dsiff, Roger
ggins, Paul
ffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
ffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
ogan, John
ll, Patrick *(Bedford)*
milton, David *(Midlothian)*
nson, David
rman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
rris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
ward, Dai
ealey, John
nderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
nderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
ndrick, Mark
epburn, Stephen
eppell, John
ewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malleber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair

Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

ENTERPRISE BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a), (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Enterprise Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Office of Fair Trading, the Secretary of State, any other Minister of the Crown or a Government Department by virtue of the Act;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other Act;

(2) the payment of sums out of the Consolidated Fund into the Insolvency Services Account or the Insolvency Services Investment Account.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

ENTERPRISE BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a), (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Enterprise Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the charging of fees; and

(b) payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Angela Smith.]*

PETITION

Prisoners of War

10.15 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I rise to present the petition of my constituent, Mr. Leslie Allen, the honorary secretary and founder of the National Ex-Prisoner of War Association, and of other ex-prisoners of war who were held in German camps. In the petition, Mr. Allan declares

"that he was taken prisoner and held captive by Nazi Germany between May 1940 and May 1945; that, during that period, he suffered ill-treatment contrary to the Hague Convention on the Laws and Customs of War on Land; that his fellow petitioners suffered similar ill-treatment during their captivity; that a letter to him from the German embassy, dated 23rd January 2002, acknowledges this fact in stating that 'many prisoners of war were not treated by the Nazi regime in accordance with international law, and as a result suffered damage'.

That fact is also acknowledged in a letter to me from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), who says that

"it is accepted that there were cases of deliberate ill-treatment of our servicemen held by the Germans and that during the course of the war, the possibility of subsequent claims against the detaining power was recorded."

My hon. Friend goes on to state that the German Government have set up a new scheme to compensate forced labourers and others from concentration camps, but the laws governing that scheme specifically exclude prisoners of war, and no compensation out of the reparations which the allied powers have received has been paid to ex-prisoners of war who were held in German camps in respect of the ill-treatment that they suffered when held prisoner.

The petitioner therefore requests that

"the House of Commons urge the Government to review its policy on the compensation of ex-prisoners of war ill-treated in German camps, and to accord them equal treatment with ex-prisoners of war held in Japanese camps"

who have now received compensation.

"And the Petitioner remains, etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Racing Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): In recent months, right hon. and hon. Members—along with others in another place—have become aware of disputes and divisions within the racing industry, and subsequently within the sport itself. For those not fortunate enough to be familiar with this very British pastime, there may be the temptation to regard such matters as a little local difficulty, of interest only to wealthy racehorse owners, the tweedy set, rich bookmakers—most of whom are regarded as having short, stubby arms and deep pockets—or, worse still, every mother's nightmare: the compulsive gambler. This debate gives me the opportunity to put the record straight, although not in the case of the bookmakers, of whom that is an apt, commonly used description.

As long as 15 years ago, I was regularly being verbally bludgeoned by hon. Members, many of them Conservatives, about the definition and status of racing. I say to them again, and to others in the racing industry who chose to remain in their comfortable time warp: yes, horse racing is a sport, but it is primarily a gigantic industry in Britain, and one in which the nation and those who work in it can take great pride. It is also of great economic and social importance to the country.

The realities of racing today may surprise many. Indeed, on closer examination, even the racehorse owner often turns out not to be what most people would expect. That is because of the heartening development in recent years of syndication, or should I say partnerships of people in large and small groupings who share maintenance costs and ownership of thoroughbred horses.

That development has enabled enthusiasts from a wide range of socio-economic classes for a comparatively small outlay to share the impecunious pleasure of ownership of a horse whose blood-line may recall classic triumphs. More usually, it enables owners to appreciate the delightful pleasures of countryside retreats such as Ayr, Kelso, Catterick or Lingfield Park, which are all wonderful places.

I am led to believe that some right hon. and hon. Members in this House and in the other place follow such equine dreams—unfortunately I am not one of them, for the moment at least, although I would never rule out the chance of making such a mistake given the right, or the wrong, opportunity.

The importance of the racing industry is clear. Collectively, it is the eleventh largest industry in Britain. Some 60,000 people are employed directly in the racing and horse breeding industries, which is the equivalent of one in eight of all agricultural workers in the United Kingdom. What is more, a further 40,000 are employed in the betting sector, which remains dependent on horse racing for the majority of its revenue. In addition, a host of large and small businesses and individuals depend on racing for much of their income, including the transport companies that move the horses of the 523 registered trainers between the 1,200 fixtures and more than 7,000 races held in the UK's 59 turf tracks and three all-weather tracks spread throughout the length and breadth of the

[Mr. Alan Meale]

country, more of which are in the planning stage. On top of that, more than 5 million people become racegoers every year when they visit a race track meeting.

To imagine the scale of local business dependency connected with horse racing, we should think also of the hotels, restaurants and bed and breakfast establishments that supply the demand for accommodation at race meetings not just at Ascot or Epsom Downs, but at Redcar, Bristol, Yarmouth, Uttoxeter and many more. The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) is present. He is the joint chairman of the all-party group on racing and bloodstock, and I wish him well in his endeavours on this important subject.

The regular audience to such events has witnessed some of the finest feats of horsemanship in the world at the recent national hunt festival in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, at the grand national meeting at Aintree, Liverpool and at the opening race meeting of the flat season, with the Lincoln meeting held at the Minister's local race track at Doncaster. That is estimated to have brought hundreds of thousands of people to those beautiful but usually sleepy communities. I am not attempting to give the Minister, who is a true Yorkshire lad, the impression that Doncaster is a quiet town, especially at the weekend, but I hope that he gets my point.

The impact of racing extends to our greater economy through a huge network of subsidiary businesses that supply services as various and as numerous as feed merchants to farriers, vets and vehicle manufacturers. For the media, racing represents a front-line sport, with cumulative television audiences of more than 400 million, which makes it the second most televised sport on terrestrial television after football. It is even more important for the corporate hospitality industry, the main reason being that, whereas football and rugby take a couple of hours, a day at the races is usually just that, with at least a four or five-hour experience for those attending and considerably longer when travel is taken into account, especially as most race courses are situated in rural settings.

If the racing industry is in a state of war with itself, it is not merely the hobby of a few rich men and women at risk. On the contrary, it is the jobs of tens of thousands of workers in this important industry along with many more who supply it.

Let us consider those in the media, among whom Clare Balding is a good—or perhaps bad—example. She did a great disservice to the sport. She tried to undermine the new Minister for Sport in his first few hours in the job by turning her interview with him—his first as Minister for Sport—into a pub sports quiz. She probably regarded that as a golden opportunity for herself, but in retrospect it was very silly—indeed, stupid—and about as useful to the industry as some of her so-called expert advice and tips, which she regularly gives to television viewers. She and others in the media should get a life and remember the old racing adage: a beaten favourite is never more popular than before it runs, and never less trusted than afterwards. Thankfully, the Minister is the sort of person who does not hold a grudge, and who will not be brow-beaten or hesitant as a result of such behaviour.

Putting that issue aside, something needs to be done quickly, as the war in racing to which I have referred is raging as never before. To some, it might sound strange to hear me say that, as I have a long history of campaigning for a change in racing, and of warring with the likes of the Jockey Club and the bookmaking fraternity in doing so. However, somebody has to attempt to bring order and common sense, before it is too late. It will indeed be too late if no solution is found before 1 May, when betting customers will be robbed of screening races in betting offices. The 47 race courses that control 1,050 of the 1,200 meetings that are screened have decided not to allow those meetings to be shown in betting offices.

Great strides have recently been made in this place to help racing. That is not usual, although there have been some notable exceptions in previous Governments. In June 1993, under the previous Administration, the Jockey Club handed over the operation of British racing to the British Horseracing Board—a development that the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire, who leads for the Opposition on these matters, and I had long campaigned for. Indeed, several of the Members present also engaged in that debate. Although the hand-over was not as comprehensive as I would have liked, it did usher in a change of management and approach that offered a modern dynamism befitting such an important industry.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the then chief steward of the Jockey Club, Lord Hartington—or "Stoker", as I and many others know him—and most of his board, who put their hearts and minds into achieving that important change.

The issue that the Minister will soon have to address is that the hand-over was only half the trick. The Jockey Club continues to own the majority of the UK's prestigious race courses. Those courses run the best races, most of which are televised, and the majority were purchased through public funds. The value of those publicly funded courses is estimated at hundreds of millions of pounds. Like others, I think that they should be transferred to a new racing trust. Those public funds should have been used for the public's benefit, rather than for that of a small, Jockey Club elite.

Members will also be aware that, in recent years, a deduction from bets—a tax, as the punters called it—excluding those made on race courses, has contributed some £500 million per annum to the Treasury, and to the financing of racing through the operation of the Horseracing Levy Board. The deduction was subject to negotiations between the betting industry and other elements of the racing industry, led by the British Horseracing Board. As the Minister is now painfully aware, on those occasions when the parties involved could not reach agreement, responsibility for setting the levy passed to the Government. In reality, that was a get-out clause for the industry, allowing it to delay, or avoid, taking a decision. That stupid scenario led the racing side of the industry to arrive at largely gutless non-agreements, to the delight of bookmakers, whose annual strategy was to deny and delay agreements. As one of them honestly and openly admitted to me, "We enjoy the ritual of annual refusals, but we cannot be seen to be getting too carried away. The trick is the negotiations and, of course, the delay." Consequentially, I can tell the Minister that the concept of an agreement in the racing industry has been, if not extinct, certainly an endangered species for many years.

Those outdated strategies and system epitomise the lunches of industrial brewers in times now long gone, when they annually paid for their lunches with successive Chancellors who then misled them about the beer duty that they set in their Budgets. In simple terms, as I have said, those outdated and useless practices managed to produce only the most expensive lunches in London for brewers and beer drinkers alike.

Of course, as the Minister knows, a different approach is needed. By the end of the 20th century, it was apparent to everyone with even a modicum of brain cells that the levy arrangement was quickly becoming unworkable. The Minister is also aware that the proverbial straw broke the camel's back when offshore bookmakers—many of them well known British bookmakers—established themselves overseas and offered British punters easy access to tax-free betting.

Even more significantly, the internet had arrived and offered a further threat to arrangements and other opportunities to betting customers and bookmakers alike, who saw its potential in the global marketplace. Therefore, with the speed of the available technological development and the imminent arrival of broadband technology, it was a realistic prospect that punters in Malaysia, Moscow or Mansfield would be able to study the form for the 2.30 at Cheltenham, check different bookmakers' prices and current Tote pool odds, place their bets and then watch the race on their laptop computers.

Thus the strong and aggressive new management under the BHB and its chairman, Peter Savill, had to move quickly to counter the threat, vigorously engage with new developments and stake out its demands for a share of the spoils. I readily pay tribute to him for the work that he and his board have so far done in that regard, but now I appeal to him to go the last mile to keep the industry running. I ask him not to risk an ITV Digital scenario for racing, but to find a solution in the coming days.

I pay tribute to the Government, particularly the Chancellor, who acted swiftly to aid the industry in several ways, such as ending betting tax, as well as a number of other important measures, all of which helped the industry to adjust. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who is sitting beside me, for the work that he did as a Home Office Minister. Indeed, I pay tribute to his successor. Perhaps more importantly, the Government also recognised that this large and valuable industry had to change fundamentally if it was to move forward as it should.

I am pleased to say also that the Government were right to say that some of that change had to be addressed not by the Government, but by industry itself. However, at the same time, they also recognised that there are areas of direct Government responsibility that had also to move into the future. I am pleased to admit that, under the guidance of my right hon. Friend the Minister, they are thankfully making progress towards such badly needed change, first, with the Horserace Totalisator Board—the Tote, as it is more generally known—which is the organisation established to provide pool betting at every race course in Britain. It also operates as a commercial bookmaker, with a chain of betting shops, and as active credit business, which is now emerging as a front runner in the international internet betting market.

The Tote is very special to all connected with racing, because it exists to service racing itself. As many hon. Members know, the Tote is currently the largest sponsor of racing and its profits are ploughed back in to the sport. Its facilities are not dictated purely by profit considerations alone. Moreover, its provision of high quality computerised betting facilities and smartly staffed Tote points at every racing meeting throughout the year, regardless of location, weather or size of crowd, are part of the service that it provides the sport and form vital parts of the race-going experience.

In the same way, the Tote's promotion and use of large television screens at race tracks has greatly improved visibility for racegoers and greatly helped to develop the racing experience itself, as well as the use of those facilities in many other sports. Because of that, the Minister and other hon. Members will understand my and many other Members' view that the Tote is, as I have stated, very special and, of course, important to racing. Indeed, I will go much further—it is the mortar that holds together much of the fabric of the sport. It also marks the point at which betting and horse racing are seen most clearly as part of the same industry, rather than as warring interests.

It is vital for any changes to the Tote's position to be made carefully and sensitively. Nevertheless, changes are needed urgently, and should not be unnecessarily delayed. As the Minister knows only too well, the Tote today is a strange hybrid, operating in the commercial market yet under Government control. Along with many other Members, I believe that running a betting shop is not a proper role for Government; nor is the Tote helped by such an awkward relationship. Indeed, never was such a silly relationship exposed at its worst until other bookmakers moved offshore to avoid betting duty. When that happened it was difficult, indeed nigh impossible, for a Government-controlled organisation to do the same. It is a great credit to the Tote chairman Peter Jones and his senior executives that they kept the organisation competitive in such circumstances.

At other times when the Tote has wanted to raise money in the financial markets to invest in its growth, its hybrid status has proved to be a stumbling block. I know, of course, that the Government and indeed the Minister have recognised that change is needed, and that the Government have announced that the Tote will in the near future be privatised by its transfer to an independent trust. I use the word "transfer" rather than the word "sale". I can tell the Minister that the racing world in general has warmly welcomed the decision, but I must also tell him that care is needed in the fulfilment of the task.

It is vital for the Tote to continue to serve and benefit racing. To achieve that, it must be truly independent. It must be out of the Government's clutches, and not controlled by the commercial betting industry or other racing bodies whose views may be either sectional or subject to mood or their interests at any particular time. I believe that the Tote should be a trust, but should not become simply a milch cow of convenience. There should be a close relationship, yes; but it should not be so close that damaging issues or conflicts of interests prevail.

The Tote is, in the main, a bookmaking business. As such it must be allowed to compete with other businesses in the betting sector, with the ultimate aim of continuing to support racing. Bodies such as the British Horseracing Board may take a different view, but herein lies the

[Mr. Alan Meale]

conflict. I hope the Minister recognises that if the BHB controlled the Tote, it would be within its power to benefit from, or to disadvantage, the operations of individual bookmaking businesses.

Although I have never been known to be a friend of this sector of the industry, most people who know me are aware of my belief that choice is of paramount importance to the British betting public. Currently, it is not available to customers in France and elsewhere. In saying that, I question neither the professionalism nor the probity of the BHB and its management. I think it imperative that their administration or regulatory role should never be compromised in any way, even by the suspicion of bias that direct engagement or amalgamation might cause.

Until last year the Tote and the sport of racing in general, like policing and penal policy, were controlled by the Home Office. Thankfully, the Government have recognised that racing is neither a sin nor a crime, and that—along with other sports—it should be subject to the sensible guidance of the Minister. That move has been welcomed by all sections of the industry. I therefore ask the Minister again to continue his efforts to get the industry to manage itself, to protect the Tote's special status in racing, and—last but not least—not to succumb to the threats and innuendos of bookmakers and others who have tried to continue their previously tested practices of kidology, brinkmanship and bullying in order to get their way, most recently with a Labour Government and with the Minister himself.

I congratulate the Minister on the businesslike approach that he has adopted so far. What I hope will come next is action that will help a peace process to deliver the Tote to a racing trust without compromise, and without accusations of favour being levied by one side or the other. I wish the Minister well, and good speed for his efforts.

10.39 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on obtaining the debate. Many hon. Members know that he has long been a friend of the industry and that he takes an interest in the subject. Hon. Members who are present also take an interest in that industry and represent various facets of it.

We are in one of the most crucial periods in the history of horse racing in this country, and my hon. Friend outlined some of the reasons for that. The debate is therefore timely and gives us a chance to recognise the importance of racing to the economy and to consider some of the challenges and opportunities that it faces. The most important is its future funding, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

Perhaps for too long, racing has relied on the statutory levy. I hope that it is well established that the Government believe that such a levy is no longer needed. That rightly places the responsibility for funding squarely on the racing industry and those whose businesses depend on its success. I am therefore heartened that it has become widely accepted in recent months that racing and bookmakers should regard each other as business partners rather than traditional foes. Meaningful discussions are now taking place and I shall be disappointed if they do not reach a successful conclusion in the not-too-distant future.

I believe that there are people of genuine ability on both sides of the negotiations. Despite some of the recent megaphone diplomacy, which has blighted relationships to some extent, there is a recognition that they need each other. Both industries' perception of each other will not change overnight; it will evolve and shared initiatives and partnerships will develop. If the industries work together, they will prosper.

It is encouraging that a deal for the sale of pre-race data is in sight. My hon. Friend referred to that. Doubtless both sides have made concessions, which will be needed throughout the process. I urge everyone to maintain the flexibility that has been required to get the recent negotiations to the current point. I hope that such a flexible approach can be adopted for the last mile. I have always believed that there was a deal to be done and I hope that I am right for the sake of the industry.

I expect the bookmakers to reconsider whether it is in their interests to pursue their outstanding legal action against the Government on state aid. It would be nice to believe that a settlement between racing and betting would be taken into account by other agencies that are currently examining both industries. I believe that such agencies should consider the maturity that has been shown in reaching a deal of the sort that we believe is under discussion for the fundamental change that my hon. Friend outlined.

Of course, the negotiation is properly commercial, and the Government cannot play a direct role in it. However, it would be fair to say that we have played our part in creating the environment in which a deal can be done. Through a changed tax regime, the Government have given the betting industry a boost. That benefit will be shared with the racing industry, as we wanted. We are in the enviable position of having two important industries that should do better financially in future than in the recent past. By any standards, that should count as a success.

For the first time, bookmakers are being asked to pay a commercial price for the racing product. I understand that separate negotiations will take place for the sale of the picture rights. Let us hope that they will be quickly resolved so that racing will continue to be televised throughout Britain's betting offices after 1 May when the current contract expires.

The Tote is another, albeit less significant, source of finance for racing. I should like to restate the Government's position on its future. I take on board what my hon. Friend said earlier, but our preference continues to be that we sell the Tote into a consortium of racing interests. A model of the consortium and of the way in which it would acquire the Tote was put forward jointly by the BHB and the Tote's management. As long as circumstances do not change markedly, there will be no need for us to revisit our planned strategy.

The recent disagreement between the Tote and the BHB about the sale of racing's media rights was unfortunate, and was made all the worse by its public nature. Although this has understandably raised some concerns about future relations between these two bodies, it is important to make it clear that this episode has not caused us to reconsider our plans for the Tote.

I have talked so far about the importance of funding for the racing industry, whether it comes from commercial payments, the levy or the Tote. When we all get caught

up in the machinations surrounding these issues, it is vital that we do not forget why continued funding on such a scale is needed. Again, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he described the industry, and its importance to the many thousands of people who rely on it for their livelihoods.

The sport of racing in this country has a rich history and, I have no doubt, an equally rich future. That future, though, must be built on firm foundations. That means that it must have the funding to attract the best horses and to provide the best facilities at race courses, but also that it must have the money to invest in the grassroots staff upon whom the whole industry depends.

In many rural areas, horse racing is one of the main employers, and we should never forget the role that it plays in local economies and local communities. Largely as a result of changes to the tax regime covering them, bookmakers will be paying more to racing than ever before. There can be no excuse if these additional funds do not also contribute to improved pay and conditions for stable staff.

It is to be hoped that that would be one way of addressing the problem of poor staff retention rates. Another way might be to put more resources into the training of people at all levels in the industry. This is an area in which I have previously expressed an interest, and one that I will continue to keep a close eye on.

The racing industry is now the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I had not long been Minister for Sport when Clare Balding interviewed me, as my hon. Friend noted, and asked whether I knew which horses were running at a meeting. I am running a half marathon in two or three weeks' time, and I invited 70 journalists to join me. They told me how good they were at writing, and I said that they write the write, I talk the talk and we all should run the run. Unfortunately, only seven—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twelve minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 April 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 18 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Railtrack

1. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make a statement on the involvement his Department has had in the proposed structure of the successor company to Railtrack. [44497]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): Treasury Ministers and officials have been involved in regular discussions with colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the subject.

Norman Baker: I am delighted to hear that. Is it a coincidence that on the very day that the Treasury received advice from the Office for National Statistics that the finances of a successor to Railtrack would not be counted as public borrowing, Railtrack was put into administration? Are we running a railway system based on the needs of passengers, or being driven by Enron-like accounting tricks?

Mr. Smith: This Government are determined that the rail system serves the needs of the travelling public as well as meeting the needs of the taxpayer. The future of the company limited by guarantee depends on the Railtrack Group and the administrator, but we believe that it will offer a more efficient service, better aligned to the needs of this country's travelling public, because it will be able to focus on engineering efficiency and excellence in the network service that it delivers.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the evidence given by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the Transport Committee yesterday, when he outlined how savings will be made to meet some of the additional costs of Railtrack receivership? Will he join me in congratulating our right hon. Friend on the work that he has done and the efficiency that he has applied in bringing rail services back to something like normal?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I am very pleased to congratulate my right hon. Friend. I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right that enormous benefits to rail users and savings to the taxpayer are to be gained from an early exit from administration—quicker efficiency savings, reduced performance penalties, faster progress on the 10-year plan projects and earlier introduction of the right incentives for managers to get the network rail system delivering to the travelling public in a way that was not possible under the flawed privatisation for which Conservative Members were responsible.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Before the Government's recent announcement about Network Rail, was the Treasury told by the team preparing the Network Rail bid that without it administration for Railtrack would last until at least the later part of next year?

Mr. Smith: We have the same information as anybody else on the likely length of administration. I am aware of recent speculation that without an early exit as a result of the CLG bid, administration could go into November. There has even been speculation that it could go into next year. Ultimately, of course, that timetable and those matters are for the administrator and not the Government.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): There has been some concern that payments to shareholders might impact on Government spending in other areas. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that there will not be any impact on areas in which we want to invest as a result of payments to shareholders?

Mr. Smith: The £500 million—the £300 million from the Strategic Rail Authority and £200 million from the CLG—is not compensation to shareholders. As I have been explaining, it is an offer that has been made in appreciation of the value to the travelling public and the taxpayer of an early exit from administration. My hon. Friend can be assured that that is not an additional cost to the taxpayer. Indeed, because of the savings, there will be enormous benefits for the taxpayer and the travelling public.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The House will be aware that under the proposals for Network Rail to purchase Railtrack, it will need to borrow £9 billion, mostly to finance Railtrack's debts, of which I believe £4.4 billion constitutes the Treasury-guaranteed loan. In turn, that will have to be guaranteed by the Strategic Rail Authority, which is itself an arm of government. Will the Minister please confirm whether under Eurostat requirements that will be accounted for as a public sector liability? If it will not, will he candidly explain the Enron off-balance-sheet accounting trick for not so doing?

Mr. Smith: The technical position is that the £9 billion is a debt that Network Rail expects that it needs to raise to finance the purchase of the company and to repay the company's finance creditors. It is a contingent liability,

which will be called only in the unlikely event of all alternative means of refinancing the bridge borrowing falling through. The money does not score unless it is called. I have to say that we would not be having to do this if the Conservative party had not privatised Railtrack in such a flawed way, doing such enormous disservice to taxpayers and the travelling public.

Renewable Energy

2. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): What fiscal measures are being considered to assist the renewable energy industry reach the Government's target of 10 per cent. of energy being sourced by renewables by 2010. [44498]

10. **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If he will use the forthcoming Budget to help increase investment in renewable energy. [44508]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Government are already putting in place significant support for renewables, not least through the renewables obligation in England and Wales. Most forms of renewable energy are already eligible for exemption from the climate change levy. Hon. Members will appreciate that, for obvious reasons, this is not the time to speculate about future measures.

Mr. Challen: Is it not evident that the Government have done more in the past five years for the renewable sector than the nuclear neanderthals on the Conservative Benches did in the previous 18 years? Nevertheless, perhaps because of that inheritance, Britain, which has the greatest wind energy resources in Europe, does not have a single wind turbine manufacturer. I urge my right hon. Friend to follow in the footsteps of the parliamentary renewable and sustainable energy group and the Environmental Audit Committee and speak to the German economics ministry and consider the measures that it has taken which, by 2025, should generate a quarter of all German electricity needs from wind.

Mr. Boateng: That was a breath of fresh air on the debate. My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. We are always happy to learn lessons from Germany. It, too, has a lot to learn from us in terms of reducing the burdens of business taxation, not least on its manufacturing sector, and in terms of the rate of growth of the economy. But it is always important to keep such matters in mind and we certainly shall.

Lynne Jones: I am glad that my hon. Friend is happy. I want him to be sunny. By 2005, Japan will have 370,000 solar roofs and Germany 140,000. Under current policies, Britain will manage only 4,000 to 5,000 and we need 15,000 a year to justify manufacturing capability. Will my right hon. Friend consider fiscal and other measures to ensure that building projects automatically consider the incorporation of photovoltaics? Not only will that help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions but it will give a boost to manufacturing investment in innovative technologies.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes an important point that has already formed the subject of a considerable volume of Budget submissions in this area. She will know that we have already put in place a programme of support for measures that increase the use of solar panels, but she makes a powerful case for fiscal measures and no doubt my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will bear that in mind in due course.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Minister will be aware that to obtain the full benefit of wind and wave energy it may well be necessary to extend the national grid, particularly to the north and west of Scotland. Has the Minister given any thought to public investment in so extending the national grid?

Mr. Boateng: I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gives that matter thought from time to time. It is important to recognise the importance of the national grid in that area, and also to recognise, as the performance and innovation unit's report did, the ramifications of the new electricity trading arrangement in terms of renewables. The Government are considering the PIU report and we will make our views known in due course.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Minister explain why he made particular reference to England and Wales in his earlier response although wind and wave energy are also vital within Scotland and Northern Ireland? Is it a question of co-operation? In that context, will the Department be having discussions with local planning authorities, especially in England, which have been hindering the development of such proposals?

Mr. Boateng: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, my noble Friend Lord Falconer has brought forward a raft of proposals in relation to planning and they will undoubtedly have ramifications for renewables, and wind farms in particular. My omission of Northern Ireland was an oversight for which I apologise.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Minister for Industry and Energy is to establish a Government agency in Aberdeen called Renewables UK? This is the first opportunity that I have had in the House to welcome that initiative. It will make a huge difference in helping to steer some of the energy companies—I do not want to call them oil and gas companies—currently operating in Aberdeen and in the North sea towards renewable energy. Obviously, any help that the Treasury can give in next week's Budget in ensuring that the fiscal regime is helpful to those companies to diversify into renewable energy will be helpful.

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that further Budget submission. She will be aware of the not inconsiderable support that we are already giving in terms of renewables, but she makes an important point and no doubt my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will take it into account.

National Health Service

4. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement on the conclusions of the final Wanless report. [44500]

14. **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): When he plans to publish the final report by Mr. Derek Wanless on the future funding of the national health service. [44512]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): On Mr. Wanless's conclusions, his interim report states that there is no evidence that any alternative financing method to that of the UK would deliver a given quality of health care at a lower cost to the economy. Indeed, he says that other systems seem likely to prove more costly. His final report will be submitted to me shortly, and he will also publish a study commissioned by his review on international health care systems, considering health systems in individual countries around the world.

Mr. Swayne: Given that expenditure on the NHS in Scotland has already reached the Prime Minister's target of the EU average without providing noticeably better services than are to be found elsewhere in the United Kingdom, what reforms does the Chancellor think will be necessary to ensure that greater expenditure leads to a better service?

Mr. Brown: Reforms have already been put in place and are being implemented now. Only a few days ago, the primary care trusts were implemented in England, and we have also established the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which deals with standards. There is now greater provision for audit and inspection, and around the country, hospitals have more autonomy. Money was paid directly to health trusts. Those measures are making a difference: waiting lists are down; half a million more operations are being done; and there are 10,000 more nurses in the system and 7,000 more doctors. As a result, for example, in relation to cancer, 10,000 more operations a year are being done, and in accident and emergency, 200,000 more people are being seen.

The question posed by the hon. Gentleman is this: what is the best system for funding health care for the future? I have asked people in the past few months to put their views to us about what they believe would be the best system for the future. The Conservative party has not yet put its views to us in detail. The hon. Gentleman signed a motion in the House some years ago saying that it was time to think the unthinkable and go for private health care insurance systems. We now find this morning that the Conservative party is planning the dismantling of the national health service. It is time that it was honest with the House.

Mr. Laws: In the Chancellor's speech on 20 March, he undertook to use his Budget statement next week to put the national health service on a long-term stable financial footing. In an environment in which Governments come and go, is not the only way of achieving that goal for the long term to introduce either a dedicated health tax or a system of social insurance for the national health service?

Mr. Brown: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's views, but they are clearly not those of his party. They are distinct from those advanced earlier this week by his shadow Chancellor, who urged continued funding of the existing health care system. It is right that we need a long-term system of funding for health care in this country. That is why the Wanless review was asked to deal with a 20-year perspective and is considering technology, demography and rising expectations—issues that, as he will agree, must be looked at so that we can find the basis for a long-term system of funding.

I return to the issue raised by both questions: what is the best system of funding health care for the future? We have looked at private health insurance. In America, it covers some people some of the time, but it certainly does not cover all the people all the time. We have also looked at charging, which is called "self pay" in the document in which we find this morning that the Conservative health spokesman has been involved.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Rubbish!

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should read the transcript of the tape. *[Interruption.]* Indeed he has; and he will agree that when the issue of charging arises, it is called "self pay". It is a new term that the Conservatives have invented, just as they used to call private medicine personal medicine when they were trying to make it a softer version for the public.

I come back to this question: does not a system of charging or self-pay mean that the sick pay for being sick, and that they pay more when they are sick? We have looked at health care systems around the world, and at social—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Beard.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the interim conclusion of the Wanless report—that anything other than general taxation is likely to constitute a more expensive way of providing a given level of health care—should eliminate political controversy from this issue? Does it not illustrate the absurdity of statements such as that of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who said that the national health service is a Stalinist creation, and of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who described the health service thus:

"An unreformed, Stalinist structure now in crisis"?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is not in order. I call Mr. McFall.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I ask the Chancellor to use next week's Budget to invest more money in the national health service, and to convince people that a publicly funded NHS is the only way forward for the well-being of everyone in this country? Does he have some sympathy for the shadow Chancellor, who wants to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product, while the shadow Health Secretary—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not to the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who points out that the decision that must be taken is whether we invest more in health care to get the doctors, the nurses and the improvement in the service, backed up by reforms, or whether we invest less. If we go with the proposals that this Government have put forward, we will

invest more. The prior question that must be addressed by those who want to put forward alternative systems is whether they are more efficient and equitable than the current funding system. On charging, such alternative systems would involve the sick paying for being sick, and in terms of social insurance, employers would pay an average of £60 a week for an employee, as happens in France. Such systems would not provide the full coverage that the health service in this country provides. The issue that the Opposition will have to address at some point is that we want to invest more and they want to invest less.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Before the Chancellor is cut off again, perhaps he could tell the House whether he regrets the fact that it took six years and two general election campaigns before he was prepared to ask an expert to tell him what was staring everybody else in the face: that if the NHS is to be put on a healthy footing, a tax increase is necessary to raise the money for the doctors and nurses who are obviously still missing from the NHS. According to the Wanless report, they are still not being trained to fill the gaps.

Mr. Brown: In 1997, the Liberal party advocated the spending of an extra £500 million a year for the national health service, but we are spending an extra £5,000 million a year. Since 1997, we have taken tough and difficult decisions that the Liberal party never supported. We raised interest rates, cut back on the national debt and initiated a welfare-to-work programme. Those decisions were taken to reduce debt interest payment and unemployment, and they have enabled us to pay more for health care in this country. However, if we want a health care system for the next 20 years that is worthy of our country, we must also take long-term decisions on funding. I hope that, for once, the Liberals will face up to some long-term decisions.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I urge my right hon. Friend to carry on, regardless of those who think the unthinkable or speak the unspeakable, and not to be deterred from accepting the fact that, as we all know, long-term, sustainable investment and good management is the right answer for the health service? At a convenient time, will he find extra resources to establish centres of excellence, which can train managers who care and who are engaged not just in the private sector, but in the public sector?

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. A public sector leadership programme is being run for the health service and, indeed, for education authorities. He is absolutely right that resources need to be matched with proper reform. Many reforms are already in place, some are being introduced this month and many will have to be introduced in future years. Matching money to modernisation is the way forward, but the question that we must resolve is this: what is to be that long-term system of funding for the health care system? It is no good people three, five or 10 years down the line saying that they thought that they might have had a good idea if they have not put it forward. We must resolve those questions over the next few months for the sake of the health service.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The Chancellor's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) was astonishingly complacent. Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that lung cancer survival rates are lower in England than in France and Germany; that 25,000 lives could be saved every year if the United Kingdom were as good at treating cancer as the best in Europe; and that in Germany waiting lists do not exist? Does he still think, as he told the Social Market Foundation last month, that we have no lessons to learn from the way in which health care is provided elsewhere?

Mr. Brown: I did not say that. What I did say was that I reject the social insurance system as proposed for France and Germany, I reject private insurance as in the United States of America and I reject the policy that the Conservative health spokesman is now putting forward—it is called self-pay, which is, effectively, charging for medical services.

If the shadow Chancellor wants to achieve improvements in the health service, he has to support the additional doctors, he has to support the additional nurses and he has to support the investment in new hospitals. He cannot support that if at one and the same time he wants to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of national income—a £50 billion cut in public spending, which the public find unacceptable.

Mr. Howard: The Chancellor continues to misrepresent and distort our position. We have no target along the lines that he falsely suggests, but we do need a proper debate on those issues. It is already clear that we have an open mind on them; he has a closed mind. His idea of the debate is the speech that he makes when he looks at himself in the mirror.

Mr. Brown: First, the shadow Chancellor cannot get off with the fact that in 1997 he said:

"I believe that our aim should now be to reduce the proportion of national output now taken by the state towards 35 per cent.".

That represents a £50 billion cut in public spending. He also cannot get out of the fact that the shadow health spokesman has been quoted this morning as saying that he wants to replace the national health care system by charging and private insurance. As long as the Conservative party supports those privatisation measures, it will have no chance of support from the British public.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

5. **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): What recent action he has taken to assist heavily indebted poor countries. [44501]

13. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): If he will make a statement on the Commonwealth education fund. [44511]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Last month, Sierra Leone reached decision point, qualifying for nearly $1 billion of debt relief from the international community, including the United Kingdom writing off 100 per cent. of all its debt owed. That means that 26 countries—22 from Africa and four from Latin America—will benefit from $62 billion in debt relief, with potentially $100 billion in prospect. Last month, the Monterrey conference moved forward the millennium development goals. Last month, to mark the Queen's golden jubilee, the Government launched the

Commonwealth education fund with a grant of £10 million to promote primary education in Commonwealth developing countries. Further details of the action that the Government are taking on debt relief and primary education are set out in the annual report to Parliament on the UK and the International Monetary Fund, which we are publishing today. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

Phil Sawford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and congratulate him on the work that he has done, but I am sure he agrees that a tremendous amount still needs to be done to alleviate crippling poverty in those countries. Many are experiencing AIDS epidemics and lack education opportunity, proper health care and the basic necessities of life. I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to take a lead on those matters. Will he put as much pressure as possible on the international community to address those very serious issues?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he has done in Kettering to publicise the case for debt relief. Many Members on both sides of the House have done the same in their own constituencies. There are now 26 countries getting debt relief, which means that money is going to health and education. Taking the case of Uganda, it is now possible to say that every child will be in primary education over a period of time as a result of the debt relief provided by the international community. However, we must do more and, as my hon. Friend rightly says, we must now build on what we achieved at Monterrey. Next weekend, I shall go to Washington for IMF and World Bank meetings, where we shall discuss the next stage of moving debt relief forward and meeting the millennium development goals, which include every child receiving primary education.

Mrs. Betty Williams: May I, too, thank the Chancellor for his record and that of the Secretary of State for International Development? We have reason to be proud of what the Government are doing on the international scene.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will match pound for pound money collected by individual organisations such as Comic Relief towards primary education in Commonwealth countries?

Mr. Brown: We shall, indeed. I thank my hon. Friend, too, for the work that she has done in her constituency in Wales to promote those issues. We shall match pound for pound the money raised by Comic Relief's sports day, which will go directly to education projects run by non-governmental organisations, particularly in Commonwealth countries in Africa. Equally, in the Queen's jubilee year we shall match pound for pound money raised by businesses through corporate donations to help promote education in Africa and elsewhere. We shall thus be able to move further and faster towards good economic policy, which is also desirable for social opportunity, so that every child gets the chance of primary education. In the Commonwealth today, 75 million children are not going to school. We owe it to them to move faster to ensure that there is a school for every one of them and that there are teachers who can give them the education that they need.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): The Chancellor deserves considerable praise for the forceful way in which he has championed this issue internationally, building on the excellent foundations that he inherited from the John Major Government in the 1990s.

Has the Chancellor had a chance to look seriously at the proposals for an international bankruptcy procedure that have been put forward by Jubilee Plus and strongly supported by the UN Secretary-General and by the champion of free markets, Professor Jeffrey Sachs? That procedure would bring some order to those issues in the poorest countries of the world, and would enable them to continue trading without serious damage to their social infrastructure.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If this country could achieve all-party consensus on this matter and move as one in the international community to press for more to be done, I would welcome that, and I hope that all hon. Members would support it. I acknowledge the work carried out by the previous Chancellor in terms of the debt relief proposals put forward before 1997.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about an international bankruptcy court, he may know that the International Monetary Fund is looking at those very matters. Such a court would have to be part of a large restructuring of the way in which the IMF and other international organisations deal with the bankruptcy, insolvency and illiquidity of countries faced with those difficulties.

In my view, the procedure is probably more relevant to emerging market economies than to African economies. The best way to help economies that are in debt is, first, to get rid of unpayable debt so that we can build afresh; secondly, to insist on corruption-free policies, allowing stability to be pursued by monetary and fiscal transparency; and, thirdly, to open up investment and trade. That must be backed with the offer to provide substantial additional resources if those steps are taken. That is why I say that it should be the international community's aim to provide $50 billion a year extra in international development aid to back up that new deal for the poorest countries in the world.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): While I acknowledge the Chancellor's considerable efforts in this area, does he agree that there is growing disillusionment among many debtor countries with the extreme rigidities of the present scheme? Does he acknowledge, for example, that there is no low-cost mechanism to help debtor countries cope with new shocks, such as rising oil prices and no specific mechanism for post-conflict countries? Without radical reform, the HIPC scheme is in danger of producing debt reduction that is not sustainable in the long term.

Mr. Brown: It is true that the IMF and other international organisations are looking at how we can deal with shocks to the international system. We said in the last G7 communiqué—indeed, in the IMF communiqué—that there must be greater flexibility in the operation of the HIPC programme.

I paid tribute to the previous Chancellor, but it is true that by 1997 only one country was likely to go through the debt relief process, whereas now there are 26. It surprises many people that we have managed to get so

many countries through in that period, but that is absolutely necessary. I believe that we can achieve $100 billion of debt relief, but we need a far better framework for the longer term.

The problem is not simply one of flexibility to respond to shocks. There must be a new relationship between the richer and the poorer countries, whereby we are prepared to give poor countries additional aid in return for their adopting policies that are in their interests, such as poverty reduction plans on which they consult their communities. Flexibility is one factor, but a far greater change is required. I hope that we can make progress at the April meeting of the IMF.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

6. **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): If he will make a statement on the impact on small and medium-sized enterprises of the recommendations of the Competition Commission. [44502]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): My statement to the House on 14 March made clear the Competition Commission's conclusion that competition in the market for banking services to small and medium-sized enterprises is not working properly. The Competition Commission's recommendations, which the Government have accepted in full, will bring competition into the market for banking services to small businesses.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. When he announced in the House several weeks ago the results of the Competition Commission's inquiry into banking services for SMEs, many hon. Members were delighted to hear that the liberalisation of banks would lead to £500 million being sent back to small and medium-sized enterprises. What further initiatives can those companies expect in the forthcoming Budget to ensure that they reap the rewards of their ventures?

Mr. Brown: It might be more comfortable to announce the Budget in the House when there is a far more friendlier atmosphere than I will perhaps find next week, but I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I hold the Budget announcements for the appropriate time—next Wednesday.

As for banks and small businesses and what more we can do to back them up, competition grounds led me to support the Competition Commission's report on banking for small businesses. We want to see competition in that sector, because for too long there have been only a few big players and the service has undoubtedly not been as good as small businesses want. My hon. Friend will know that we have also announced that we want to do more to simplify VAT and to help small businesses starting up. We also want to help small, high-tech businesses, and I hope that we can build on that over the next few months.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): The Chancellor will recall being advised by Mr. Ed Balls on post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory. We now read that Mr. Balls has a new big idea called progressive universalism. *[Interruption.]* It is jargon. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain how the principles of progressive universalism influence Treasury policy on competition?

Mr. Brown: By helping all banks and those who have suffered most as a result of the operation of a monopoly in the banking market. It is a universal requirement that all banks be given good service, but the small business community, which has suffered most, must have the redress that we have proposed and that the Competition Commission had originally recommended. It would repay the hon. Gentleman to read all Mr. Balls's speeches.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): What direct representations has my right hon. Friend received from small and medium-sized enterprises on the steps that he is taking to increase competitiveness? Many SMEs in my constituency recognise that the Government are on the side of business; that we shall continue to take appropriate measures to increase profitability; and that we want small businesses to succeed. Is it not the case that, as well as providing secure economic stability and promoting enterprise, we consult small businesses almost daily through the Small Business Council? By contrast, the Conservative party never listened to business and was not aware of its needs. The last Conservative Government will probably go down as the Government most inimical to the interests of business in recent years.

Mr. Brown: Most Members have between 3,000 and 5,000 small businesses in our constituencies, so the reaction of small businesses and the importance that we attach to them is vital to us. I was gratified that the Federation of Small Businesses welcomed the decision that was made on the Competition Commission. It said that we had made the "right and proper decision". The British Chambers of Commerce welcomed the help for small businesses that would come from the Competition Commission's recommendations. The Institute of Directors, which is not known for always supporting what the Government do, said:

"Two cheers for Government response to competition banking review."

It is true that circumstances in which long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 40 years and inflation is also low compare dramatically with the state of the economy when the shadow Chancellor was Secretary of State for Employment and interest rates were at 15 per cent.

Taxation

7. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): If he will make a statement on changes in the burden of taxation since 1997. [44503]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The figures for net taxes and social security contributions as a percentage of gross domestic product are set out in table B22 of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Amess: After that hogwash, will the Minister confirm that the amount of tax raised each year is now £100 billion greater than it was when this rotten Government first came to power? Will he explain why the Government have broken their promise not to increase tax without reforming services, particularly the national

health service? Finally, will he now admit the truth—that taxes are going up while, because of Government incompetence, public services are being driven down?

Mr. Smith: It is nice to see the hon. Gentleman approaching the issue with his characteristic objectivity and good humour.

I, of course, stand by the figures in the table to which I referred. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that we made the tough decisions. We sorted out the public finances; we invested more in public services; and we kept every promise that we had made on tax. The hon. Gentleman's party wrecked the public finances, cut public investment and broke all its promises.

Derek Twigg (Halton): The burden of taxation is a key issue. Constituencies such as mine, which is one of the most deprived in the country, want that burden to be shifted from the poorest people. I hope the Minister and the Chancellor will do more next week to ensure that it is. My constituents also want the money raised in tax to be spent specifically on education, health and transport in deprived areas such as mine. I urge the Minister to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible.

Mr. Smith: I share my hon. Friend's concern—indeed, determination—to ensure that while everyone in the country benefits from our policies, those who need help most of all benefit the most. That is what is happening as a consequence of the record investment that we are already making in the NHS, and the increased investment in fighting crime and in transport. As a result of the Government's decisions on personal taxation and benefits, the poorest fifth of the population—the poorest fifth of families with children—are £1,700 a year better off. Of course we hope to build on that in the future.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): One of the most damaging burdens of taxation that the Government have introduced applies to pension funds. That, compounded by the problems of the market and of annuity rates in particular, means that many people approaching retirement face it with grave misgivings.

Tomorrow the Government will have an opportunity to put matters right, when the Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill is before us. Will the Minister guarantee that neither his Front Benchers nor his Back Benchers will talk the Bill out, or dissemble in any way? That would deprive people who are very concerned about their income in retirement, for which they have saved. Will the Minister ensure that Labour Members support a Bill that is backed by the Opposition and by other Members on both sides of the House, so that pensioners can heave a sigh of relief in the knowledge that the Government will not penalise them any further?

Mr. Smith: Of course we are all concerned about the future of pensioner incomes, and it would be good if there could be a cross-party consensus. I look forward to hearing the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends support the Government's proposals for the pension credit, which will do an enormous amount to reward those with savings who were penalised under the Conservative party.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has published a full consultation document on annuities. I shall read with interest what the hon. Lady says on the subject.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend will have read in this morning's newspapers that a multi-billionaire receives more from the Treasury than ever he pays. Will he ensure that after the Budget such people pay the appropriate amount of tax?

Mr. Smith: As a matter of long-established practice, we do not comment on the individual circumstances of taxpayers. I shall take the general thrust of my hon. Friend's question as a Budget representation and refer it to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Has the Chief Secretary also seen the figures reported today, calculated by the United Kingdom's largest financial adviser, which show that British families now face a higher tax bill than those in France, Italy or Spain? Is the Chief Secretary proud of that?

Mr. Smith: The overall tax burden, which is what the question was about, is lower in this country than in France and Germany. Moreover, as a consequence of all the changes made by the Government, a typical family with children is £1,000 a year better off. Furthermore, the tax burden, which fell last year, is falling this year as well.

Climate Change Levy

8. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If he will make a statement on the operation of the climate change levy. [44505]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The climate change levy is designed to promote greater energy efficiency, and to be revenue neutral. Part of the levy revenue is being recycled to provide enhanced energy efficiency advice to business and to provide support for energy efficiency investments. We are on target to meet our Kyoto obligations to reduce carbon emissions.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's response, but will he look again at those companies that do not qualify for integrated pollution prevention and control status and thus cannot take advantage of the rebates introduced by the Government? I refer particularly to a company about which my right hon. Friend may have heard during his recent visit to Barnsley—Potters Ballotini—which uses 100 per cent. recycled materials. It seems anomalous that a company using recycled materials should suffer from having to pay the full climate change levy. Will he look again at the operation of the system?

Mr. Boateng: I learned very intimately from meeting business people in Barnsley of the interest and concern that my hon. Friend takes in these matters. Such a company would be well placed to benefit from the considerable advice and financial support that the Government are making available to those who want to make energy efficiency savings. However, my hon. Friend will appreciate that the tax is on energy; it was designed by Lord Marshall to help us to meet our Kyoto

obligations, and it is doing that. It is benefiting businesses through the reduction in national insurance contributions and through the advice and assistance of the Carbon Trust. I hope that the company to which my hon. Friend referred will feel able to approach the trust and ourselves for any advice that it might require.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I should have more respect for the Financial Secretary if he were prepared to take responsibility for the Government's decisions rather than to hive it off to Lord Marshall or anybody else they have hired to give advice. Surely his hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) made an extremely important point, which is relevant to the interests of a large number of manufacturing businesses throughout the country that do not qualify, under IPPC regulations, for taking part in a climate change agreement. What answer does the Financial Secretary have for a company such as Plastic Technologies of Smethwick? It tells me that it faces an annual climate change levy bill of about £61,000 but that it will receive national insurance rebates of just over £4,000. Is not the truth that the Government have picked a complex and bureaucratic method of taxing companies which will deliver small environmental benefits but which has already distorted markets and is placing burdens on British manufacturing companies that their foreign competitors do not have to bear?

Mr. Boateng: The benefits are real and tangible. They are appreciated by a range of companies and, indeed, the citizens of this country because they are designed to enable us to respond to climate change—to enable us effectively to deliver a response that cuts carbon emissions. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to sneer at the care and detailed attention that was paid to consulting industry. Lord Marshall, a distinguished leader in industry, was extremely helpful in enabling us to get the right solution to a very real problem.

It ill behoves Opposition Members to make wild promises in their election manifesto to abolish that tax without making even one minute suggestion—one iota—on how emissions might otherwise be reduced. They wish the ends but are completely bereft when it comes to the means.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that every energy user, such as the glass and paper industries, still feels disadvantaged, despite Government moves to meet their requirements on the climate change levy? They feel that they are at a disadvantage with their competitors. Does he also recognise that they feel more concern about the massive increase in gas charges, which mean that they are paying far more than those on the continent?

Mr. Boateng: We do indeed recognise that, and the Government will respond in due course to the performance and innovation unit report on the issue. It is important that we continue our dialogue with industry. We have met the CBI and continue to work with its officials on the IPPC definition, about which we have heard. We have a tax that is sound in its essentials and is delivering the objectives that the whole House surely seeks.

Manufacturing (North-West)

11. **Dr. John Pugh** (Southport): What assessment he has made of trends in manufacturing output in the north-west since January 2001. [44509]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Government's latest assessment of developments in the manufacturing sector, based on all relevant factors, was published in November's pre-Budget report. An updated assessment will be published in the forthcoming Budget on 17 April.

Manufacturing in the north-west, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, cannot have expected to remain immune from the sharp slowdown in the world economy last year. However, the leading indicators from business surveys suggest that a recovery in manufacturing is under way.

Dr. Pugh: With regard to the application of state aid rules to manufacturing in the north-west specifically, is the Treasury, in its monitoring role, satisfied that European rules are being applied in the same way throughout Europe? Will Ministers investigate any allegations from north-west manufacturers that they are not? Will they seek in the Budget to give the same support as their French and German counterparts give their regions?

Ruth Kelly: What we need is not more state aid, but state aid that is well directed and focused on helping manufacturing across the United Kingdom. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been arguing so strongly in Brussels that we should have a system that tackles market failures and puts in place, for example, regional venture capital funds across the country that can support growing and thriving manufacturing businesses. That is the way forward, and we will continue to argue our case in Brussels. I am confident that we are making progress in this area.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What discussions are taking place between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry about the future of Marconi, with particular reference to Liverpool? Does my hon. Friend realise that employment at Marconi in Liverpool has halved over the past year? Does she accept that were that plant to reduce further, it would be a blow not only to manufacturing but to the skills base in Liverpool and the north-west?

Ruth Kelly: As my hon. Friend knows, it is difficult for me to comment on the specific case, but the regional development agency is working with my hon. Friend and others with an interest in the problem. Manufacturing across the north-west and throughout the rest of the UK will have benefited significantly from the Government's tax cuts in the corporate sector. Corporate rates have been cut by 3 per cent; they are the lowest in the history of the United Kingdom and lower than those of any other industrialised country. We are also giving significant support to boost the manufacturing sector and I am confident that we will begin to see the fruits of a recovery in the manufacturing sector later this year.

National Health Service

12. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of extra tax revenues being spent in the NHS. [44510]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): These are matters for consideration by the Chancellor prior to the Budget and the spending review. The outcome of the Budget and spending review will be announced in due course.

Tim Loughton: That was a disappointing answer, but perhaps the Paymaster General can give me a fuller answer without reference to some of the desperate fantasy stories that her spin doctors have placed in *The Mirror*. Does she recall her Government's official answer that, in 1997, there were 196,700 managers in the NHS and 210,520 beds? Now, there are 224,030 managers and the number of beds has fallen below 200,000 for the first time—a ratio of 1.15 managers to beds, and a ratio that has widened most in the last year. Does she think that that is a cost-effective use of tax revenue in the NHS, and are we to be subjected to yet more of the same after next week's Budget

Dawn Primarolo: I recall from the reports that we have 28 more hospitals, more beds and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has demonstrated, there have been improvements in the number of patients being treated and the time in which they are being treated. I recall that the hon. Gentleman is on record as supporting the use of charging and privatisation in the health service. I also recall that the Conservative party is determined first to undermine the health service and then to challenge it and introduce privatisation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is out of order.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Has the Paymaster General seen the report on the front page of today's *Financial Times* that the Serious Fraud Office is investigating six pharmaceutical companies that might have defrauded the national health service of £400 million? Does she agree that this shows that there is great need for the NHS to improve the way in which drugs are procured and that there is great scope for savings to be made in the NHS drugs budget?

Dawn Primarolo: I have not seen the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but all abuse should be rooted out. If anything is going wrong, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has shown that we will address it.

Stamp Duty

16. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What assessment he has made of the impact of stamp duty on labour mobility. [44514]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): We keep all taxes under review, including stamp duty on property. The number of property transactions in 2001 was the second highest since 1989.

Mr. Kidney: The pace of house price inflation is so great that in some parts of the country jobs cannot be filled because people cannot afford to live in those areas. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that difficulty, and has any modelling work on stamp duty been done to see whether a different application of stamp duty would alleviate the problem?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, which no doubt my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will hear as a Budget representation. We have sought to focus the cuts in stamp duty on areas in most need. We have exempted all transactions below £150,000 in 2,000 disadvantaged areas. That undoubtedly will encourage investment and help the very people about whom my hon. Friend rightly expresses concern.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): In relation to stamp duty in central London and the very high cost of property, what are the Minister's thoughts on how labour mobility, especially in public services, will be enhanced by the high level of stamp duty? The fact that it is introduced at particular thresholds means that it applies to a different level of housing tenure in London and the south-east than it does in other parts of the country.

Mr. Boateng: We took those issues into account when we set the levels. Some areas in London will undoubtedly benefit from the measures that we are taking in relation to stamp duty in disadvantaged areas. We have also taken an initiative on starter homes, and above all house purchasers have benefited from the fact that as a result of the policies adopted by this Government and the economic stability that is delivering more success, mortgage payments are at their lowest for many years. They are now running at £150 a month less than they were at their highest. That is a real achievement, which is down to the sound policies adopted by this Government, in stark contrast to the ones supported by the Conservatives.

Manufacturing (West Midlands)

17. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): If he will make a statement on support the Government are giving manufacturing companies in the west midlands. [44515]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This Government are committed to the success of manufacturers in every region of the UK. The best support that Government can give is a stable macro-economic framework, giving firms the confidence to invest for the future. We have delivered low interest rates and low and stable inflation. We are better placed to deal with the downturn than any other economy in the developed world, and we are doing so.

Mr. Plaskitt: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Many manufacturing companies in my constituency report improving trading conditions and order books filling up, but they also report difficulty in recruiting skilled people. What further measures can the

Government take to help manufacturing address the skills shortage? That will be particularly important as general conditions for the industry improve.

Mr. Boateng: The issue is being dealt with by the proposals that we have announced in relation to skills, science and technology. It is also being dealt with as a result of the enhanced assistance now available for the regional development agencies. The position is looking good and firms will be able to benefit from the expected upturn as a result of the sound macro- and micro-economic policies on which the Government have embarked.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader for the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I would be delighted to answer the right hon. Gentleman's question. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 APRIL—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

TUESDAY 16 APRIL—There will be a debate on the middle east on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 18 APRIL—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 19 APRIL—Private Members' Bills. The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 22 APRIL—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 23 APRIL—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL—My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will propose an Humble Address to celebrate the golden jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen, followed by Second Reading of a Bill, the nature of which I will confirm next week.

THURSDAY 25 APRIL—There will be a debate on international development on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 26 APRIL—There will be a debate on the quality of life in local communities on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I am aware that many hon. Members are interested in the future of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, which had to be dropped earlier this week. I assure the House that we shall bring that Bill back at an early opportunity, and we are confident that we can take it through in this Session.

Mr. Forth: Are you?

Mr. Cook: I note the right hon. Gentleman's observation.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 23 April 2002, there will be a debate relating to total allowable catches and quotas 2002 in European Standing Committee A.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 24 April 2002, there will be a debate relating to food hygiene in European Standing Committee C.

[Tuesday 23 April 2002:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union documents: 14130/01, draft Council regulation fixing for 2002 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and for Community vessels in waters where limitations in catch are required; 15238/01, draft Council regulation fixing for 2002 the fishing opportunities for deep-sea stocks; 6918/02, draft Council regulation establishing specific access requirements and associated conditions applicable to fishing for deep-sea stocks; relevant European Scrutiny Committee reports: HC 152-x, HC-152-xviii, HC 152-xxii, HC 152-xxiii (2001-02).

Wednesday 24 April:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union documents: 10427/00, draft Council regulation on the hygiene of foodstuffs; draft Council regulation laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin; draft Council regulation laying down detailed rules for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption; draft Council regulation laying down the animal health rules governing the production, placing on the market and importation of products of animal origin intended for human consumption; draft Council directive repealing certain directives on the hygiene of foodstuffs and the health conditions for the production and placing on the market of certain products of animal origin intended for human consumption and amending directives 89/662/EEC and 91/67/EEC; 15475/01, Commission communication on the withdrawal of the proposal for a regulation laying down detailed rules for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption; relevant European Scrutiny Committee reports: HC 28-iii (2000-01), and HC 152-xxxx (2001-02).]

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader for giving us the business for next week and a hint of what lies beyond.

Yesterday, at column 42 of *Hansard*, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) raised the issue of the traffic chaos surrounding the Palace of Westminster. Indeed, I believe that, as a result of that chaos, the Leader of the House was delayed in getting to the House yesterday to chair a Committee. We have chaos on the roads and chaotic railways, and, just recently, we had completely chaotic airlines. Who is the guilty man behind all of this? Can the House guess what is the common thread between chaotic roads, chaotic railways and chaotic airlines? I suggest to the Leader of the House that he try to identify that guilty man, bring him to the House and have him answer all these questions.

Talking of airlines and airways, did not we all tell the Government that what they were doing to air traffic control would be a disaster? Even many Labour Members said that it would be a disaster. The fact is that air traffic control has run out of money. Apparently, it is running out of runways and, now, it is running out of aeroplanes as well. We were told before 1997 that the air was not for sale. It now appears that the air is not for flying either.

I was talking of guilty men. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions appears to have sneaked out yet another announcement, this time—disgracefully—under cover of the funeral of Her Majesty the Queen Mother. The odd thing about this one is that it appeared on something called a website but apparently without an accompanying press release. Uniquely, we seem now to have the Jo Moore memorial non-press release. However, we no longer have Jo Moore or that nice Mr. Sixsmith to blame, so who does the Leader of the House imagine is to blame for all this

Is it not clear that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions must step forward and take responsibility for this recidivism, as he seems unable

[Mr. Forth]

to give up committing this offence repeatedly? We ought to get to the bottom of the matter and understand the right hon. Gentleman's psychology, since he needs help.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister was asked about post office closures. Memorably, he answered:

"No, it is not correct that 3,000 offices are scheduled to close. What is correct, however, is that there needs to be a major programme of change within the Post Office."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 125.]

We need a debate on this matter to flush out the truth. Are there to be 5,000 closures, or nearly 3,000, or will the number be completely different? Does the Prime Minister have a clue about how many offices will close, and does he care? When asked a specific question about a matter of great importance to people in both town and countryside, the Prime Minister was, as usual, quite unprepared to give any sort of answer. Can we therefore please have an urgent debate on what is going to happen to our post office network? If the Prime Minister is not prepared to answer that question, perhaps another Minister will come forward and do so.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his helpful questions. If I were to attempt to parade before the House the guilty people responsible for the difficulty of air traffic chaos, I should have to produce many members of the previous Administration. I do not know which planet the right hon. Gentleman inhabits when he is not here in the Chamber, but I routinely and regularly fly between Edinburgh and Heathrow and I can tell him that difficulties with air traffic control computers did not begin in June 1997.

As for the eccentric idea that this Government should have adopted the Conservative Government's plans for involving the private sector in air traffic control, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that those plans amounted to complete privatisation, in which all responsibility would have been handed over to the private sector. That would have left us in a worse position than at present. We are involved in seeking a way forward so that we can find a solution.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): A final solution?

Mr. Cook: The phrase that I used was "find a solution", and I hope that the record is correct on that point.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst accused the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of having sneaked out a report on its website yesterday. That report was a private paper from private sector consultants to an official seminar at which there was no ministerial attendance. The Department was under no obligation whatsoever to publish the report at all. Indeed, if the Department had wanted to suppress the report, it would have been simplest not to publish it, as there is no requirement to do so. It is to the Department's credit that it pursues a policy of transparency. Every month, 200 documents are placed on its website—many more than was the case under the previous Administration.

If the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst really wishes to raise questions about people who have sought to conceal from the public what they wish to say—

Mr. Forth: I can see what is coming.

Mr. Cook: I am glad, but the right hon. Gentleman should have seen this coming before he raised the question. He may wish to have a word with his party's health spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). He told a private meeting of Conservative doctors that the advantage of speaking to them was that he would not read about it afterwards in *The Mirror*. I am delighted to say that we can find a full account of the meeting in *The Mirror*. It fully displays the intentions of Conservative Members to dismantle the NHS, if they ever get their hands on it. In the very week when we have shown dramatic reductions in out-patient and in-patient waiting lists, the Conservatives' health spokesman has told the nation that the national health service cannot work and will not work, and that they intend to dismantle it and replace it with private health care.

On the Post Office or Consignia—whichever term the House wishes to use—

Mr. Forth: Post Office.

Mr. Cook: I am happy for the right hon. Gentleman to live in the past, and we shall accept his terminology when it comes to Consignia.

The Prime Minister is right that there has to be substantial change within Consignia or the Post Office. The Post Office is losing millions of pounds, which amounts to a heavy annual debt. I have a simple question for the Conservatives, which I note the right hon. Gentleman did not attempt to answer: how do they propose to pursue their policy of cutting taxation and public spending if they are not prepared to embrace the case for change in the Post Office?

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): May I encourage my right hon. Friend to ignore the sedentary comment by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to the effect that there is no hurry to reintroduce the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill? There is an urgent need to ensure that advertising of tobacco products is outlawed for the thousands of people whose lives can be saved by not being encouraged to take up that appalling habit.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I assure the House that it is the Government's intention to reintroduce the Bill. We adopted it when it came from the House of Lords precisely because we are fully committed to it. Indeed, it reflects the text of the Bill that we introduced in the previous Session. I assure hon. Members that it will be timetabled in a way that enables it to be passed this Session.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I warmly welcome the statement by the Leader of the House on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, introduced in the other place by my colleague Lord Clement-Jones?

I was also delighted to hear the robust exchange on the Post Office and the reference to the question put to the Prime Minister yesterday by my right hon. Friend the

Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy). May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to some of the serious problems in the Post Office? Our office received a letter today—I cannot read the exact date on the envelope because it is smudged—addressed to David Lloyd George, which suggests that there are delays in the postal service that need to be urgently addressed.

On a more serious matter, I notice that yesterday the Lord Chancellor said in the other place that he hoped to publish the responses to the White Paper on Lords reform shortly. How shortly is shortly? In addition, may we have a general discussion soon, although obviously not within the next two weeks, on a review of the constitution? I am sure the Leader of the House is well aware of the great public and media interest, especially over the past few days, in the role of the monarchy in the 21st century. That is part of the tripartite nature of the British constitution—the two Houses of Parliament and the sovereign.

Given the conventions on discussing the monarchy in this place and our responsibility for monitoring some of the statutes that affect the monarchy—notably, the Act of Settlement of 1701—surely it is time to review the unequal rights of women and the ban on Roman Catholics in the succession, and to reconsider the transparency of the allocation of the civil list, for which the House is responsible. There is talk in the media about the publication of an annual report. Do the Government have a view on that?

Will the Leader of the House address that issue seriously and urgently? I hope he agrees that it is ridiculous that the pubs, clubs and media of this country can discuss the important topic of the future of the monarchy, yet here in the House of Commons we are prevented from doing just that.

Mr. Cook: I fully apologise to the Liberal Democrats if they have only just received a letter to David Lloyd George. All three major parties represented in the House must share the blame for that, since it plainly transcends Governments led by them all.

I acknowledge the work carried out by Lord Clement-Jones on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we intend to complete that work within this Chamber.

I, too, want the responses to the White Paper on the reform of the House of Lords to be published as soon as possible. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, I said at a previous Question Time that the bulk of those responses show support among the public for a substantially elected second Chamber.

The Government have no proposals, no intentions and no plans—I want to leave no room for misunderstanding on this—to change the monarchy. As Foreign Secretary I had the privilege of serving with the Queen on a number of foreign visits and I want to record my immense respect for the way in which she fulfils a very difficult and delicate role. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that if we are to maintain the relevance of and respect for the monarchy, it is important that we take sensible, modern steps towards modernisation. If the House can develop a consensus on these matters, we will be willing to respond to it, but it is not an issue on which the Government should be taking a lead.

As the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of equality between the sexes, I think that all hon. Members will wish to applaud the leadership role played by Princess Anne during the recent royal funeral in demonstrating the importance of that equality among members of the royal family.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has my right hon. Friend had the chance to study today's article by the distinguished journalist Nick Davies, in which he reveals the surprising fact that the richest family in the United Kingdom pay next to no income tax? In fact, they make a profit out of the tax system because the subsidies that they receive from their farms bring in a greater income than the tiny amount that they pay in income tax. Should not we take a look at a regime under which families with low or average earnings pay under a very efficient pay-as-you-go system, but billionaires and millionaire farmers pay under a pay-if-you-like system?

Mr. Forth: Good soundbite.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman is right; I congratulate my hon. Friend on his soundbite. I read the article with interest this morning—I try to read all articles before the business statement—and reflected that I might wish to contact the family concerned for advice on my tax return, as they are doing substantially better than I am.

The tax returns of an individual household are of course a matter for it and for the Inland Revenue, but I am sure that my hon. Friends who are in charge of the Inland Revenue will note my hon. Friend's comments.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): What has been the outcome of the discussions between officials in the right hon. Gentleman's Department and in that of the Lord Chancellor about the implications of the data protection legislation for Members of Parliament?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an issue that is of grave concern to many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I fully share those concerns. We have got into a position in which the data protection provisions are being applied in a way that nobody anticipated or intended when the Act was passed. It is rather strange to be told that if we take up the case of a constituent who has come to see us we are breaching their privacy, even though they approached us for help in the first place. We are exploring ways in which we might resolve the matter, possibly with the Data Protection Commissioner by means of guidelines; if not, I stand ready to ensure that we amend the law to protect the rights of hon. Members and their constituents.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to bringing back the Tobacco and Advertising Promotion Bill at an early date. That is very good news.

Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate about homelessness among young people? Next week, three young people from Wales will come up to Westminster to show hon. Members a film called "Cold Light", which gives their experience of homelessness, generally caused by violence in their homes, drug addiction and many other tragic circumstances.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for welcoming my comments on the tobacco Bill.

[Mr. Cook]

Homelessness is a grave and serious issue for those affected by it, and it is important in the overall context of rising housing and property prices that we should not forget people who are squeezed out of safe, secure and affordable accommodation. My hon. Friend will be aware that the matter has been actively under consideration in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for the past two Sessions, and I hope that we may be able to bring it before the House again in the not too distant future.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): In his earlier response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the Leader of the House referred to a meeting held at the Conservative party conference in Harrogate. He referred to it as a private meeting; it was not. Not only was it a public meeting, but a member of the Labour party was there by invitation, as a courtesy. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to discover the nature of the "free at the point of delivery" health service over which his Administration is presiding, perhaps he would like to visit North Thanet to meet some of my constituents who are currently paying for hip, eye, cataract and other operations that they cannot get under this Government.

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Mr. Gale: Whoa, I have not finished yet.

In February, I asked the Prime Minister whether he would name the companies on whose behalf he had written to other authorities. In a written parliamentary answer, he declined to do so and referred me to another answer, so I wrote to him on the subject and asked him to answer the question that I had actually asked. Yesterday, I received a letter from the Prime Minister saying that he has written to other people on behalf of many companies that he is not prepared to name, pleading exemption 13 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

I have read section 13 of the code of practice, which mentions

"confidences, trade secrets or intellectual property whose unwarranted disclosure would harm the competitive position of a third party."

I do not believe that that code of practice was designed to protect the Prime Minister from disclosing support for his cronies. Can we please have an early debate on the code of practice on access to Government information, so that we can amend it if necessary?

Mr. Cook: I do think that there is a danger that the hon. Gentleman is getting totally out of touch with reality. Frankly, it is to the Prime Minister's credit that he has written on behalf of many companies in Great Britain to promote their interests, and it has been the practice of Prime Ministers over the years to do so. Indeed, if my right hon. Friend refused to write on behalf of companies to pursue their commercial interests, there would be a wave of criticism from the hon. Gentleman and all his hon. Friends on the Opposition Benches.

On the health service, of course I fully understand, as all Labour Members do, that people have been waiting too long in some cases. That is why we want to reduce the waiting list times, and I am delighted to say that the report of the chief executive of the NHS this week showed that the number waiting for more than 15 months has fallen from 80,000 at the last election to only two in the present context.

We intend to continue that enormous improvement, but it would, of course, be totally thrown away if we ever ended up with the Conservative health spokesman in charge of the health service, given his own view that the NHS cannot work and will not work and his statement at that meeting—I gather that the hon. Gentleman is aware of it—that the big growth market in the United Kingdom is in people paying for health care from their own savings. That is the perfect dividing line between us—under the Conservatives, people will pay from their savings; under the Labour Government, we will pay for the NHS from taxation.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that we will have a debate on the quality of life. I hope that there will be an opportunity in that debate to discuss the fact that many people's quality of life is ruined by the antisocial behaviour of a handful of their neighbours. That happened in the Westfield estate in my constituency during the Easter recess. While we were discussing a response to those issues, a great welcome was expressed for the statement, made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, that he intends to give local authorities and other landlords greater powers to evict in those circumstances, as well as the Home Secretary's statement that he will speed up the ways in which antisocial behaviour orders can be obtained. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will have an opportunity in that debate to express our concerns on those matters and press for the introduction of those reforms as quickly possible.

Mr. Cook: All hon. Members will be aware from their constituency surgeries that the issue that my hon. Friend raises is a pressing one in so many areas, not only rural as well as urban, but suburban as well as in city centres. He obviously has an excellent contribution to make in the forthcoming debate and—with respect to you, Mr. Speaker—he will be guided on what is appropriate. The debate is to take place on a motion for the Adjournment; it can be wide ranging, and we hope that it will provide an opportunity to explore the ways in which we can improve the quality of life in local communities.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange time for the House to debate the suitability, or otherwise, of the well known Australian property developer and pop impresario Lord Levy—who masquerades as the Government's envoy to the middle east and who caused the right hon. Gentleman such trouble by meddling in the middle east during the period when he was a distinguished Foreign Secretary—to continue in that role without being in any way accountable to Parliament at one of the most difficult and serious passages of international affairs for many years? Will the right hon. Gentleman see what he can do to bring him before Parliament?

Mr. Cook: I must correct the hon. Gentleman on one point that he made—*[Laughter]*—indeed, on several points that he made. Lord Levy did not cause me any

difficulty during my time as Foreign Secretary. Indeed, he and I worked very closely together. *[Interruption.]* We certainly did. He travelled with me on a number of occasions in the middle east and throughout the week that I spent there in October 2000 at the start of the intifada. He was of immense value at the meetings that I attended on those occasions.

This is a time of grave trouble in the middle east—worse than I have ever known. The hope of a resumption of peace is weaker and more faded than at any time I can recall. It is therefore very important that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Office should use all the resources and assets available to them. Lord Levy has a range of contacts which he is able to use with great skill and diplomatic charm.

Mr. Soames: Lord Levy is a great nuisance to all the ambassadors.

Mr. Cook: I have never met an ambassador anywhere in the middle east who in any way has resented what Lord Levy has done. On the contrary, he has opened doors to many of them that would otherwise have been closed.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): My right hon. Friend will know that I, many of my hon. Friends and Members across the House are concerned about the problem of the participation of young people in the political process and the small numbers who apparently take an interest in the affairs of this House. Will he consider when talking to his hon. Friends and others whether it would be possible in organising the business of the House to provide a slot—perhaps 10 minutes—to discuss issues relating just to young people, as we have in respect of issues relating to women? Would not that be an incredible symbol to the young people of this country of the importance that we give to matters of concern to them?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has written to me with his proposition and I responded by saying that I fully understand the reason why he suggests that we should have a distinctive and separate slot for questions on youth policy, but since the Home Office is responsible for youth policy, the first call on the matter must remain with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, as it would be out of that Department's Question Time that such a slot would have to be found. The issue would have to be looked at in the round and the consequences weighed, although I fully appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend has raised an interesting point which underlines his interest in youth policy.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Has the Leader of the House noticed that a number of his right hon. and hon. Friends have taken to addressing him just as "Leader"? Is there any significance that we should attach to that development?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Don't tell Gordon.

Mr. Salmond: I hope that *Hansard* caught that.

On a serious issue, the Leader of the House will have seen the publicity in Scotland about Dungavel detention centre and early-day motion 1060, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), which expresses concern.

[That this House notes with concern reports of conditions in the Dungavel Detention Centre for asylum seekers, with the lack of privacy and no freedom of movement effectively creating a prison environment for people who are guilty of no offence, including young children; further notes with concern the reported suicide attempt by Nigerian asylum seeker Mr. Dotun Adeosun in Dungavel; and calls on the Home Office to accede to requests by human rights groups, such as the Friends of Refugees in Ayrshire, to have wider access to visit and meet asylum seekers at the Dungavel Centre and provide them with support, and to inspect conditions for detainees.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is widespread concern that people who have committed no crime, including children, are effectively being held in prison conditions? Given that we are some distance from the next Home Office questions, will he arrange a statement for next week or at some other suitable moment on whether the conditions in detention centres are appropriate and on the rights of inspection by human rights groups? There is substantial concern that he should be addressing.

Mr. Cook: I shall overlook the hon. Gentleman's characteristically mischievous opening line, and tell the House that I am delighted—

Mr. Forth: Flattered.

Mr. Cook: I am far too humble to be flattered. I am perfectly happy in my present role and would not wish any Member to suggest anything that should remove me from it.

The particular point raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is of course a devolved matter, but I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my colleagues in the Scottish Executive and to the Home Secretary.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware of yesterday's lobby of the House of Commons by postal workers, which closely followed reports last week, particularly in *Tribune*—a newspaper known and loved by Labour Members old and new. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear." Perhaps it is known and loved on the Opposition Benches too. The reports were to the effect that the Department of Trade and Industry had been planning to flog off the Royal Mail to the Dutch post office, TPG. Those reports followed the statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the effect that the Post Office could cut thousands of jobs but there was nothing that the Government could do about it. In view of the shoddy treatment meted out to postal workers and, frankly, the Secretary of State's inadequate response, could we have another debate on the Post Office?

Mr. Cook: As the Leader of the House, I am under no illusion about the fact that that is a matter of grave concern to Members on both sides of the House, and that it will also be raised with them in their constituencies. I am fully aware that the House will wish to discuss it and have reports on it in the future, and I assure my hon. Friend that I expect that to happen.

[Mr. Cook]

I have now had an opportunity to study the early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and I see that the detention centre that he referred to is for asylum seekers, so that is not, of course, a devolved matter. None the less, if he will allow me, I will still take up the matter both with the Home Secretary and with the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I fully endorse the views expressed by the Leader of the House about the Princess Royal, Princess Anne, who happens to be the colonel-in-chief of the regiment with which I served, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). She is a magnificent person, and plays a major role in the life of the regiment.

May I also ask the Leader of the House a question following on from the question asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer)? A substantial lobby came to Parliament yesterday, representing postal workers throughout the country, including two postal workers from the sorting office in Macclesfield. I share their concern that the universal postal service could be eroded. We now have collections seven days a week, and deliveries five days a week. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that that service, which is critical to people's quality of life, particularly in rural areas, will continue? If he cannot find time for a debate, will a Minister of the Crown come to the House to give an assurance that the universal postal service will continue?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the Princess Royal, Princess Anne.

I am sure that we will have other opportunities to discuss the postal service at length in the House, but I stress straight away the Government's commitment to the universal postal service. The universal service obligation is the Post Office's prime obligation, and in our dialogue with the regulator, Postcomm, we are making it clear that any changes that it proposes must be consistent with that obligation.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Further to the reference by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) to the involvement of youth in politics, may I remind my right hon. Friend about the UK Youth Parliament, of which Mr. Philip Carey is the member for Hastings and Rother? To encourage young people, would it be possible—during the summer recess, perhaps—for the UK Youth Parliament to use this Chamber, thus encouraging their involvement in politics?

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Disgraceful.

Mr. Cook: I have to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) that I could not envisage this Chamber being used for any purpose other than the sitting of the elected House of Commons. Indeed, strictly speaking, it is an act of treason to take a seat in this Chamber without being elected to it. *[Interruption.]* I think the shadow Leader of the House is going a little far; we are seeking to encourage rather than discourage youth. I fully sympathise with my hon. Friend's observation that we should try to encourage young people to have an interest in their civic duty and in the political democracy of their country. We did have a gathering of young people from each constituency in Scotland, but that met in Westminster Hall, which does not raise the same sensitivities—

Mr. Forth: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman's robust views on Westminster Hall are well known—and because of such robust views, it might cause less controversy if my hon. Friend were to aim at having such a gathering in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Is the Leader of the House aware of the concern in all parts of the House about the changes in disability living allowance introduced in regulations on 8 April? They mean that people who suffer fear and anxiety out of doors will be prevented from receiving the lower rate of the mobility component—nearly £15 a week—unless they can demonstrate that their fear and anxiety arise from severe mental disability. If the right hon. Gentleman cannot find time for an early debate on the Floor of the House, early-day motion 1054 has been tabled, including the appropriate prayer:

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 648), dated 11th March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th March, be annulled.]

Can the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation to consider those matters? Reasonable concern has also been demonstrated by the Social Security Advisory Committee, so important issues concerning those changes remain to be discussed.

Mr. Cook: I know that the hon. Gentleman follows these matters closely and speaks with authority on behalf of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, and I shall draw his observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Should an opportunity present itself for the statutory instrument to be debated, I shall obviously take on board what he says.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend, with his renowned powers of total recall, will remember that at the last business questions I asked him about bringing the Foreign Secretary to the House to disavow the speech made by George Bush on "the axis of evil." My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave a rather uncharacteristically unsatisfactory response, more or less suggesting that my question was about withdrawing support for the action in Afghanistan, which of course I had not intended. Does my right hon. Friend accept that unless that speech is disavowed, there will continue to be major concern among Labour Members about any action in Iraq, because that will be seen as the first stage of an activity which extends beyond Iraq to Iran, North Korea and any other country which might be deemed to be part of that so-called axis of evil? Therefore,

I ask my right hon. Friend again: will he ask the Foreign Secretary to come to the House in order to disavow the "axis of evil" speech?

Mr. Cook: I must apologise to my hon. Friend if I misrepresented his question in the answer that I gave to it. I am always keen not to misrepresent any Member of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will address the House next Tuesday. It is right that we should be given a day for a debate on the middle east at an early opportunity after our return from the recess and I am sure that my hon. Friend and others will want to take that opportunity to question my right hon. Friend and to make their own contributions.

I fully understand the different views taken on Iraq in the House, but I hope that all of us can find common ground by first recognising that weapons of mass destruction should not proliferate within the globe; that we shall live in a situation of greater difficulty and danger to ourselves, never mind to the neighbours of the countries that acquire them, if we permit that to continue; and that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right when he says that we have to take action in order to prevent those weapons of mass destruction remaining in the hands of people such as Saddam Hussein, who in the past have shown a willingness to use chemical weapons. How we proceed from that is a matter that we shall now discuss with our allies and our friends in the United Nations, and I hope that a way forward can be found. But I hope that we can all proceed from the same starting point: that we want to see an end to those weapons of mass destruction.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Leader of the House has just announced a four-day debate on the Budget statement, which I welcome. Will that not be the first time since the Queen's speech nearly a year ago that the House will have debated in Government time key issues such as public expenditure and taxation? Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to move away from this feast and famine approach to debates on the economy and ensure that the House has an adequate opportunity throughout the year to hold the Government to account on those key issues?

Mr. Cook: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's recognition that we are about to have a feast of debates on the Government's handling of the economy and their record in achieving a sound economy in Britain which has the lowest inflation in Europe, the lowest unemployment in a generation and a secure and stable economy whose growth rate compares with any other within the G7 economies. All those are matters that we can debate at length over those four days. In fairness though, I would say that there was an extended discussion of public expenditure when the Chancellor presented his autumn statement only last November and he regularly appears before the House to be held to account by the House. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, I heard his voice on my way into the Chamber.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be aware of the welcome announcement made yesterday by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions designating nine pathfinder areas in the north-west and the midlands to tackle housing in areas of abandonment. Will the Leader of the House give maximum opportunity for the House to make representations on the need for a properly funded housing markets renewal fund so that those pathfinder areas can be meaningful? Does he agree that this is a regional issue and that it should also be discussed at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the attention of the House to the progress that is being made at local and regional level by my colleagues in ensuring that we tackle issues of urban regeneration and housing shortage. It is worth noting that throughout the country, where such initiatives have been taken on urban regeneration, they have evoked wide support and interest from the affected communities. In a number of ballots related to our progress on urban regeneration, a higher turnout has been achieved than for elections to the House; notably, that happened in Glasgow only the other week. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall convey her welcome for the measures to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and that we will continue to take all the action that we can to build on the success that we are securing in urban regeneration.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): At column 20 of yesterday's *Official Report*, the Prime Minister said in answer to a question on standards in government that most of what was being raised by Opposition Members was "complete nonsense". When early-day motion 1112 is published tomorrow, will the Leader of the House talk to the Prime Minister and see whether there will be an opportunity for a debate in the House on standards of government and the ministerial code, as well as whether the Prime Minister is interested in upholding that code, whether there is a complaint and whether the Government will make a submission to the Wicks Committee on this and related issues?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is to be congratulated on having stumped my Parliamentary Private Secretary, who cannot produce an early-day motion that is to be published tomorrow, as opposed to one that is currently on the Order Paper. The hon. Gentleman will, therefore, understand if I cannot comment on the motion. On standards in government and public life, I have always said that we should keep the matter in perspective. I believe that standards in public life in Britain bear comparison with those in just about any other country that the hon. Gentleman might care to name. We should not contribute to the agenda of some of those in the press who wish to discredit the standards in public life in this place or elsewhere. I intend to make a submission to the Wicks Committee, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will study it with care.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Will the Leader of the House consider early-day motion 725 and the cross-party support for it?

[That this House notes that the widows of police officers who retired after 5th April 1978 and subsequently married are entitled to a pension under the Police Pension Scheme, that the widows of police officers who retired before 5th April 1978 and subsequently married

are not entitled to a pension under the Police Pension Scheme, and that the widows of a marriage entered into before retirement would receive a pension under the Police Pension Scheme whether or not the retirement was before 5th April 1978; believes that this creates an inequitable and arbitrary position for police officers' widows; and further believes that the Government should take urgent action to remedy the situation and to ensure appropriate entitlement to pension provisions for the widows of all retired police officers.]

Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House on the plight of widows of police officers who remarried, but retired before 1978? Such widows do not receive a pension, despite contributions having been made to the pension scheme. Will the right hon. Gentleman congratulate *The Mail on Sunday* on its campaign on the issue?

Mr. Cook: I will not do so; there are some things that hon. Members can ask me to do, but it is a step too far to ask me to congratulate *The Mail on Sunday* on anything. The hon. Gentleman raises an issue of great sensitivity, and I appreciate its importance to the people who are caught up in the situation that he describes. Of course, there is a downside, as any extension of pension rights must be paid for. It is a matter of judgment for the members of any such scheme as to whether they are willing to pay and accept the additional contributions that would be necessary. Within that limitation, I fully accept that we should be moving to a situation in which pensions are not withdrawn on remarriage.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Three months ago, as the Leader of the House will obviously recall, I asked him whether he would find time for a debate in the House on the two Green Papers published by the Government making radical proposals for changes to our town and country planning system and major inquiries. He fairly pointed out that there was a consultation period and that any changes would have to be brought before the House. I think that the Government and hon. Members in all parts of the House would find helpful a debate in which we could inform the Government of our views and opinions before they make definite proposals for approval by the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the matter?

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly reflect on what the hon. Gentleman says. Having sat through the past 45 minutes of questions, he will be aware that I am not short of bids for time and debate in the Chamber or elsewhere in the precincts. I understand that he makes his observation in good faith and with a genuine wish to help. I anticipate that we will return to the matter on a number of occasions in future; whether we can do so in the near future is a matter of judgment that I shall have to consider.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): While it was unfortunate to say the least that the accident-prone Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was yet again caught giving out controversial information at a sensitive time, does the Leader of the House agree that an even more serious issue is at stake? At a time when there is terrific congestion both in our cities and on our motorways, our constituents will fail to understand why the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has not come to the House to make a statement and why the Leader of the House has not organised a debate on transport and congestion, which has increased so much under this Government. When will that happen?

Mr. Cook: As I have said before, I do not think that there is a member of the Cabinet who has been more willing to make statements to the House than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I am sure that there will be many future opportunities for us to debate transport policy.

The hon. Gentleman reminds me that the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), expressed concern about the impact on Parliament square of yesterday's traffic disruption. I share Members' concern about that issue, and we will pursue with the authorities the need to ensure that Members have reasonable access to the House of Commons.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the previous Parliament, I initiated an Adjournment debate, to which the then Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) replied, on improvements to the A50—the M1-M6 link—and the associated dangers. An intolerable burden has been placed on the A515, which has not been improved at all, and residents along that road now live in fear. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to make a statement to the House on road safety and the associated problems?

Mr. Cook: I am confident that my hon. Friend gave an excellent answer in the Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Gentleman. I cannot promise an oral statement to the House on that precise topic, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's observations to the Secretary of State's attention.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Before we debate the provisions in this year's Budget, can we examine the implementation of some of the measures in the previous one, particularly the aggregates levy? One justification for the sustainability fund was that it would go some way towards mitigating the environmental effects of quarrying. Why, therefore, will the three counties that produce the greatest part of the aggregate in this country—Somerset, Leicestershire and Derbyshire—not receive a commensurate sum from the sustainability fund? In fact, they will end up as losers as a result of the fund's operation. Will we have an opportunity to debate that issue?

Mr. Cook: I regret to say that I have not been briefed this morning on the aggregates levy, and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for that oversight. He asks a fascinating question to which I do not have the answer, but I shall ensure that somebody writes to him with it.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May we have an early debate on the state of our railways, not least in light of an article by Libby Purves that appeared in Tuesday's edition of *The Times*? She wrote:

"What an extraordinary country this is. The railways are in tatters and hospitals in crisis: clearly we can't run a whelk stall. Then at a few days' notice we put on a vast, immaculate procession of brass and plumes and pomp, timed to the second . . . If the Royal Horse Artillery fancy taking over Railtrack, I'm for it."

The state of our railways is a matter of concern to all our constituents. When can we have an early debate on the fact that the Government have still failed to lift Railtrack out of administration?

Mr. Cook: The timetable for Railtrack's removal from administration was set out long ago. That process will necessarily take some time, given the need for legal and accountancy procedures. In the first instance, it is the administrators, rather than the Government, who must assess the alternatives to Railtrack. That said, it is well known that the Government welcome the fact that a company limited by guarantee is available to take over Railtrack. I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that, if he is in any doubt, he should talk to the travelling public, who greatly welcome seeing the last of Railtrack as a private company. Railtrack constantly struggled with the question whether to put first the interests of the travelling public, or private payments to shareholders. We have removed that conflict from the minds of those who run Railtrack.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): The situation has got worse.

Mr. Cook: On the contrary, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the latest figures, I think that he will find that the situation is getting better.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I ask the Leader of the House to respond robustly and positively to calls for a debate on congestion. Is he aware that disruption to freight operation through the channel tunnel is costing freight operators £500,000 a day? By the end of March, the total cost of disruption had reached £15 million. Curiously, however, French operators are still functioning, and it is British operators who are losing out.

In addition to a debate on guilty men, will the Leader of the House also invite the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—a guilty woman—to debate the demise and collapse of ITV Digital, and the resulting awful effect on sport and on football clubs across the country?

Mr. Cook: I fully share the hon. Lady's concern about the impact of the collapse of ITV Digital, but, with the greatest respect, that cannot be laid at the Government's door. I hope that those involved in the discussion are able to find a way forward that does not leave football a casualty of a failure by the commercial television sector.

The hon. Lady has diligently raised freight transport via the channel tunnel at three successive business questions. I again repeat that my colleagues at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are fully engaged with the matter and continue to make representations on a disruption that of course stems primarily from the French side of the tunnel, not the British.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): May I associate myself with the call made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) for an early debate on the operation of the aggregates tax? The Leader of the House will be aware that it came into effect on 1 April, perhaps appropriately, and it is already threatening to bring the aggregates extraction industry in my constituency to a grinding halt. It is also causing a great deal of concern in the agriculture industry, in Orkney in particular, because of the suggestion that it will apply to sand used for liming agricultural land. May we have an early debate to assess, in the light of experience, the disastrous effects that the tax will have, before it is too late for small rural and island communities such as those that I represent?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that, since 1 April, we have had sufficient time to make a mature assessment of how the system will work in practice, but, as I said to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, I shall draw the attention of the relevant Minister to what has been said in the House.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the weekly parliamentary Labour party meetings to be held in the Chamber, notwithstanding what he said to the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) about the dignity of this place? If he does so, we could all see the endemic divisions in the Labour party on Iraq, missile defence, private finance in the public services and so on, instead of having to read about them in the newspapers the next day.

Mr. Cook: Had the hon. Gentleman been present at the PLP meeting, as I was, he would have been impressed, as I was, by the thunderous and warm applause given to the Prime Minister. However, I am pleased to respond to his contribution on bringing serious debate to the House. If we continue at the next general election on the trajectory that we set at the last two, the PLP will occupy this Chamber entirely.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I refer the Leader of the House to the Prime Minister's reply on Sea Harriers at column 16 on Wednesday 10 April. Judging by the Prime Minister's response to a straight question, it is perfectly obvious that he did not have a clue about the answer. Indeed, it is perfectly obvious that he would not know what a Sea Harrier looked like if one landed on the lawn at Chequers. If he is to deploy our armed forces round the world, should he not at least first properly do his homework on our capabilities? Does the Leader of the House agree that, until a credible alternative is in place, withdrawing the Sea Harriers from commission would be an absolute disaster?

Mr. Cook: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is knowledgeable in military matters, so he is aware that the Sea Harrier is an air-sea defence weapon whereas Harrier GR7s and GR9s are principally weapons to be used to support ground offensives. It is in support of such ground offensives that we have found the carriers most useful. That is what we shall require if we are to intervene to carry through the actions against terrorism and to make sure that we secure the world, which is why we propose to upgrade the Harrier offensive system from GR7 to GR9. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that, if he wants to support international action.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a debate at an appropriate time on the possibility of establishing a permanent public memorial to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother? Such a debate would enable the official Opposition to make common cause

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

with the Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman, who is reported to have made the excellent suggestion that a statue of her be erected in Trafalgar square. Acting on that suggestion would give the public an opportunity to subscribe to such a statute, even if that upsets those of the chattering classes who have been filling the empty plinth in Trafalgar square with their perverse, self-indulgent and inconsequential offerings in recent months.

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to stand in the way of any rapprochement between those on the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat Benches at a time when we are all concerned to promote world peace. The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting suggestion, on which I am sure both parties may wish to build. I am not sure that I see the case for the House spending a day debating that matter, but plainly, should a consensus gather, the Government would naturally want to be part of it. *[Interruption.]* This is an issue on which we should proceed with a consensus; it should not be a party political issue.

I sat through the entire debate last week in which the House paid tribute to the Queen Mother, and I thought that the House distinguished itself with a moving and very touching celebration of the Queen Mother's strength, humour and commitment to duty. I am content that the House was able to play its part in celebrating her life.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The right hon. Gentleman has drawn our attention to the heroic achievements of the chief executive of the NHS. Earlier this week, I received a letter from a lady who, having reached the politically sensitive threshold of having waited 18 months for an operation, was telephoned and asked whether she wanted to take up the opportunity of having the operation carried out by another NHS trust. She accepted, and when some three months later she inquired as to when the operation would be she was told that, as she had been waiting for only three months, she did not have a prayer. The trick was that the clock had started again when she moved to the other trust. May we have a debate on those heroic achievements so that we can scrutinise precisely how they have been achieved?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health with the details of that case, we shall certainly pursue it. I assure the hon. Gentleman, however, that if he looks at the figures—produced by the chief executive of the NHS, not by Ministers—he will see that we have made dramatic progress in both in-patient and out-patient waiting times. We have also reduced by a quarter the delay in discharge resulting from bed blocking. Those are substantial achievements and the chief executive was right to say that we should sometimes congratulate NHS staff on the progress that they are making instead of constantly knocking them.

Armed Forces Personnel

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Mr. Speaker: Before we begin the debate on armed forces personnel, I draw the House's attention to the following documents, which are relevant: Second report from the Defence Committee, Session 2000-01, The Strategic Defence Review: Policy for People: Government response thereto; Fourth special report from the Defence Committee, Session 2000-01, HC 462; Minutes of Evidence taken by the Defence Committee on 6 and 13 March 2002, on Ministry of Defence reviews of armed forces pensions and compensation arrangements, HC 666. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

1.28 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Today's debate on armed forces personnel matters provides an opportunity for me to pay tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. The magnificent part that so many members of the armed forces—from all three services—played in last Friday's ceremonial procession to Her Majesty's lying-in-state and in her funeral on Tuesday provided the most eloquent tribute possible.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother had long-standing and close links with the armed forces. She was an inspiration to many during the first world war, when she helped to tend the wounded who were being cared for at Glamis castle. With His Majesty King George VI, she was an inspiration to many more, both civilians and those serving in the United Kingdom, as well as those fighting overseas, during the dark days of the second world war.

Her Majesty was the Commandant-in-Chief for women in both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. The men and women who have served aboard HMS Ark Royal have taken considerable pride in the fact that she was the ship's sponsor and presided at the launch of all three aircraft carriers that bore that name, including at the rededication ceremony in November last year.

Her Majesty was the Colonel-in-Chief of eight regiments in the Regular Army, Royal Honorary Colonel of three units in the Territorial Army, and Colonel-in-Chief of five Army units from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Perhaps the most affectionate of her relationships with Army units was with the Irish Guards, who had the privilege of providing the bearer party on both Friday and Tuesday. Her Majesty was also Commandant-in-Chief of the RAF central flying school and Honorary Air Commodore of 600 (City of London) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force. I know that service men and women throughout the armed forces, and their Commonwealth counterparts, will mourn her passing.

I want specifically to mention that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother was Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Anglian Regiment. The 1st Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment is currently serving in Kabul as part of the international security assistance force, and held its own memorial service on Tuesday as a mark of respect.

Tuesday was a sad day for the Royal Anglians for another reason. Tragically, one of their young soldiers was killed after an accident while he was out on patrol in

Kabul. I know that the whole House will join me in extending their condolences to the soldier's family. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Today's debate is the first opportunity that the House has had since the events of 11 September to consider and discuss issues affecting those who serve in the armed forces. Before I deal with specific issues, I would like to bring right hon. and hon. Members up to date on the most recent developments concerning operations in Afghanistan. A number of Members of this House have recently visited British troops deployed there, and have seen the excellent work that they are doing.

I shall begin with the international security assistance force. The United Kingdom agreed to lead ISAF at its inception for a limited period. We took on that responsibility because our forces had the knowledge, experience and ability to organise and establish a multinational expeditionary deployment. They have done just that, with genuine distinction. ISAF has been a significant success, and has provided considerable support to the Afghan Interim Administration as they have taken the first steps in rebuilding their country. We can be proud of the contribution that the United Kingdom's armed forces have made.

Now we must look to ISAF's future. We remain committed to its success. In all probability, the United Nations Security Council resolution authorising the force will be extended, so that ISAF can remain in place beyond June. We support that entirely, as there is still work for it to do.

Although British troops will continue to play a part in ISAF, it will not remain under our leadership. Following his meeting with Hamid Karzai on 4 April, Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit made it clear that the Turkish Government intend to take over as lead nation. I know that the House will welcome that good news.

We have still to agree the exact date on which we will transfer leadership. It is now unlikely that we will be able to hand over to Turkey at the end of April, as we had originally hoped. We may well remain as lead nation until June, probably until after the interim Loya Jirga, although we anticipate that, before then, Turkey will continue to build up the already considerable number of troops that it has deployed.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): What financial arrangements are being made with the Turkish Government to enable them to undertake this task? What contribution are the United Kingdom Government making?

Mr. Hoon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that at this stage, before all the arrangements have been finalised, it would not be appropriate for me to go into any detail. Appropriate financial support will be made available. The agreement has not yet been finalised, and I do not want to anticipate those practical arrangements, but if the hon. Gentleman asks me that question again in due course, I shall be able to provide him with a more comprehensive answer.

I make no apology for the fact that the United Kingdom may remain as lead nation until June, rather than the end of April. It is far more important that ISAF continues to do its vital work than that we stick absolutely to the letter of our original aim and end our period as lead nation at the end of this month.

Turkey expressed interest in taking on this responsibility from the very start. We have always been candid in our discussions with the Turkish authorities, and have set out very clearly the complexities involved in leading ISAF. We very much welcome the statement by Prime Minister Ecevit.

We have always made it clear that the size of the British contingent serving with ISAF would reduce over time, particularly once it had been established. Our contribution has now reduced in size. We currently have about 1,500 personnel serving with ISAF, rather than the 1,800 who were out there at the start. We now expect those numbers to reduce still further, as Turkey takes over as lead nation. I should emphasise that our commitment to ISAF will continue, and that a significant number of British troops will remain in Kabul under Turkish command.

ISAF is only one strand of the United Kingdom's contribution to operations in Afghanistan. We are also working with our allies, as we have from the very start, in continuing operations to defeat al-Qaeda terrorists and their Taliban supporters. Those operations have been remarkably successful, but we need to remain vigilant and committed to completing the task. That is why we have decided to deploy 45 Commando Group and the headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade to Afghanistan to take part in operations against the remnants of the al-Qaeda network and the Taliban.

Overall, the deployment is going well. Five hundred members of the force have now arrived in Bagram. Although it will be the end of April before all the members of 45 Commando Group will be in Afghanistan, they will soon be ready to conduct operations against remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): When the Secretary of State made his statement about the deployment of 45 Commando, he was not able to tell us what the remnants of al-Qaeda consisted of. I realise that he cannot be too specific, but has he received any further intelligence about the numbers that 45 Commando and other troops will face in Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: I went into as much detail as I considered appropriate about the nature of the operations that would be carried out, and about what we expected would be found. Part of the purpose of the operations, however, is to seek out and find those elements. Obviously it is vital to me to have confidence, as I do, in the number and skill of the commandos who will be engaged in the task; but I cannot be precise, and it would not be appropriate for me to be so even if we had the information. This is about ensuring that we have the right quality of people—which we have—to perform a difficult and demanding task.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): In a parliamentary answer given to me yesterday by the Ministry, it was suggested that the remnants of the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan amounted to several thousand people who would have to be hunted down in one way or another. Will the Secretary of State explain where that figure came from? Was it based on intelligence from forces still in Afghanistan, or on intelligence from forces going back and forth across the Pakistan border?

Mr. Hoon: It was, inevitably, an estimate based on information from a wide variety of sources, including

[Mr. Hoon]

forces already on the ground. But, as I said on the last occasion, Members must appreciate that we are not talking about a thousand-strong group waiting for offensive operations; these are smaller groups scattered across Afghanistan, but particularly in the higher and more remote areas. That too makes it more difficult to be absolutely precise about the numbers.

Mr. Hancock *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: May I make some progress?

The deployment of 45 Commando Group has not been without difficulties. Deploying troops to Afghanistan exclusively by air is not easy, as I suspect Members who have visited Afghanistan can testify and as I can testify from my own experience. Nor is Afghanistan an easy place in which to operate. We had originally planned to accommodate the Royal Marines in former Soviet barracks at Bagram airfield, but following further consultations with the Afghan authorities we have concluded that those barracks are not suitable. We have had to build a new tented camp, which has taken time because the welfare of our troops is crucial.

Members on both sides of the House have strongly supported the Government's action in the campaign against international terrorism. They have applauded the steps we have taken to destroy the al-Qaeda network, remove the Taliban regime from power and reintegrate Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community, ensuring that it will never again become a safe haven for terrorism. We remain committed to completing those tasks.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that we are giving our service personnel in Afghanistan the best possible accommodation and facilities? He will know, as I do from my experience of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, that the facilities and accommodation provided for our service personnel in Bosnia were the worst that I had ever seen. Will he assure me that if we put our personnel in the line of fire—where they may risk their lives—for any length of time, they will be given the quality of accommodation that they deserve?

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, in the conduct of this kind of expeditionary warfare there is necessarily a trade-off between the best possible accommodation—which of course we would all want to be provided—and the speed of deployment, and ensuring that people are capable of carrying out such operations. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect new barracks to be constructed in a place such as Kabul. He understands the needs of expeditionary operations but, within those, it remains important that people have proper accommodation suitable for the tasks that they have to carry out. I assure him that we have constant regard to that; but that is not to say that I do not strongly believe that there are areas where we need to improve the expeditionary accommodation available.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): We are delighted that the Secretary of State is going to deploy the best possible accommodation for our troops who will be in Afghanistan for some time. When does he intend to deploy mobile bath units, laundry units and bakeries, all of which are easily transportable on Hercules aircraft?

Mr. Hoon: Again, the same type of balancing exercise has to be undertaken. Different countries make different contributions to the capabilities of ISAF, but it is most important that appropriate facilities are available across that force.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of Afghanistan, he will recollect that some of us expressed misgivings that two strands were involved. One was a peacekeeping role and the other was an operational, offensive role to counter al-Qaeda. Our qualms were based on the fact that the two roles may have been somewhat incompatible. In retrospect, were our misgivings and our qualms ill founded? Has the problem been solved, or is there still incompatibility between those two roles?

Mr. Hoon: I had no reservations so it is a little difficult for me to decide whether I have resolved those of my hon. Friend. I have certainly sought to do so, in that I have explained to the House on more than one occasion how the command and control structure of the different forces works. Indeed, it is right to say that we constantly check to ensure that there is no overlap, nor the possibility of the confusion about which my hon. Friend was concerned. That is a constant part of our effort.

Mr. Hancock: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way to me again.

Will he explain the details of the rules of engagement and how 45 Commando will operate under an American commander? Do the rules of engagement give those forces the right to cross into Pakistan if they are in pursuit of Taliban or al-Qaeda rebels?

Mr. Hoon: We went into that matter on the last occasion that we discussed this subject so I do not propose repeating what I said then. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that our forces have robust rules of engagement that allow them to do their job. It has never been the practice of any Government, when discussing such matters, to go into detail about the nature of those rules of engagement.

Even without the continuing operations in Afghanistan, this has been a particularly busy year for the armed forces and, indeed, for the civil servants who work so closely with them. Service personnel are engaged in operations over Iraq, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Sierra Leone and throughout the world. Operations in Afghanistan have meant that some people have, perhaps, overlooked the remarkably successful deployment of about 2,000 British troops to Macedonia last summer, to collect weapons from Albanian fighters in support of the framework agreement that continues to provide the basis for Macedonia's moves towards greater stability.

In view of the 20th anniversary this year of the Falklands conflict, I should also mention those members of the armed forces who are deployed in the islands. I recently visited the Falklands again and was able to see for myself the excellent work that British forces continue to carry out there.

Closer to home, the armed forces have continued their work in Northern Ireland in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and, more recently, the Police Service of Northern Ireland. They also played a key role in helping to control the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Our service men and women are obviously busy. About 28 per cent. of the Army are currently committed to operations. That is a high proportion, although not as high as the 44 per cent. committed to operations at the peak of the Kosovo campaign. In addition, 11 per cent. of the Royal Navy and 10 per cent. of the Royal Air Force are deployed on operations.

The armed forces are very busy, but they are not operating beyond what they can bear, although we recognise that a number of units—particularly specialists—and those who serve in them face specific strains. I would like to say something about what we are doing to tackle those issues, but I emphasise that the amount of time people spend on operations and the amount of time they have to recover and spend with their families are key concerns. We are determined to achieve and maintain a balance of commitments. We aim to commit our troops to operations for no longer than is absolutely necessary. We will continue to withdraw them at the earliest opportunity and to press our allies and partners to take on their share of the responsibility.

Our efforts are largely successful. As I have said, the proportion of the Army that is currently committed to operations is well down from the peak of activity in Kosovo. Relevant guidelines for the Royal Navy are largely being maintained. Only 2.3 per cent. of trained RAF personnel spent more than 140 days away from their parent unit last year.

Our reserve forces have an important part to play. They have made a significant contribution to meeting our current operational commitments, reaffirming the emphasis that we have placed on integrating them more closely with our Regular forces and making them still more relevant to current operations. At any one time, some 10 per cent. of our forces in the Balkans are reservists. Reservists have also been called out to support operations in Sierra Leone and the United Nations observer mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the reason why so many reservists have been required is the shortfall in the Regular forces? Will he inform the House what the current shortfall is in the Army?

Mr. Hoon: The use of reservists is not a result of the overall shortfall to which I have referred. It is a result of pressure on key specialisations and has involved, largely, the replacement of particular specialists. I know from my visits to the Balkans that the reservists who at any one time make up 10 per cent. of our forces there are often people with particular skills in the civilian world who have been able to make those available to the armed forces. They have done so not least because of the significant contribution that the armed forces are making to the rebuilding of countries in that region. We tend to have manning difficulties in those particular specialist areas, and I am not at all complacent about the importance of ensuring that we have the appropriate manning balance and of making sure that the pressures that we put on those specialists are relieved as much as we can manage.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not a fact that the Territorial Army is at present about 1,300 below the strength anticipated at the time of the strategic defence review? Would the Secretary of State care to consider that one way of keeping the reserve forces up to strength would be to revisit what was done in 1999, when the reserve decoration and the territorial decoration were extended to all ranks, but nobody was allowed to put letters after their name any more? Would it not be a tremendous boost to the reserve forces and an incentive for people to renew their commitments if those people who get the volunteer reserve medals were able to put the appropriate letters after their names?

Mr. Hoon: I will certainly look at that practical suggestion, but I will refer later to questions of recruitment and retention. I will set out some of the efforts that the Ministry of Defence is making to ensure that we have the right numbers of people coming in and remaining in the armed forces for as long as we need them.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Secretary of State has repeated the mantra that we so often hear about the principal requirement for reservists lying in specialists. Will he confirm that in every single year since the Government took office, by far the largest category of reservists used has been infantry?

Mr. Hoon: They tend to be infantry with particular skills, and it is important to recognise that. That is wholly consistent with what the Government set out at the time of the SDR, so that we have the kind of people available to us to do particular jobs. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware from his own experience, being a member of the armed forces these days is an increasingly specialised role and the levels of skill and training that are required are increasing from day to day. That is something that every Government will have to face up to in the future.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I say quickly that being an infantry man is something of a skill in its own right? Can the Secretary of State give us some idea of the Government's thinking in response to the new chapter of the SDR? They began a consultation exercise on a possible new role for the reserve forces in responding to the events of 11 September. Is there any initial conclusion as a result of that consultation exercise?

Mr. Hoon: I shall address that point in due course, but I am grateful for the contribution that right hon. and hon. Members have made to the discussion document that we published.

Let me return to the use we have made of the specialist skills of our reservists, particularly in the continuing operations against international terrorism. The compulsory call-out of intelligence staff from the Territorial Army and movement operators from the Royal Auxiliary Air Force has been vital in helping us to prosecute the campaign against the al-Qaeda network and the Taliban.

In addition, more than 1,700 members of the reserve forces are currently serving in full-time reserve service. This means that they have voluntarily entered commitments to serve full-time for periods ranging from a few months to three to four years.

[Mr. Hoon]

Recent operations have proved beyond doubt that the 1998 strategic defence review and our further work on the changing strategic context have put the United Kingdom in a strong position to respond to the appalling events of 11 September. As the House is aware, however, we are looking at what more we might need to do in the light of those appalling attacks on the United States.

We are pressing ahead with our work on what has been termed a new chapter to the strategic defence review. In ensuring that we have the right defence concepts, forces, and capabilities, we are placing particular emphasis on the impact that any proposed changes might have on members of the armed forces and their families. I consider it very important that we do not make unreasonable demands on our service personnel. The strategic defence review put people at the heart of our policy. That is where they will remain.

Our emerging thinking on the new chapter was set out in the public discussion document that the House discussed during the defence policy debate on 14 February. There has been a positive and constructive response to the paper. By last month's deadline we had received more than 300 responses from hon. Members, local authorities, academics, and members of the public.

The responses cover a wide range of issues, but a number of key themes run through them. There has been strong support for the strategic defence review and the work on the new chapter. There has also been strong support for many of the emerging conclusions of our work, including the armed forces' focus on operating abroad; the recognition of the importance of rapid effect and high readiness; the armed forces' role in preventing terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and the contribution that the Territorial Army could make to home defence; the importance of cross-Government co-ordination; and the role that international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO and the European Union have to play in combating international terrorism.

We are taking account of the views, ideas, and opinions that have been expressed as we take this work forward. Although the formal deadline for responses has passed, this should not be the end of the public debate. These issues will face us for months and years to come, so we continue to welcome views and ideas.

Our intention is to publish conclusions from our work in the late spring or early summer, but I can assure the House that we have already taken the necessary steps to adjust the posture of the armed forces in response to the changing situation. We will continue to implement further urgent measures as and when required, in advance of the publication of our conclusions.

May I emphasise one fundamental aspect of this work? Our people—the service men and women on whom we make such demands—are our most valuable and important resource. We are giving careful consideration to the impact that any possible changes in the light of the events of 11 September may have on them and their families.

The fact that the armed forces are so busy serves as a reminder that the recruitment and retention of people is our most important task. We need to find people with the intelligence, courage, and commitment necessary to undertake tasks that are always demanding and often hazardous, right across the world, often with little or no warning. We need to train and motivate them to do their jobs, to provide them with support and guidance, especially at the times of greatest stress and trauma, and to support their families who remain at home.

I will not pretend that this burden of effort is always easy for the armed forces or the Ministry of Defence to bear. Our forces are, as we have acknowledged, currently undermanned. We are making considerable efforts to achieve what we call the manning balance. Achieving this balance is about recruiting and retaining the right people but getting and keeping them is not straightforward.

The current employment context is difficult. The size of the critical age group of those between 16 and 24 years declined in the past decade. The economy is relatively strong and many more are electing to stay on in higher education. It is, therefore, a tough job recruiting and holding on to the best people.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Can the Secretary of State account for the extraordinary success of certain regiments in the Army that find no difficulty with recruiting? In fact, they often allow themselves to be overmanned or enabled to be overmanned, yet the recruiting group does not seem to take account of the particular styles of operation that these regiments follow.

Mr. Hoon: I have been concerned about the need to encourage much greater flexibility in the way we recruit. The hon. Gentleman is clearly aware that there are issues in relation to the allocation of recruits to particular areas of the armed forces. I have taken an interest in that, but I would welcome his thoughts and suggestions, based on his experience, on how best to resolve those questions, not least because of particular problems in certain specialist areas.

Civilian employers speak highly of the quality of those who have served in the armed forces, and particularly of their dependability and adaptability. When service men and women have particular skills and experience—such as pilots, signallers, logisticians, engineers and others—they are doubly attractive to civilian employers. We face a huge demand for the best young people and we need some 25,000 new recruits every year. Clearly, we face competition for them from other employers. Attracting people to the armed forces can therefore be an uphill task.

Mr. Brazier: Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer), will the Secretary of State recognise that while almost every major civilian organisation is trying to decentralise its personnel strategy—a horses for courses approach—the Ministry of Defence is pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach, which is bringing personnel policy in all three services ever more closely together, as criticised by the Select Committee on Defence in the last Parliament, and is making his problem harder?

Mr. Hoon: I shall go on to talk about personnel policy, but I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's description of it. A central part of that policy is to emphasise the diversity of the three services and to respect their considerable different traditions. If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it for a moment, he will realise that the

implication of the point made by the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) was that we must look across the board at how we allocate people to different parts of the armed forces.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Will the Secretary of State tell the House a little about recruitment from overseas? As he knows, the British Army has had an excellent record of recruiting people from overseas, particularly from Commonwealth countries. Will he comment in particular on moves in New Zealand to recruit former members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force?

Mr. Hoon: That continues to be the case, and recruitment from Commonwealth countries continues to be strong and to provide us with not only valuable sorts of recruits but excellent links and contacts with Commonwealth countries. Efforts have been made to recruit New Zealand pilots although it will not greatly surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that their services are in great demand, not only from other air forces around the world but from civilian airlines.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): In a parliamentary answer at the end of last year, the Minister of State informed me that the intention was to move the Regular Commissions Board to Sandhurst to be co-located with the Royal Military Academy. I now understand that the money for that is not available and that the Regular Commissions Board will stay in Westbury. However, the Territorial Commissioning Board, which is currently co-located with the Regular Commissions Board, will be removed to Chilwell. Will the Secretary of State confirm that? What is the rationale for dislocating the Territorial Commissioning Board from the Regular Commissions Board and moving it to Chilwell?

Mr. Hoon: Chilwell is a fine place, which is close to my constituency—*[Laughter.]* It is not that close. I will have to ensure that the premises of the hon. Gentleman's question are accurate before I respond to his conclusions. However, I shall write to him on that in due course.

I have set out the background of recruitment. I want to emphasise that recruitment levels have not fallen recently but have remained remarkably resilient. In the first 10 months of 2001–02, the total intake for the armed forces reached 81 per cent. of the year's recruitment target. Over that period, intake levels across all three services were up on the same period in the previous year. That indicates that the armed forces are on course at least to match if not exceed the previous year's achievement. That is excellent news.

Bob Russell: Will the Secretary of State put some flesh on those bones and give the House some figures on the shortfall and the percentages involved? It is all very well saying that the Government are trying to achieve targets, but I got the impression from a written answer that I received that a sizeable shortfall still exists.

Mr. Hoon: I do not want the hon. Gentleman to be hypnotised by a particular figure for the shortfall. We have made no secret of the fact that the shortfall is of the order of 9,000–10,000 overall, but we have always maintained that the important figures are the ones that show how many people are joining the services, and how many are not staying in as long as we would prefer. A marginal improvement in retention rates would solve the whole problem.

I deal now with the changes that have occurred in society. In 10 years, 15 per cent. of the youngest age group from which we draw our recruits will come from ethnic minorities. That only serves to remind us that the armed forces must reflect the society that they serve. We remain committed to recruiting from all sectors of the community, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

The annual recruitment rate from the British ethnic minority communities continues to improve. In the three years from April 1998 to April 2001, the percentage of recruits from the ethnic minorities more than doubled. The signs for 2001–02 suggest that this upward trend has continued. The position for female recruitment is similarly positive. In the 12 months to 1 February 2002, 2,658 females entered the armed forces—11.3 per cent. of the total intake.

As I have made clear, however, recruiting is only half of the challenge that we face in reaching the manning balance. Retention is also a matter of the highest priority, not least because it is the key to solving the problems of undermanning. We are trying to get this right, and I want to touch on three areas of work that are under way.

The first is pay. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body for the clear and wide-ranging report that they have produced this year. I am pleased that we were again able to implement the review body's recommendations in full and on time, for the fourth year in succession.

We expect a lot from our service men and women. Fair remuneration is an essential ingredient in maintaining their morale and persuading them to remain in the armed forces. It is reassuring, therefore, that the Armed Forces Pay Review Body welcomed the new pay structure that was introduced last year, and that it was able to report the success of the significant task of transferring personnel to the new pay ranges.

I attach great importance to the work that the Armed Forces Pay Review Body does on behalf of our service men and women. In particular, I welcome its independent status. This gives the review body's views added weight, both inside and outside the Ministry of Defence, and—most important—with service personnel themselves.

Secondly, we recognise the fact that frequent overseas deployments pose significant challenges to our people and their families. Young men and women who are attracted to joining the armed forces by the prospect of adventure and travel often find that less appealing as they grow older, settle down and take on family responsibilities.

We are therefore working hard to try to reduce the stresses and difficulties associated with service life. For example, the service families taskforce was set up in 1999 to act as a central focus for family issues and to liaise with other Government Departments on issues outside the Ministry of Defence's immediate control. Recent advances on issues involving health and education and on clarification on eligibility for allowances, particularly for those serving overseas, have been very well received. Useful progress is being made elsewhere. For the first time, for example, the code of practice on schools admissions now makes specific reference to service children.

[Mr. Hoon]

We recognise that the number of operations to which UK service personnel are committed has increased significantly in recent years—an inevitable consequence of the challenges and instabilities that we have faced since the end of the cold war. To ensure that we provide the best possible support to service men and women deployed on operations, and to their families back home, we commissioned a review of operational welfare.

That review was completed in December 1999. It took into account the views of hundreds of service personnel across a wide range of operational theatres, and also drew on lessons learned by our allies. The result was the development of a single, comprehensive operational welfare package.

Experience to date indicates that the operational welfare package has been extremely well received, most recently in Afghanistan, where the harsh conditions have been relieved, in part, by the provision of 20 minutes of weekly telephone call time and of electronic "blueys". Both of these help service personnel to stay in touch with their families. British service personnel have also had access to three UK radio and television channels.

Thirdly, we are addressing those areas where we face particular problems in retaining service men and women. A key example is aircrew, where a recent comprehensive review confirmed that we face serious shortages, notably in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

These shortages are largely the result of the pull from the civilian airlines, dissatisfaction with the management of aircrew and their careers, quality of life issues and the effect of early pensions and gratuities. The services are now urgently addressing these issues. We have also introduced targeted financial retention initiatives aimed at service aircrew. The Armed Forces Pay Review Body recommended that sums of between £30,000 and £50,000 should be paid to retain our most experienced and valued aircrew. Next year, we will introduce new pay arrangements for all professional aviators.

The remuneration and non-remuneration levers that are now being applied are integral parts of a coherent package that is expected to improve aircrew manning levels, although we anticipate that shortfalls will inevitably continue for several years. It is too early to assess the success of these measures, but initial indications are encouraging.

It is also worth noting that the Armed Forces Pay Review Body was impressed by the rigour and comprehensiveness of the aircrew review, and found the remuneration proposals to be a forward-looking and well-targeted approach to addressing the problems that we face.

We will build on the aircrew review and use the same methodology to address manning shortfalls in other areas. A medical manning and retention review and a submariner review are already both

Tony Cunningham (Workington): My right hon. Friend rightly talks about the value of aircrew. Sometimes we forget the incredible job that our RAF pilots do in the no-fly zones over Iraq. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the pilots who, day in, day out, risk their lives trying to protect the people of Iraq—and especially the Kurds in the north of the country—from the tremendous threat posed by Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have had the considerable privilege of visiting both the bases from which our aircrew operate. I have talked to a number of pilots and crew about the hazards that they face and the astonishing skill that they deploy in those operations. I know that the whole House will be grateful to them for the courage that they display and for the job they do in protecting people on the ground in Iraq.

I want to emphasise, however, that we do not rely solely on financial inducements. People are not simply motivated by money, so the recent TOPMAST initiative in the Navy, for example, aims to tackle retention by introducing a more efficient use of manpower and by providing service men and women with more geographic stability and a greater ability to plan their own lives and careers. TOPMAST will also allow better career management, giving "employing units" more involvement in personal development and, where appropriate, in the medical rehabilitation of injured or wounded personnel.

I should also mention the medical quinquennial review, which has just been completed and whose conclusions are being placed in the Library of the House today. The review looked at the functions and organisation of the Ministry of Defence's four medical agencies—the Defence Secondary Care Agency, the Defence Dental Agency, the Defence Medical Training Organisation, and the Medical Supplies Agency—and at other aspects of medical provision.

The review concluded that there must be a clearer focus on the delivery of the two key defence medical outputs—deployable operational medical capability and timely appropriate health care for service personnel. The defence medical services will be realigned and restructured to focus more effectively on those two key outputs. Importantly, we will also establish a stronger partnership between the defence medical services and the national health service. In particular, we will draw on the NHS to strengthen management capabilities throughout the defence medical services.

That is an important area of work. There have been significant improvements in the defence medical services since we announced the new strategy for them in 1998, but there is still a great deal of work to do. The Government are committed to restoring the services' capability and to ensuring that key defence medical outputs are delivered. That will have a significant impact on improving the welfare of our service men and women and their families.

We face a number of challenges in recruiting, retaining and caring for our service men and women. We are working hard to tackle them, but we are not taking these initiatives in isolation. As I have indicated, they fit within the overarching armed forces personnel strategy, which we established two years ago to provide a framework to guide our work across the whole personnel agenda.

The framework encompasses the work that we must do right across the board, from encouraging the young to join up to supporting and remembering former service personnel. Hence the framework's five themes—cultivate, obtain, retain, sustain and remember. It sets out the overall direction that the Department wishes to pursue in

achieving its objectives by good management and care of its people. It also aims to maintain the diversity, identity, and ethos of the single services, because the Royal Navy, the Army, and the Royal Air Force must continue to take the leading responsibility in meeting these challenges.

Mr. Hancock: On the key issue of provision for service families, will the Secretary of State assure the House that the service families taskforce, although highly successful, will receive greater resources? Some of the Defence Committee's recommendations have still not been implemented, such as setting transparent targets for education, social health and housing so that families can see what should be achieved. Will the Secretary of State consider introducing greater transparency in the way evaluations for service personnel are carried out and how they interact with TOPMAST? In particular, will he consider the resentment that many service personnel have about Pay 2000 and the fact that the evaluations were not addressed?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman touches on significant issues, some of which I dealt with when I emphasised the importance of families as well as the careers of service men and women. However, I repeat that the work of the taskforce is important and assure the House that we will continue to support its activities. I will give careful consideration to any recommendations made by the Defence Committee that have not been fully or properly implemented.

Mr. Francois: I have a specific point to raise. One thing that infuriates service personnel is that units are often rotated in the summer and by the time they get the address for their new posting it is nigh on impossible to get their children a school place for the start of the school year. That has been a long-running problem for several years. Although the Government say that they will do more to address it, according to anecdotal evidence whatever they have tried is not working. Will they reconsider the problem and try even harder to solve it?

Mr. Hoon: I am well aware of the difficulty and it has exercised my mind for some time. That is why I welcome the changes involving the Department for Education and Skills, and we will continue to pursue that matter. However, there is a wider problem of stability, especially for those in the Army, and we need to find ways to give greater certainty on future postings. The Army is considering that carefully. Although I cannot give full details now, I am keen to see that provision in place in future.

Our people are our most prized asset. They make the difference time after time and in place after place, both at home and across the world. They are engaged in operations that involve considerable risk and significant danger. They work in areas where they may be required to face real danger to protect the principles and rights that we at home perhaps too frequently take for granted. They undertake those missions on our behalf with determination, skill and compassion. We owe it to them to do all we can to ensure that they have the right conditions of service, the right support for their families and the right benefits to get the job done. I do not pretend that that is an easy task or that success has come or will come quickly, but I know that we are on the right road and making good progress.

2.13 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother for her incredible service to the armed forces throughout most of her life. I also pay tribute to the armed forces themselves for the supreme effort and achievement of the ceremonial duties that they undertook and performed with such professionalism throughout the period of mourning and the funeral of Her Majesty. We congratulate them on that without qualification. I am sure that the House will agree that they are a wonderful advertisement not just for the armed forces but for this country and for what it stands.

I also thank the Secretary of State for a lengthy but useful speech and for taking so many interventions, which gave rise to helpful exchanges on the personnel problems faced by the armed forces. Before embarking on my remarks, I emphasise that there is much common ground between the Government and Her Majesty's official Opposition. We should build on that for the benefit of the armed forces rather than picking at the areas of disagreement between us. However, I have a job to perform, so I will have to pursue some matters of disagreement.

I thank the Secretary of State for addressing the situation in Afghanistan. I am grateful for the opportunity that he afforded me last week, when the Minister of State and I accompanied members of the Select Committee on a valuable visit from which we learned a great deal. I congratulate 1 Royal Anglian regiment on the supremely professional performance of its duties in Kabul. We went on patrol with C company on the streets of Kabul and I am distressed to hear of the tragedy that has struck it. I join the Secretary of State, as I am sure the whole House does, in extending the company my condolences.

Morale was high when we were there. The regiment was pleased with its new personal role radios and I am glad that it has the communications that it needs to do the job. It undertook proper patrolling by walking the streets of Kabul. Other armies were less bold in getting out of their armoured personnel carriers to meet the public. We can take pride in what that regiment is achieving in difficult circumstances.

The enthusiasm expressed by the population of Kabul for British forces in particular and the international security assistance force in general was obvious. Children ran after us everywhere we went, wanting to shake our hands. Even though they could not speak English, they kept asking, "How are you?" with great enthusiasm. We were impressed by civil-military projects to build relations between ISAF and the population. It was moving to visit a school where so many children were pleased to be returning to education after years of oppression.

It is difficult to assess the threat levels. By day, patrols took place without hard hats or body armour and were greeted with extreme enthusiasm by the local population. By night, however, things were different and our forces had to undertake difficult operations in the curfew. Underlying that is the extraordinary depth of ethnic tension, not just in Afghanistan as a whole but in the city of Kabul itself.

Kabul politics remains a melting pot, and I pay tribute to General McColl and his command team. They demonstrated in their briefings a supreme grasp of the political sense of direction necessary to build on what has

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

been achieved so far, from the Bonn process to the Loya Jirga in the summer, through to the elections two years after that. General McColl has shown extraordinary initiative. For example, he deployed elements of ISAF to help to relieve the disaster caused by the earthquake. That demonstrated for the first time in decades in Afghanistan how the central Government can matter to outlying parts of the country.

The Bonn process remains fraught with difficulties, however. The Interim Administration are dominated by the Tajiks who were dominant in the Northern Alliance. In particular, the Panshiri three—General Fahim, the Defence Minister, Abdullah Abdullah, the Foreign Minister, and Mr. Rabanni—are seen as the main power brokers. Senior Pashtuns were largely excluded from the Interim Administration in Bonn, and the provision in the Bonn agreement to exclude General Fahim's soldiers from the streets of Kabul has not been enforced.

There needs to be a realistic approach to the Loya Jirga in the summer, which in turn needs to reflect a balance between the Tajiks, the Pashtuns and other elements of Afghan society. If a political stalemate arises, there is a danger that the Interim Administration could start to be regarded as a puppet Government kept in power by uninvited foreigners. The rocket attacks mounted by remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, or other extremists, demonstrate that there are forces afoot anxious to capitalise on any discontent with the Interim Administration. Future stability depends on a much more broadly based and ethnically spread administration following the Loya Jirga in the summer, and on the development of the Afghans' own national army, the Afghan national guard. While we were in Kabul, the first battalion of the national guard had its passing-out parade. I regret that I was not present, but I understand that it showed the influence that British armed forces can have on people from any part of the world, whatever their background.

There is a need for realism, and I invite the Government to be realistic. The Secretary of State says that he remains committed to the success of ISAF. Realistically, for ISAF to complete its mission it will need to be there for another two years after the Loya Jirga until the elections that will then take place. That will provide time for training the Afghan national guard to take over from ISAF and to provide security for the whole of Afghanistan. The United States is committed to that project, and we need to be realistic about time frames.

I was disappointed that it was not possible for Members of Parliament on the trip to visit 45 Commando Royal Marines. Nevertheless, I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for keeping me informed about the development of Operation Jacana, and I reiterate the Opposition's support for that operation. Those in 45 Commando are preparing for what can only be described as extremely hazardous operations, and Her Majesty's Opposition stand alongside the Government in facing those risks.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): In talking about hazardous operations and—nearly—about the Royal Marines, does my hon. Friend intend to deal with a very significant development in recent defence announcements that flies in the face of all known military experience and doctrine since the Falklands: the decision no longer to retain the Sea Harriers? That will ensure that if the fleet goes to sea deployed on major operations, it will have no air cover until the new aeroplane is introduced. Given the dangers in Afghanistan that he described, does he agree that to expose an already tiny British fleet to such astonishing and needless danger is extremely foolish?

Mr. Jenkin: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. I had intended to address that at some point in my speech, but I shall do so now. It is an extraordinary decision. It is not, as the Prime Minister claimed yesterday, a result of the Government's strategic defence review—it flies in the face of that. It reflects the Government's difficulties in retaining combat pilots and the Ministry of Defence's difficulties in making ends meet under the current budgetary arrangements, given its existing commitments. It means not that British forces chiefs would put British ships in danger, but that we simply could not deploy our carrier forces into a conflict zone unless air support was provided by another power, presumably the United States.

The decision represents a huge reduction in the expeditionary capability of Her Majesty's forces, which was originally the backbone of what the SDR was intended to address. I think that on reflection the Government will want to revisit it and to preserve the life of the Sea Harrier force until the joint strike fighter comes into operation and can take over that role, as they originally intended in the SDR.

This matter has tangential relevance to the operations that are being undertaken by 45 Commando Royal Marines, because we are deploying a battle group without our own dedicated air support—although Sea Harriers would not be used in a case such as this. We remain concerned that the fact that we are not deploying with our own dedicated air cover means that we are reliant on air cover provided by the United States, which necessarily cannot provide the same integration of command and control that is required in such operations.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pursuing this extremely important point. Is he aware that the armed forces wanted to deploy Harriers in support of these operations, on the ground that we would be a completely deployed force? The aircraft were ready to go and capable of doing the business, but it was decided not to send them—for no reason other than cost.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving that new and extremely relevant information to the House. We have a right to an explanation from the Minister of State when he replies.

Mr. Francois: Before my hon. Friend leaves the issue, there is another point to add. Several years ago, the Sea Harrier force went through an expensive upgrade to give it improved radar and the ability to carry long-range air-to-air missiles. The British taxpayer has invested a great deal of money in upgrading the aircraft to make it more capable, only for it to be taken out of service. There is no logic in that decision.

Mr. Jenkin: We know that the decision was taken on a very short time frame, undoubtedly under pressures of cost. The aircraft will be replaced with a non-marinised

aircraft without radar or an air-to-air capability—indeed, a slower aircraft that could not outrun or catch up with attacking aircraft. I understand the Secretary of State's saying that we are concerned only about mounting ground attack operations off our carriers from now on, but the decision severely limits the role and flexibility of our armed forces and it is unacceptable that the Government have made it.

I reiterate that we wish 45 Commando Royal Marines every success. We have every confidence in their ability and commitment. They and their families will be constantly in our thoughts and prayers in the weeks and months ahead.

Before I leave Afghanistan entirely, this debate is about personnel issues, and I ask the Minister of State to deal with the following points. Both ISAF and Operation Jacana are likely to extend beyond their present operational horizons, and it is fair to ask what plans the Government have made to provide for that extension. We welcome Turkey's commitment to take over the leadership of ISAF, but, as the Secretary of State said, the British commitment will remain significant. There is a need for a realistic tour plot for the roulement of 45 Commando Royal Marines, and perhaps for the continued maintenance in theatre of a battalion to support the continuing activities of ISAF. Why leave it all to the last minute? That has a detrimental effect on retention, as I shall explain later.

Another issue that was raised during the exchanges with the Secretary of State relates to the facilities that our armed forces enjoy while they are in theatre. I was distressed to learn from several people in Kabul that the British forces there are lightheartedly nicknamed "The Flintstones" by their counterparts from other national forces. That is not a comment on our forces' professional ability to do their job, but on what are regarded as the stone age facilities that they live out of compared with those available to other forces. I fully agree with the Secretary of State that there is a balance to be struck and that the speed and lightness with which we can deploy is a key part of our capability. However, it is ultimately a matter of force planning and of how long we are likely to be in theatre. Clearly, other national forces are planning and providing for being in theatre for very much longer. Huge amounts of the Royal Engineers' time and money are used in making do with hand-to-mouth facilities instead of setting up more permanent and efficient washing and toilet facilities. Indeed, such a false economy ultimately affects the personal hygiene and cleanliness of our soldiers. I do not think that British soldiers are going soft, but it is right to report that this welfare issue was raised with us on our visit. We should also raise it in the House.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I apologise for not being present at the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech. However, his comments about ISAF gave me the impression that he envisaged that ISAF might have to continue its presence in Afghanistan for up to two years so that it will be able to train a local army. Does he envisage that the United Kingdom will continue to make a contribution for a period of up to two years?

Mr. Jenkin: I am merely asking the questions, because such issues naturally came to our attention during our visit. It is for the Government to explain what they envisage. At the moment, their proposals are unspecific and they are reluctant to plan for a commitment to ISAF considerably greater than that which they initially indicated they were letting us in for. Such issues need to be addressed to enable the Government to plan for their own purposes. If they do not know what is involved in the commitments, that adds to the problem of overstretch generally in the armed forces and to all the other problems that I am about to discuss. It is not for me to dictate to the Government how long we should stay in Afghanistan, but it is fair enough to point out that the deployment is turning out to be a very much longer-term commitment than the one that they originally indicated. However, I do not wish to dwell excessively on that point.

Four years ago, the Government said that tackling overstretch—I use that word because they used it—would be one of the key elements of the strategic defence review. In June 1997, the then Secretary of State for Defence promised:

"The problem of overstretch will be seriously addressed".—[*Official Report*, 16 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 5.]

Announcing the strategic defence review in July 1998, he said:

"Unlike other recent reviews, this review is designed to put people first."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 1075.]

The Secretary of State alluded to that point earlier.

The Government said that one of the most important elements of SDR was its "Policy for People". In the documents supporting SDR, they said:

"Addressing the personnel problems that affect the Armed Forces will take time, trust and money. Trust needs to be earned and will only arise from the delivery of tangible improvements in overstretch and undermanning."

In the SDR, the Government set out their policy and views on the problem of overstretch. They said:

"We need to solve the problems of undermanning and additional overstretch which come from over-commitment. Undermanning—that is when units are not up to planned strengths—is one of the causes of overstretch. Individuals with undermanned units have to do more and, particularly for operations, individual reinforcements have to be brought in from other units. Unsurprisingly the additional pressures from consistent overstretch contribute to higher exit rates thus adding to manning difficulties".

I could not agree more. The SDR added:

"We need to break this vicious circle. To do so we must match the commitments we undertake to our planned resources".

Four years after the SDR, it is clear that the Government have not stuck to their declared policy.

It is also clear that the Government have failed so far in their bid to cure the undermanning problem. As at 1 February 2002, there was a shortfall of 7,477 personnel against the currently assessed in-year requirement for UK trained army personnel. Figures from the Defence Analytical Services Agency show the decline in UK regular forces, including both trained and untrained personnel. Between April 1997 and February 2002, the number of trained officers fell by 804 while the number of trained other ranks fell by 10,800.

The immediate impact is clear. A Tornado air defence squadron was disbanded this year because of lack of pilots, and the RAF said that the mothballing was caused by "pilot shortages". It should have 1,484 pilots, but it is 131 short of that figure. We also know that the units being sent to Northern Ireland are not at full strength and that Royal Navy warships put to sea regularly without their full complement.

[Mr. Jenkin]

Recruiting is fairly strong, and I pay tribute to the Ministry of Defence for getting quite near to its target. Its performance report tells us that the forces achieved 90 per cent. of the overall recruitment target in 2000–01, against 96 per cent. for 1999–2000. The report adds that recruitment shortfalls were experienced in all three services.

The real problem, however, is retention. In Defence questions on 11 February, the Minister responsible for the armed forces said at column 15 that the trend for retention was "upwards". Yet across all three services in 2000–01, more personnel left than joined the armed forces, and more people left than joined in each of the preceding three years.

Under the SDR, the Army was supposed to increase in size by 3,300 men. In 1998, the whole Army strength was 109,800. In 2001, it was 109,500 but now we hear that the Government have reduced their SDR target for the Army. A document leaked to *The Daily Telegraph* last month shows that the target of a 108,500-strong Army set by the Government in 1998 has been reduced by 1,500. Can the Government confirm whether that is correct? If it is true, it is a very sorry state of affairs.

Mr. Francois: That is two battalions.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend says that that is equivalent to two battalions and, in effect, that means short changing every battalion in the British Army because the Government, rightly, cannot face the prospect of axing whole battalions.

During the general election campaign, I recall that the Labour party attacked the Conservatives' commitment to make full manning a priority, saying that that would cost £1.3 billion. That claim was later denied by the Secretary of State for Defence, and perhaps we can now see why. It is difficult for the Government to meet their manning targets.

We need to ask why the forces are suffering such terrible retention problems. It is clear that one of the main factors is overcommitment. The Armed Forces Pay Review Body noted in its 2002 report that the level of armed forces commitments remained "high". It pointed out that in November 2001, 31 per cent. of the armed forces were committed to operations. At the height of the Kosovo operation, the figure was 89 per cent. of Land Command. In autumn 2000, 34 per cent. of the naval services front-line manpower strength was engaged directly in operations, and the Secretary of State has pointed out that today, 28 per cent. of the Army is committed to operations. That compares with the planning assumption in the SDR of 20 per cent.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): In the unlikely event that the hon. Gentleman found himself in government tomorrow, which of those commitments would his Government cut back on?

Mr. Jenkin: Labour Members are programmed to ask that question, and I am happy to fantasise about being Secretary of State tomorrow. However, I have better things to do.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day".

The Secretary of State should watch out. The truth is that no Government would be in a position to axe arbitrarily existing commitments. The question is the rate at which commitments are taken on, and we are periodically sceptical about the enthusiasm with which the Prime Minister spreads our forces around the globe on peacekeeping activities when the Ministry of Defence is not funded for such a high level of operations.

Mr. Jones *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

Mr. Keetch: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I will.

Mr. Keetch: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If he cannot tell the House what commitments the Conservative party would axe in the unlikely event of its coming to power, will he tell us the Opposition's policy on the defence budget? Are they committed to the defence budget remaining at its current level, to increasing it or to increasing it at above the rate of inflation? Will he explain their policy on that?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is so utterly predictable—I debated with myself whether it would be worth giving way to him. We do not anticipate becoming the Government next week or next month, and it is the Government's declared policy, which I quoted from their SDR, that they would match their capabilities and their commitments. They are failing to do so. The hon. Gentleman may not be part of the official Opposition—I am, and I am entitled to point that out.

On 10 February 2002, the Secretary of State for Defence admitted:

"We are operating at the limits of our capabilities and it is important that it is recognised that there is a limit to what we can achieve. We're certainly stretched."

That indicates how stretched the elastic is in his Department. It comes as no consolation to know that he made that statement before the deployment of 1,700 Royal Marines to Afghanistan.

In its report, "Policy for People", the Select Committee on Defence noted that the continuous attitude surveys, which assess satisfaction with service life, showed that separation from family and its effects on relationships and the inability to plan one's life consistently scored high as reasons for leaving the services in surveys of leavers. The key point about retention is the need to restore the quality of life of our service men.

During the Committee's inquiry, the Army Families Federation said:

"The expeditionary nature of current deployment has significantly altered the way of life for Army families: separation has increased dramatically. The Army must establish a reasonable expectation for time families spend together, and fulfil the expectation".

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will clarify something for me. If the Defence Committee suggests in a forthcoming report that the defence budget should be increased to 3 per cent. of gross

domestic product, would he allow his defence spokesman, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who is also a member of the Select Committee, to sign that report?

Mr. Jenkin: I would draw the relevant paragraph to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor.

Most recently, the commander of the British marines arriving in Afghanistan warned of the strain that their heavy schedule is placing on his men's families. The commanding officer of 45 Commando said that there were consequences to the constant demands on his forces' time and hoped that, when the operation was complete, his men might be granted some quality time. On 4 April, he told the *Financial Times:*

"A year ago we came back from Kosovo and reformed to a new organisation of battle, early July we did a UK-based exercise, then we went to Oman. From mid-November to mid-December we did mountain training, then short notice embarkation, and then Afghanistan."

He added:

"The last time we had time to catch breath was a long time ago. We can do the job, but families and friends are the ones who bear the brunt."

That officer's words demonstrate graphically how overcommitment can lead to people leaving the forces.

Obviously, with 10,000 fewer personnel than we left the Secretary of State in 1997, the pressure on those remaining in the services increases. At the same time as the number of commitments has been increasing, the budget has been reduced by around £1 billion a year in real terms. Those cuts have a real impact on morale. The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Peter Squire, has said:

"I recognise the sense of frustration in having to make do and mend with inadequate resources, particularly at home bases. We support people well on operations, but, frequently when they get back, they find there are not enough spares . . . frustration worries people and puts the question in their minds of how long to give the Air Force before moving on to a second career."

The Minister must be in no doubt of the impact that those continued cuts are having on the forces. There has been widespread dismay, particularly at the withdrawal of the Sea Harriers, as has been mentioned.

In any personnel policy, training has a central and important part to play. Training is what suffers most as a result of overcommitment. I noted with alarm a recent written answer that revealed that in the past 24 months, 84 exercises have been cancelled, many because of commitments to operations or because of financial restrictions. Five were cancelled directly because of a lack of funding and 36 were cancelled because of operational commitments. It has even emerged that the Secretary of State for Defence wanted to cancel Britain's biggest post-cold war exercise—Saif Sareea 2, recently completed in Oman—to save £93 million, but was overruled by the Prime Minister on the advice of military chiefs.

I have not forgotten that two years ago the Royal Marines annual arctic warfare course was cancelled through lack of funding. Fortunately, it was reinstated in 2000–01, because the skills learned and honed by the Marines in those exercises directly relate to their duties in Afghanistan.

Mr. Dalyell: Week after week, some of us listen to the assertions from the Leader of the Opposition that he is enthusiastic for military action against Iraq. Who will take that action in the circumstances?

Mr. Jenkin: I do not think that we are enthusiastic for military action against Iraq, but unlike the hon. Gentleman, we do not think that we should rule out options against Iraq, as that would be contrary to the Government's foreign policy and contrary to the interests of the free world.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): The hon. Gentleman has said that he is in favour of joint exercises. Is he in favour of Britain continuing the joint exercises that have taken place in the United States with the Israeli air force and the Americans?

Mr. Jenkin: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman address that question to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I personally think that Israel is not a rogue state in the same category as Iraq, and it is a mistake to try to pretend that it is a case of six of one and a half a dozen of the other.

Skill fade inevitably occurs when units are on operations, particularly peacekeeping operations, because they cannot maintain their training for their assigned roles back home. They cannot train on tanks or artillery if they are peacekeeping. That shows how overcommitment can directly degrade fighting capability.

The Secretary of State addressed many of the questions that he was asked about the Territorial Army. With the Government now seemingly scaling back their plans for the size of the Army, we must not forget that they have also cut the Territorial Army by 18,000 men. That move never made any sense, especially as the TA provides a valuable avenue of recruitment for the Army and, in supporting the regulars, can relieve some of the effects of overstretch.

I was somewhat heartened to hear that the Secretary of State said in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph* that, in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks on America, he was glad that the TA had not been fully cut from its previous strength of 56,000 to the 41,200 set by the defence review. Although I was pleased at his apparent conversion, I am afraid to tell him that the TA is, in fact, well below its SDR target. Perhaps he can tell us today whether he has plans to increase the TA's establishment. If not, can he at least clarify his position?

Another important factor in retention is the standard of service accommodation. Following the sale of married quarters by the MOD to Annington Homes in 1996, the Conservatives gave a commitment to service families that their quarters would be upgraded to grade 1 condition by autumn 2003. Some £470 million of the £1.6 billion proceeds of the sale was allocated for that purpose. However, pressure on the defence budget has forced the MOD to delay the upgrade programme by two years, until 2005.

Bob Russell: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the rushed sale by the outgoing Conservative Government,

[Bob Russell]

which raised £1.7 billion, represented good value for money? Does he think that, out of that £1.7 billion, only £100 million was sufficient to upgrade the housing stock?

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is a shame that the Government did not honour the commitment that we made before we left office, and that they have scaled back the commitment to the development of the defence housing stock. The Army Families Federation has said that soldiers are driven to leave the service by intolerable living conditions, so I would be grateful if the Government could report to the House on the progress being made in upgrading service housing.

The Pay 2000 initiative has worthy roots but unfortunately, it is also proving a source of resentment. Strange discrepancies have been thrown up. For example, a farrier in the Veterinary Corps is paid less than a farrier in the Royal Armoured Corps. An explosive ordnance disposal specialist—someone who carries out highly dangerous operations—can be paid less than a chef. I would be grateful if the Minister could pay close attention to those potential problems, as resentment about such cases could become a "pull factor" for many personnel.

There are many other matters that I could raise, such as pensions and defence medical services, but I conclude by saying that I think that the Government agree that people must be at the forefront of their defence policy.

On a positive note, they have implemented a number of good measures to improve service conditions and welfare. I welcome those. In particular, I welcome the guaranteed period of post-operational tour leave to enable service men and women to spend some quality time with their families following an operational deployment. However, I wonder how much that is being respected. Also welcome are improvements to welfare packages on deployment, and financial retention inducements, for fast jet pilots in particular.

All too often, however, despite the Government's warm words, people in the forces feel that they are being given a raw deal. It is not just the official Opposition who say that; service personnel say it themselves. All too often, I hear that morale is lower than it has ever been. That is why retention is suffering, and why our forces are in the vicious circle of undermanning.

I call on Ministers to pay careful attention to the problems that I have outlined, and, more importantly, to continue their best efforts to do something about them. We wait with bated breath for the Budget, following the Prime Minister's remarks in the House yesterday. However, the words that ring in our ears are those of the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie, who said that the strategic defence review was underfunded from the start.

2.52 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): I shall make a few brief remarks. The subject of military housing has been raised, and although I may be wrong—I do not think I am—I recollect that when the properties were initially sold, the then Secretary of State for Defence was challenged by his then shadow about whether the Government would guarantee the present level of expenditure on maintaining houses. The Secretary of State would not say. If we were to spread the £100 million or so over seven years, providing about £16 million a year, the expenditure on maintenance would be reduced, and that is exactly what the Government of the day did. The previous level of expenditure was not guaranteed. The Government who sold the houses—at a pretty low price, and gaining a pretty small benefit—talked about a figure of £100 million, which was meaningless.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) asked about the figures, and asked why we were still short of however many thousand people. The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) mentioned the figure of 7,000, and that may be accurate; I do not know. The shortfall, in troops at least, has been about 5,000 or 6,000 since the mid-1990s—perhaps even earlier.

No one would disagree that there is a clear correlation between a strong economy and difficulty in recruiting troops. That has been true not only in the post-war era but throughout Britain's history. When there are jobs around it is difficult to recruit, and it is easier to recruit when there is a weak economy.

We need 25,000 people for the services every year. We do have shortfalls, and because of the immense recruitment requirement, a drop of a few per cent. is reflected in very large numbers, which is why—

Mr. Francois: The hon. Gentleman is contradicting those on his Front Bench. They are arguing that recruitment is quite healthy, and on one level they may be right. Recruitment itself is not the problem. The problem is retention—not bringing people into the forces but keeping them there.

Mr. Joyce: I would, of course, hesitate to disagree with my Front-Bench colleagues. Recruitment is extremely successful, and I shall say more about that later, but I also agree with the point about retention. There is a slight shortfall in recruitment, but more than 90 per cent. of the requirement is achieved, and that should be a cause for modest celebration. It is pretty good, given the strength of the economy.

I was reflecting on what the Conservative Government's strategy to improve recruitment had been, and then I suddenly realised. Recruitment is hard if we have a strong economy, so perhaps it was the plan of successive Conservative Chancellors to mess the economy up completely, so as to make it easier for the military to recruit. I suddenly realised that there was a cunning plan—but it was unsuccessful.

Recruitment levels at present are something to be quite proud of, and there have been some successful initiatives, but there is an ongoing trickiness, and it may continue for some time to come. None the less, we should be pleased that we are achieving more than 90 per cent. of our target.

I have raised the issue of ethnic minorities before, and I had the privilege of working briefly at the Commission for Racial Equality, so I know that it thought that the Army's efforts over the last five years had been quite impressive. A doubling of the number of people from ethnic minorities coming through the doors in the last three years is a pretty good result.

I suspect that the new census will reflect the fact that there are far more people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the recruitment zone now, and that will

continue. The question is: why is it so difficult to raise those figures even higher? There has to be some responsibility on the other side of the equation now: the wider society, such as schools and so forth, should stress to members of the ethnic minorities the benefits of joining the Army. Ethnic minority communities themselves have to consider more seriously career options in the military and the armed services as a whole.

When I talk to people from ethnic minority backgrounds I sense that they sometimes make the mistake of bracketing the armed services with the police. That is wrong. Whatever reasons there may be for the perceptions about joining the police among people from ethnic minority backgrounds—some of those perceptions may be right, some may be wrong—the armed services are different. The time has come for other bodies—not the Ministry of Defence, but other agencies, schools and ethnic minority leaders themselves—to start to make that distinction and encourage people to join the services.

Until the early to mid-1990s, several different parts of the Army divisions ran 14-week potential officer courses. Most of those were cut—possibly for good reasons, possibly not—in the early to mid-1990s by the previous Government. There was probably a cost-benefit analysis.

To a certain extent, those courses at least represented some kind of positive action. Some people were quite talented and capable of being good officers, but may have been missing in one or two respects, so they were given an extra course, after which they could go to the Regular Commissions Board, and by then many of them had been brought up to standard.

In the Army today, at the Adjutant-General's Corps centre at Worthy Down in Winchester, there are two courses that have such an effect. One is the pre-RMAS course and the other is the potential officer development course. Both are excellent, and they are probably the last courses that are vaguely akin to positive action. The main difference is that, unlike what happens with positive discrimination—which would, of course, be unlawful—people have to be brought up to the required standard and are then tested with their peers. If they do not come up to the standard then, they are not accepted.

It seems to me that there might be scope for some linkage of those courses with the under-representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds. I wonder whether, in a course such as the pre-RMAS course, there would be scope for encouraging more such people. The Minister might like to say something about that when he sums up.

My final point has been brought to my attention by a couple of my constituents, ex-service personnel, who have come to me over the past year. Other Members with more experience than I may have come across the subject more often. Some areas have fewer council houses than others. Mine has a large number. In some parts of the country council houses are disappearing altogether. In Glasgow they will all go; in Birmingham they will not. For the moment, at any rate, there are 22,000 in the council area that I serve.

Historically, when people left the services they were given extra points that enabled them to be pretty well guaranteed a council house. That does not seem to happen now. It is no longer the case with my council, and I am not sure whether it is in other parts of the country. That is one modest idea that the Ministry of Defence could pursue. We could raise awareness among councils. Ultimately, it is a policy issue for the councils themselves, but in terms of resettlement, it is an idea that we could helpfully press. I am only mentioning it briefly, but the Minister may want to comment on it in his summing up.

2.59 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I associate myself with the Secretary of State's remarks concerning Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother and her association with the armed forces, and with his commendation of all the members of the armed forces who played such an important role in the funeral on Tuesday. I watched it from the House, as I am sure many hon. Members did, and it was a remarkable ceremonial. Our forces performed their duty with great honour and dignity. They were a credit to the armed forces and this country, and indeed to the monarchy.

I thank the Secretary of State for the conversations that I have had with him over the past few days concerning Turkey and the deployment of 45 Commando in Operation Jacana. We welcome the news that Turkey is taking over. We understand the reasons for the slippage. We believe that it is better that the international security assistance force and Operation Jacana should be seen through to the end. It is important that the gains that have been made so far are secured.

Although I totally understand the need not in any way to give details of the rules of engagement, I hope that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will assure the House when summing up that arrangements between our forces and the Pakistani forces for areas on both sides of the border will end as much as possible its crossing by al-Qaeda and Taliban rebels.

I enjoyed the speech of the Conservative defence spokesman, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin); it was very good. I was especially interested in his apparent lack of enthusiasm, compared with that of the leader of his party, on any action in Iraq. I read a pamphlet written by the Leader of the Opposition, "A Race Against Time", which states:

"a regime change is highly desirable and should be accomplished swiftly . . . There should be no doubt: Saddam must go".

Mr. Jenkin: Of course there is no difference between me and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I agree with him that a regime change in Iraq is desirable—and the swifter the better. We support the Prime Minister; does the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Keetch: I am very glad that there is no difference between the hon. Gentleman and the leader of his party. The Liberal Democrats have made our position absolutely clear. If there is to be any action against Iraq, it must be taken by the international community under proper United Nations authority—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should curtail their excitement over the validity of my speech. If there is real and definable evidence, of course we would not rule anything out, but we certainly do not have the apparent enthusiasm of some to commit our forces around the world willy-nilly.

I am glad to have this opportunity to debate armed forces personnel. Many facets of Britain's defence policy require debate in this Chamber, but it is surely of paramount importance that we discuss the men and

[Mr. Keetch]

women who put their lives on the line in the defence of this nation. Members of the armed forces are the greatest resource that we possess, not just for the defence of our nation but for the protection of the ideals that we hold so dear. As has been said by Members of all parties, we must look after them properly. I suggest that the care that we take in looking after our armed forces personnel is at the very heart of the problems that we are debating: overstretch, recruitment and retention.

I for one welcome the recruitment initiatives that the Government have already taken. If they help to bring the manning levels in the services back up to those required, they are to be supported. I fear, however, that it is simply not possible to solve the problems of undermanning with a few recruitment agency initiatives. Our armed forces require better conditions and a greater understanding of their modern needs and those of their families. We must remember that even a significant increase in the rate of recruitment to the armed forces cannot replace the years of experience that are lost every time a long-serving member leaves.

On 1 January this year, the shortfall in trained strength stood at 6,059 in the Army, 2,189 in the Royal Navy and 1,149 in the Royal Air Force. However, it is in the specialist areas which the Secretary of State mentioned that the problem is greatest. For example, critical shortages in the defence medical services have been well publicised. There is an 81 per cent. shortfall in deployable accredited surgeons and an 80 per cent. shortfall in deployable accredited anaesthetists. There are also dramatic shortages of nurses in the armed forces. There is a 95 per cent. shortfall in burns and plastics nurses and a 75 per cent. shortfall in accident and emergency nurses, and there are only about half the number of nurses required for general nursing duties.

It is of course the case, as the Secretary of State and the Minister of State would argue, that many of those shortages had already occurred by the time they came to power. The cuts made by the previous Conservative Administration certainly left a legacy, but I can reveal today as a result of responses to questions that I have asked that there is a tremendous gap in our reserve medical services as well.

Our reserve medical reserves are widely used to plug the gaps in the regular defence medical services. The regular Army has only three field hospitals, but such is the shortfall of trained staff that currently only one and a half field hospitals could be deployed using regular forces. To staff the three that would be required, reservists and ex-service personnel with what is known as recall liability would [illegible] be added.

The Territorial Army is supposed to be able to provide 11 field hospitals to support the regular Army. The defence medical services strategy for the future, which was proudly launched in 1998, said:

"A significant SDR announcement was that an extra 2,000 TA personnel would be assigned to the Army Medical Service."

I ask the Minister of State: where are those 2,000 extra personnel?

TA Army medical service manning is even more appalling than regular manning: 201 field hospital, for example, is 34 per cent. undermanned. It has a 90 per cent. shortfall in medical consultants. It has no radiology or pathology consultants, and no neurosurgical nurses either. 202 field hospital is 53 per cent. undermanned, with no anaesthetics consultants, no radiographers and no burns nurses.

Such figures make depressing reading. Current reservist manning would limit the Army to approximately only two of the 11 TA field hospitals that it is supposed to deploy. So—from a strategic defence review target of 14 deployable field hospitals, we could muster only five at a push. It is no wonder that the Army now relies on the medical services of our allies when we deploy overseas. It may not be long before these shortfalls mean that we have to say no to certain missions because we cannot provide the medical support that our troops require.

I invite the Minister to comment on the primary casualty receiving ships that were promised in the SDR. The DMS strategy for the future promised that two new ships with a capacity of 220 beds each would be available by 2005 and that they would be purchased under the private finance initiative. However, we are now told that the Chief of the Defence Staff has been advised that the in-service date for one of the ships has slipped from 2005 to 2007, and that the need for the second ship is

"being assessed in line with further operational analysis".

I should like the Minister to comment on when that will be announced, when the slippage will occur and when it will be reviewed. Can we be convinced that "operational analysis" is not simply Treasury-speak for financial analysis?

I welcome the quinquennial review of the medical services, but it is unfortunate that we should again have to remind the Secretary of State, Ministers and other hon. Members of the serious shortages in the defence medical services. However, it is not in that specialist element alone that there are shortages. We also have figures for REME—the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

The figures reveal, for example, that vehicle electricians—those men and women charged with the repair and modification of electrical components on most Army vehicles—are 34 per cent. undermanned. Mechanics are 23 per cent. under strength, and even armourers, who are responsible for inspecting many pieces of weaponry, are 21 per cent. under strength. Such shortages have a direct impact on our frontline capability.

All those figures are unacceptable, and everything possible must be done to remedy them, as I am sure everyone in this Chamber would agree. Such specific shortfalls when combined with overall shortfalls in manning will have a direct impact on the lives of ordinary members of the armed forces. They can mean that some soldiers will be used too much, and others even sometimes used too little, so the optimal interval between tours can slip dramatically.

The SDR suggested that our forces should have at least a 24-month interval between tours. But for the parachute regiment in 2000–01, that interval was only 18 months. In order to retain members of the armed forces we must ensure that undermanning does not have a negative impact on their lives and those of their families. I have commented before on the danger of developing two-tier armed forces—those units that are used a lot, such as the green berets and the red berets, and others that are not.

Unlike the Conservative party, which may not have been preparing its policies, the Liberal Democrats have recently published a strategic defence review.

[Interruption.] That may produce some hilarity among Conservative Members, but I was pleased that the Secretary of State was able to thank me for the comments and to tell me that much of what we had come up with was Government thinking. It is incumbent on those parties that seek to be in government to have their own policies, not just to gripe at the Government of the day.

What was interesting about our proposals was that not only did we consider the kit required by our armed forces, but we spent a great deal of time considering conflict prevention, weapons control and peacekeeping, and policies related to our armed forces personnel. It is important that Oppositions should be ready to criticise the Government where necessary and to come up with proposals of their own.

We understand that factors affecting recruitment and retention are complicated. As the Secretary of State said, with unemployment low, the services must compete for recruits as never before. Careers outside the armed forces can be attractive to service personnel. In order to make service in the armed forces attractive to potential recruits, quality of life, security of employment, pay, pensions, housing and family issues are vital.

Other influences include the perceived status of service people within the larger community, recognition of service training and qualifications in civilian life, and opportunities for lifelong learning during service. Equipment that might be inadequate to the task and leave our personnel vulnerable, or which is late, will have a debilitating effect on morale and retention.

New proposals on service pensions have been put forward. At a time of morale and retention difficulty, any changes to the current arrangements will need to be handled with great care. Liberal Democrats would not support any measure which was perceived as worsening the pension arrangements for service personnel.

In our response to the new chapter, we have offered the Government a number of proposals to improve conditions for the armed forces. There should be a review of the pay formula used by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, and pay should recognise that service life is more dangerous and less stable and can restrict opportunities for partners to work, so we have suggested that the use of bonus systems should be investigated.

To improve on the learning forces initiative that is beginning to pay benefits, we have suggested that an upgraded individual learning account would give service personnel an entitlement to retraining and, when they leave, much greater opportunities for further and higher education.

Providing high quality unaccompanied and family quarters is also important and we would abolish the march in, march out arrangements for the handover of married quarters and replace them with new contract arrangements to prepare housing for new occupants.

Mr. Gray: Opposition Members have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's proposals, although they are not exactly rocket science. Has he costed them? Will he tell us precisely how much they will cost the nation and will it be taken out of the penny on income tax which, at least until recently, was the Liberal Democrats' only taxation policy?

Mr. Keetch: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the proposals are not rocket science. Indeed they are not, but at least we are putting forward proposals, unlike the official Opposition who seem to have nothing to say besides criticising the Government. If Conservative Front-Bench Members will just contain their enthusiasm for my words a little longer, I shall come to the defence budget in due course.

Liberal Democrats would also review moving and relocation allowances to ensure that the total costs to service personnel are adequately covered. The armed forces should, as far as possible, reflect the society that they serve, as the Secretary of State said. Armed forces personnel may be called upon to risk their lives in the service of their country. We accept that the services must have standards, for example of discipline, that differ from society at large in order to meet the special demands of the military. But no one should be subject to unfair discrimination in relation to pay, discipline, accommodation, other benefits and promotion opportunities.

Despite some small improvements, ethnic minorities still make up only 1.7 per cent. of the armed forces. It is clear that a career in the armed forces does not appeal to the youth of the ethnic minorities in Britain. High-profile initiatives to root out racism in the armed forces are welcome, but Liberal Democrats suggest that outreach and recruitment programmes run by the MOD in the ethnic minority communities should include a drive for cadet membership among young people.

The MOD continues to review the role of service women in the armed forces. Despite significant progress in the number of women serving and in widening the range of jobs open to women, some front-line positions remain closed. Liberal Democrats believe that no post should be closed to male or female personnel provided that they can meet the physical and mental requirements of the task.

Ensuring high standards of welfare for the families of service personnel is central to securing high levels of retention. The reason for departure most cited in the continuous attitude survey for service leavers is the effect on family life. It is therefore imperative for the efficient running of our armed forces that social, educational and recreational facilities for service men and women and their families be actively supported.

We offer our support to the service families taskforce and what it has done so far. We should like to see a service families officer on every base and we should like to see that implemented soon, but we support the Government in what they have done.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The hon. Gentleman mentioned pensions and I should be interested to know whether Liberal Democrat policy is to maintain cost neutrality, as appears to be the Government's policy—or have they not established a position on that yet?

Mr. Keetch: The short answer is yes, we would support cost neutrality.

Yesterday we heard of the proposed action by Kenyan tribesmen in relation to unexploded ordnance left by British forces. The Secretary of State is concerned that yesterday I referred in the media to the role of civil servants. I was wrong to criticise civil servants directly. Civil servants cannot reply and I apologise to them, but I

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have to say that the suggestion yesterday that a deal might be struck by MOD lawyers is just another round of litigation.

The MOD was taken to the European Court of Human Rights before it would give compensation to gay men and lesbian women who have been wrongly dismissed. The MOD was forced to pay £60 million in compensation to service women obliged to leave the forces on the grounds of pregnancy. We have also heard of the cases relating to equal pension rights for Gurkhas, soldiers who caught malaria in Sierra Leone and the tax on service pensions blunder.

Ministers must realise that there is a difference between being prudent and sensible with resources and being seen by some as an uncaring regime, never assuming responsibility and never saying that one is wrong. It is no wonder that there are acute problems with undermanning in the armed forces when in some cases the public image of the MOD is of an intransigent and unbending organisation that never admits its mistakes. I hope that the Secretary of State will look at the way in which his Department deals with compensation actions, particularly in relation to taking care of our service men and women and their families.

Some of the changes to personnel policy that I have outlined could be made easily while others would require greater expense. With the results of the comprehensive spending review looming, I must add that the Liberal Democrats are committed to maintaining our defence capabilities, even if that means a real increase in defence spending. Improving standards for our armed forces and resolving the crises of overstretch and undermanning are important aspects of maintaining that capability.

It is important to say that a career in the armed forces remains an incredibly attractive and deeply worthwhile option for our young men and women. I am sure that no hon. Member would wish to discourage anyone from pursuing that career, but it is important that any flaws in personnel policy and any possible solutions should be discussed in the House.

In a debate on armed forces personnel, it is right to conclude by saying once again that our armed forces perform an incredibly difficult job with remarkable skill and courage. However, if we are to maintain our capability and the extraordinarily high regard in which our armed forces are held throughout the world, we must ensure that their unflinching commitment to us is matched by our unflinching commitment to them.

3.20 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I shall focus my remarks on one issue in my constituency: the effect on the personnel at the Clyde submarine base of the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to privatise the warship support modernisation programme. I am hugely disappointed about the implications for Faslane, not least because the decision was taken without a rational basis. The MOD issued a general statement to the effect that there was overcapacity in the four yards, but no effort has been made to define that overcapacity in Faslane. The MOD said that savings of £250 million to £300 million were required, but again, no further insight into how those savings were to be made was put on the agenda.

What has been on the agenda since 1997 is privatisation. The issue has a long history; indeed, after the Government came to office in June 1997, the privatisation of catering services in Faslane was announced. The initiative was known as HMS Neptune.

Along with the trade unions and the work force, I petitioned the then Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, now my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We realised that savings had to be made, but we asked him and the MOD why they could not be made in-house. The unions and I made proposals at a meeting with him at the MOD. As a result, he overturned the decision proposed by MOD officials and made HMS Neptune in-house. Consequently, we have had target savings every year since.

The trade unions undertook the same exercise this time round, but it was rejected. The experience has been bitter for the work force and for me, especially with regard to the successful prosecution of HMS Neptune and my efforts to ensure that the MOD allowed itself sufficient time to examine the benchmark proposals made by the trade unions in Faslane. I have met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a number of times to discuss the matter, but to date, I have received no detailed explanation of why the Government are taking this way forward, other than the notion of the £250 million saving. The work force, the trade unions and I accept that continuation of the status quo is not an option. The problem is the manner in which the decision was made and the way in which it was handled.

I am not one of those who say that the Government are arrogant—a notion that has been put abroad. We are not arrogant, but arrogance can certainly be detected in the way in which the MOD has gone about its business in this case. Let me explain. On the weekend of Saturday 23 March, the media trailed the story that there would be 1,000 job losses in Faslane. They did so in Scotland in particular, but also throughout the UK. The story ran the whole weekend, but there was no MOD response and no explanation was given, so it grew legs. No contact was made with the Members of Parliament who had a vital constituency interest. All that was said by the media and across the wires at the weekend was that a statement would be made on Monday.

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Does my hon. Friend accept that a statement was to be made on the basis of a parliamentary question? The fact that a breach of confidence occurred somewhere in our discussions is not a matter for the Ministry of Defence. If I or any of my colleagues had proceeded to take on the debate before the House had been advised, we would have been criticised as having inspired the leak. I must make it clear to my hon. Friend—I hope that he accepts the sincerity of my remarks—that the decision was taken not to enter the debate over the weekend or to engage with individual Members of Parliament because we were giving due respect to the House of Commons.

Mr. McFall: I accept my right hon. Friend's integrity, having worked with him in a ministerial capacity. However, I do not accept his explanation. The MPs should have been consulted, if for no other reason than to knock down the supposition that 1,000 jobs were at stake. Furthermore, it was disrespectful to make no statement in the House. The loss of 1,000 jobs in the UK is a big issue,

especially on a project that has been running for two or three years, and on which MPs, trade unions, the work force and others have been negotiating with the MOD. I see what happened as a mark of disrespect and a discourtesy to the House.

The letter of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, which was produced at 3.30 pm on the day in question, gave rise to further fears, as it was so thin that people could not find the details. It stated:

"Both the company and naval base management are reviewing levels of employment across all levels of naval base as arrangements bed in."

The letter refers merely to "all levels", giving no indicative number or indeed any idea that a number would be set. Neither is any idea given of the phasing of the privatisation or possible job losses—a matter that has a long history.

What happened was a discourtesy to the House and the MPs with vital constituency interests, and also to the work force, whose fears were heightened. I feel that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not play fair, and I have written to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explaining my position and asking him to seriously consider the matter. Relationships between Departments and MPs need to be much better. At the Faslane base, there was a huge sense of betrayal, as a result of which, as my right hon. Friend the Minister knows, industrial action was proposed.

People are incensed about the treatment of this loyal and committed work force, who have existed in the area for 40 years. It is shameful that workers are being kept in the dark on the plans to transfer staff contracts to Babcock Naval Services. I suggest that Ministers must address the issue swiftly and clearly. With ministerial approval, for which I thank my right hon. Friend, I am meeting all the trade unions in Faslane on Monday morning. I will meet the naval representatives and, I hope, Mr. John Howie, managing director of Babcock Naval Services.

The meeting is being held not only to assuage the fears of the work force, but to ensure that there is a comprehensive list of questions that must be addressed by the MOD and Babcock Naval Services, and which I want to convey to my right hon. Friend next week. My colleague Jackie Baillie has raised the matter in the Scottish Parliament and has a commitment from the First Minister on retraining and keeping the skills in our area as much as possible. West Dumbarton and Argyll has been an area of comparatively high unemployment over the years, so we can ill afford to lose jobs. We must do everything we can to ensure that there is no employment haemorrhage.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister had a meeting yesterday with the industrial and non-industrial trade union representatives. From what I am told, I believe that the meeting was very helpful, although there is a long way to go. My right hon. Friend will be aware that the trade unions are stepping up their campaign against privatisation and for workers' rights, and laying out a triple challenge to the MOD. First, they ask that the Select Committee on Defence and the Public Accounts Committee scrutinise the proposals. The trade unions have not been informed why their proposal was not acceptable or successful. In the name of decency, that explanation should be undertaken.

The second challenge is to establish proper consultation, so that the trade unions and the work force can challenge the detail of the MOD's plans, rather than simply going along with the MOD's current debriefing proposals. A few months ago, a global savings figure of £250 million was mentioned, but according to a written answer from the Minister of State, that figure is now £300 million. To people who, unlike us, are not privy to detailed information, that seems like a shot in the dark.

The third challenge is that, if privatisation is to go ahead, there must be guarantees for the future of the work force. I am delighted to note that John Coles, chief executive of the Warship Support Agency, will be called before the Defence Committee on 23 April. However, Ministers owe it to workers at the bases to give them the opportunity to participate in the process, and to answer questions, so that fears can be assuaged.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I share the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend, as the Plymouth community also feels that it has not been given full consideration. I appreciate that the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on Defence will be looking at the issue, but does my hon. Friend agree that putting all our eggs in one basket is dangerous, particularly if the initiative results in men transferring to—in the case of Plymouth—Devonport Management Ltd.? We may live to rue the day when that happens.

Mr. McFall: Exactly—we need to adopt a very sensitive approach to the issue. In the 1980s, I pointed out that Faslane was a highly sensitive base, and that we need the utmost assurances on security. The work force have been loyal and committed, and no-strike agreements have been established, which ensure that working practices are implemented 365 days a year. Such details must be taken into account, and I suggest that Ministers visit the bases. The Secretary of State has been invited to Portsmouth and Plymouth, and I should be happy to accompany the Minister of State on a visit to Faslane.

A letter to the Faslane work force from John Howie, chief executive of Babcock Naval Services—stating that there will be no significant change in the next year—has to some extent allayed their concerns. If change were to take place almost immediately, it would have a destabilising influence, but why was such information not made available in past few weeks, so that people could understand what lay ahead?

The trade unions have rightly asked for guarantees from the MOD in five areas: pay, conditions, pensions, redundancy entitlements and—importantly—non-compulsory redundancies. The work force should not be sold short, and relationships need to be restored. That is why, with the Minister's permission, I am holding a meeting at the base on Monday morning. Future relationships should be characterised by empathy with workers' interests and concerns; by communication, so that they know about everything that is going to happen as soon as possible; and—last but not least—by gratitude for the work that they have undertaken in the past 40 years in this highly sensitive area.

The need for change is recognised, but we must undertake it in a spirit of co-operation. That is the least that the Government can do to show gratitude to the work force and to the region for 40 years of dedicated service to the naval industry.

3.34 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): It is entirely fitting that this week, perhaps more than any other, we should debate the role, interests and future of our service men and women. In the past seven days we have seen again how their professionalism and organisation have in many ways put the "great" back into Britain. My only regret is that they do not run the railways.

Of course, those same people have by now returned to their daily duties—to the front line in the United Kingdom and abroad. That front line is now stretched to its limit. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) pointed out, the ranks have declined by nearly 11,000, and since 1997 the number of trained officers has fallen by almost 800. According to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, the Army alone is short of nearly 500 officers and almost 6,000 soldiers. With operational commitments continuing at high levels, that shortfall inevitably puts additional pressure on those who remain. Indeed, as the Secretary of State pointed out at the beginning of the debate, nearly a third of all service personnel are engaged in operational commitments. That figure cannot be sustained in perpetuity.

Other Members have chosen to examine the immediate problem of shortages and the challenge of retaining serving personnel. For my own part, I should like to focus on two other aspects: the quality of life for service personnel, particularly those in single living accommodation, and recruitment and retention for the next generation of service men and women.

Service personnel's quality of life is an essential issue that, in some ways, is as important as pay and pensions. It is important to the Ministry of Defence, because a quality of life that is perceived as good is a vital factor in retaining personnel. However, the quality of service life is even more important to the individual. No one minds working on a difficult, perhaps even dangerous, task, as long as they are looked after properly. The accommodation does not have to be the Savoy; it just has to be somewhere that can be made into one's home. As the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, among many others, has pointed out, service personnel have considerable and continuing concerns about the state of their living quarters, particularly single living accommodation.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body raised those concerns in 1996, and has continued to do so for each of the past five years. However, its report of this year goes somewhat further, and I shall quote briefly from it:

> "Service personnel continue to stress the damage to quality of life and retention caused by poor accommodation. For Senior NCOs and more experienced personnel, in particular, poor accommodation standards give rise to a strong sense of not being valued by their Service. We found considerable scepticism about the pace of change and a general feeling that much is promised but little delivered . . . Commanding Officers . . . were frustrated by the constraints on funding which limited their ability to deliver necessary improvements."

As a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I can reinforce that message. One example is Faslane, to which the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has referred, albeit in a different context. I had the pleasure of visiting Faslane recently and talking to service personnel. Both its service and civilian personnel deserve our congratulations and commendations. It is not an easy site to work on. It is fairly compact, and maintaining high standards is difficult. According to service personnel, to describe much of that accommodation as draughty would be an understatement. In many cases, you can put your fingers in the gap between the window frames and the walls. The heating is inadequate, and you may get hot water today—or not. That is how bad the service is. It is not simply Faslane and other UK bases that are affected; I understand that particular problems exist in Germany.

I am aware that the Government have announced a £1 billion programme, but why will no new beds be provided until 2004, and why will the programme take a further full eight years to complete? When I talk to service personnel, whether through the armed forces parliamentary scheme or more generally, they raise a series of points, and I hope that the Minister will be able to answer some of them. Why will there be such a delay between the announcement and actual improvements on the ground that service men and women can see? Does the Minister share their concern that some of that money is being sidetracked into other budgets?

Will the Minister guarantee that essential repairs and maintenance are not being held back in anticipation of the longer-term refurbishment package? That, I think, is known as the sticking-plaster approach. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that any delays are kept to the barest minimum?

Some claim that much delay resides in the Ministry's use of the Government's favourite scheme, best value, to assess the programme, yet the problem with the best value assessment is, of course, that it specifically considers the building element of the budget and excludes other costs such as retention, bonuses and additional special allowances. In that sense, best value fails, because it does not provide a genuine assessment of the total value for money delivered for taxpayers, although it does impose a series of delays that sap the morale of our front-line personnel.

On recruiting future generations to our armed forces, I shall raise a series of questions about the medium and longer terms. Young people no longer expect to have a single job or career. Instead, they look for variety and expect to have a range of experiences throughout their working lives. Some may say that that has always been the case, and it has in the case of the more ambitious, but it is becoming the norm across the range of experience.

Commanding officers tell me that personnel already routinely come to them seeking to leave after perhaps four or five years, not necessarily because of a bad experience or because they do not feel comfortable in service life, but because people of their generation wish to move on. A leading professional firm that I know in the commercial world cannot get younger people to commit themselves to a partnership, because the term required is too long for them, so the problem is not peculiar to the services; however, it represents particular difficulties for them, especially in a tight labour market.

Those changing aspirations, as well as the need to recruit both the numbers needed and the best and the brightest, demand a shift in service thinking and, in particular, their approach to the packages on offer. I recognise that changing those packages could be especially costly to the services, given the fitness required and the training provided compared with that for civilian jobs.

I know that the Ministry is considering those issues, but I say to the Minister that there is a pressing need for a review of the type and character of short-term contracts,

not simply in specialisations, in relation to which I believe one is under way, but in general. Indeed, the Government may need to consider whether we shall have to offer future generations significantly greater contractual and financial flexibility than existing recruitment policies allow. In the medium term, there may have to be not simply incremental change, but a potentially radical shift in direction.

In making that shift, one option may be sabbaticals or unpaid leave. I am aware of a number of public bodies that are finding that the most popular unpaid benefit among those aged up to about 35 is being able to take six or 12 months out of work. People will work long hours and they will work hard, but they now want the flexibility to use their time constructively. It could be argued that, in some ways, given their broader resources, the services are ideally suited to responding to such a demand.

The services may also need to respond to such increased labour fluidity by overhauling pension arrangements. The pension review, which is in hand, has been carefully scrutinised by the Defence Committee, so I do not intend to revisit the arguments, although we need at the very least to create genuine transparency on the contributions made and the benefits on offer.

I suspect that, for the next generation, we shall also have to consider the portability of pensions. Conventional thinking has involved the use of an immediate pension point as a retention tool—usually the age of 40—yet those of the younger generation increasingly have no intention of being in the same job at 40. They will be long gone by then. To put the point briefly, that generation's attitude to careers may make pensions completely redundant as a retention tool. I suggest to the Minister that, in fashioning our pensions policies for the next 10 years or so, we must look forward, not at the present or the past. We must not focus solely on past or current service men and women, and we need to think ahead.

We are fortunate in the calibre and commitment of our armed forces personnel. For those currently in the services, although the Government have recognised the problem of poor accommodation, I say to the Minister that we need action, not announcements. He must surely recognise the benefits for morale and for his retention efforts of being able to show tangible improvements. If he makes improvements and speeds the processes up, there will be real potential to make gains. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman responds to that point.

In reviewing manning policy, we must have a clear understanding of future generations' aspirations and needs. That means being prepared to test whether existing personnel tools will retain those future generations. We must also consider whether the services can get ahead of labour market trends and use their wider social and environmental resources to increase the attractiveness of military life. I believe that that can be done; I hope that the Government have the vision and will to deliver.

3.46 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Through the Minister of State for Defence, I apologise to the Secretary of State for missing the first 20 minutes of his speech. I am not good at punctuality.

My constituency of Walsall, South is built on hundreds upon hundreds of undiscovered mine shafts. Two were discovered recently, and I had to deal with that. There are so many undiscovered shafts that I flippantly suggested that I might tip off the United States air force that bin Laden is hiding in one, so that it would find all the holes.

That is not as fanciful as it sounds, because the Taliban appear to be recruiting far more successfully than the Army in some parts of the country. My idea did not reach fruition, however, as I thought that the consequence of tipping off the US air force would be that I might be referred to as the Member of Parliament for what was formerly Walsall, South. A good idea came to nothing.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) said. However, although I am not being critical, I would take his words more seriously if he did not submit to what I call the Opposition's "year zero" approach—the problems began in June 1997. Almost all the problems that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) described began years and years ago. I am not defending the Government—I spend much of my time doing quite the opposite, although constructively—and I enjoyed his speech, because he used against my Government exactly the same arguments that I used against his between 1979 and 1997.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) was a member of the Defence Committee at that time, and most of those present are either members or former members of the Committee or people who wish that they were members of it. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) is a member of the Defence Committee and an Opposition Front Bencher, but I digress. I shall apply to the Leader of the Opposition—the latest example of regime change, which we have heard a lot about—to ask that the Defence Committee receive some of his Short money. He has an enormous reservoir of talent in the Committee to assist the hon. Member for Aldershot in his current role.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: I shall be delighted to let my colleague on the Defence Committee intervene.

Mr. Howarth: I am most grateful to the Committee Chairman for giving way. Of course, the Committee is a source of very important information, as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) also made clear to me the other day when he said, on hearing that I was to stay on the Committee, that that was absolutely excellent. While I find it an important source of information, I assure the Committee Chairman that I have other extremely valuable sources of information.

Mr. George: The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife was also a spokesman and a member of the Defence Committee until he found that the work load became so enormous—he was responsible for defence and foreign affairs—that he jacked it in. I suggest that the hon. Member for Aldershot looks at the attendance list for that year, which shows that the strain is considerable. The difference is that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife represents the Liberal Democrats, who are not yet the official Opposition.

Let me turn to the hon. Member for somewhere near the SAS headquarters—that is an internal debate for the hon. Member for Hereford. I was delighted that the

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hon. Gentleman referred to a document of which I was hitherto unaware, namely a mini SDR produced by his mini party. I must confess that I was forced to stifle my mirth when I realised that it was grossly unfair—the official Opposition appear to be negative; it is not their job, we heard today, to present positive policies.

We would like very much to invite someone along to give evidence to the Defence Committee. I hope that the author will come along, and no doubt the hon. Member for Hereford will come along with him.

Mr. Keetch: If that is a serious invitation, my noble Friend Lord Roper, who chaired the committee along with Air Chief Marshal Sir Tim Garden—they are the main architects of it—would be more than happy to come to the Defence Committee. It is important that parties throughout the House should come before Select Committees and give their views. I should be more than happy to do so on behalf of my party, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will extend his invitation to the Conservative party.

Mr. George: The Conservative party already attends the Defence Committee, so it would be superfluous to invite another Conservative Member to appear before us. I merely have to turn to my right and the Conservative party is there. However, I shall approach my colleagues on the Committee because it is important that, in due course, the Liberal Democrat party should respond to questions. I promise the hon. Gentleman that, if my colleagues agree, we shall arrange that invitation.

I wish to make a small remark to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton and other colleagues interested in the Warship Support Agency. The Defence Committee visited Faslane, Coalport and Rosyth. We met trade union officials there and in London, and we are aware of the arguments. The Defence Committee has arranged three sittings to consider the matter. The chief executive of the Warship Support Agency and the Chief of Defence Procurement will attend our first sitting on 25 April; the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Equipment Capability) will attend our second sitting on 1 May; and the Minister for Defence Procurement will attend our third sitting on 8 May. That provides us with ample opportunity to explore the reasons for the decision. As the Committee has a strong maritime component, it would be profoundly unwise to take sides. Both the private and public sectors are equally well represented, but at least it is within our remit to explore the rationale for the decision and to see whether it was the correct one to make.

I should have said that I was sorry that the hon. Member for Hereford, excluding the SAS headquarters, could not be with us on our trip to Afghanistan because of the parlous state of his party's finances. A seat was available for him and I hope that the next time that we travel away, so long as, as was said in a newspaper, it is within striking distance of easyJet or Buzz, he will be prepared to join us. Perhaps he should have done what the spokesman for the Opposition did: while the Defence Committee, I am embarrassed to say, travelled club class, the Opposition spokesman slummed it behind and paid a fare that cost infinitely less than ours. We shared accommodation that was not of the finest quality and I apologise to him for drowning out the sound of the generator with my snoring. Perhaps that was the real reason why the hon. Member for Hereford did not come, rather than the bogus reason—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The right hon. Gentleman must now address his remarks to the armed forces personnel.

Mr. George: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that talking about a future Defence Minister—although perhaps not in the case of the hon. Member for Hereford—would fall within the remit of armed forces personnel, but I willingly refer to a more serious side of my presentation.

The Defence Committee produced an excellent report—the Second Report for the 2000–01 Session, entitled "The Strategic Defence Review: Policy for People"—in which we spent a great deal of time considering the issues that we are discussing this afternoon. We said:

"The United Kingdom's Armed Forces are acknowledged to be amongst the best"—

we should have said the best—

"in the world. It may be a truism to say that their quality depends vitally on the volunteers who constitute this country's Armed Forces, but it is a truism which is worth repeating."

We are able to say regularly how good our armed forces are—and they truly are. When one sees them in operation and on ceremonial occasions, as we did a few days ago, their magnificence and competence is unrivalled. However, this is not a toy army. We could put members of Group 4 or Securicor in nice uniforms and teach them how to march, and they could march effectively, but the men and women we saw a few days ago can not only take part in ceremonies; they are the same men and women who, a few days hence, could be called upon to do something very different. Their skills are interchangeable—from ceremonial duties to serious war fighting.

A number of hon. Members and the Minister of State saw our armed forces in Afghanistan functioning as supporters of schools, providing ambulances and medical facilities for the people of Kabul, where there are few or none of those facilities, and acting as policemen. They were amazing advertisements for British society and for the British military. Having been on patrol and ridden on the side of a vehicle, I know what it must be like—although as a supporter of Walsall football club I shall never experience it—to be on a bus going through a town after winning a cup final. Such was the incredible popularity of our armed forces, and long may that remain.

In drawing up our excellent report, we had the benefit of meeting service men and women. As a result of my close relationship with the Staffordshire regiment, I went along with two of my colleagues to solicit their complaints. That would normally be a superfluous activity, as soldiers from the black country do not need to be invited to complain; they do so quite naturally. Even in the presence of their officers they were prepared to explain what they thought needed to be done. Housing was one of the issues because many of the houses that the soldiers occupy are owned by the Nomura corporation of Tokyo, Japan, masquerading under the name of Annington Homes, which was sold by the previous Government.

Our report looked at preparing the ground—cadets and voluntary reserve forces. We also considered recruitment—getting the right people and retaining them—the need to

look after people and their families, and post-service provision. I urge hon. Members who have not read the report to do so, because it provides the agenda that the Defence Committee is pursuing. High on our agenda is the welfare of the men and women in the armed forces and civil servants in the Ministry of Defence.

The skills of our armed forces personnel have not come from on high, written on tablets of stone. They are not necessarily innate—people are not born to be warriors. Their skills are attained as a result of nurturing, investment and training, which costs money. I listen to Opposition Members calling for an increase in defence expenditure, and I reiterate what I have said many times. Those skills will progressively atrophy without a substantial transfer of resources from the Treasury to the Ministry of Defence over the next three months, six months, 12 months, two years, three years, four years or five years. All of us know that, because we are reasonably knowledgeable on defence matters. Ministers know that, and I hope even the Treasury will come to learn it.

If the Prime Minister wants our armed forces to be deployed in the Falklands, in Sierra Leone, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Cyprus, in Afghanistan and in many other places, he will have to instruct his Treasury team to provide them with the resources that they desperately need, otherwise they will not be able to perform the tasks as efficiently and competently as they have done, are doing and may do for a little while to come, but not for very much longer.

I am proud to have seen our forces in Afghanistan—I see them almost everywhere they are deployed. As the hon. Member for North Essex said, we saw the Royal Anglian Regiment, and we want to express our sadness about the as yet undetermined circumstances in which a young soldier from that regiment died.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): My party and everyone in the House have the greatest sympathy for the man who lost his life and for his family. The speech of the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) was excellent, and I hope that the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who has an important position in the House, will address the point that it is important that individuals are encouraged to have military experience. Those that have such experience understand and are sympathetic to the military ethos.

Mr. George: I agree entirely. Perhaps it was from a response to one of the thousands of questions put by my colleague on the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), that I learned that 45 per cent. of people who fly in the Royal Air Force emanate from the various flying organisations people can join during their youth. May I digress slightly? No, I will not do so, as I have just looked at Madam Deputy Speaker.

Yesterday, in the Defence Committee sitting on requirements post-11 September, we asked witnesses whether they felt any resentment that the armed forces were wandering around towns and countryside doing what may have been construed as non-military tasks. In a crisis, would people object to the military performing tasks such as those performed by the armed police of the City of London operating within the ring of steel after the bombings in the City a few years ago? People had no hostility to that, because the days when a uniform—a red coat—sent shivers of anxiety and terror down people's backs have long since gone. The military are rightly held in the highest esteem. It is important that we sustain that positive assessment.

It is no surprise to us to see United Kingdom forces involved in humanitarian and civil projects. When the Defence Committee went to Kosovo after the conflict in 1999, we saw the British troops there involved in the crucial work of distributing roofing kits and other vital supplies to Kosovars, especially in remote regions that the non-governmental organisations could not reach. That enabled the people to endure a difficult winter. That is not a peripheral role. If such missions are to achieve the aim of bringing peace and stability in areas of conflict, the local population need to see the benefits to and improvements in their daily lives quickly so that the momentum and motivation for peace is maintained.

In Afghanistan we visited a school. Not all of us wanted to go there, but that was the option presented to us. As it turned out, it was a wonderful experience. As the Minister knows, I would have preferred to go elsewhere, but perversely I am glad that I went to that school. It was not a school that Mr. Nigel de Gruchy would have liked to see. Some 3,000 children were enrolled, and four or five rooms had been constructed from shattered buildings—they had been shattered not by the Taliban but in the civil war that preceded the Taliban's unfortunate rise to power.

Much of the money for the school was provided by the Department for International Development and it was helped by British troops, wonderful Finnish troops, and a local business man and builder. There were many girls at the school, whereas before females would not have been seen within hundreds of yards of it. Teachers were not wearing the burka. That is an example of the improvements now being made in Afghanistan. It is important that our armed forces are able to play a critical role not just in hearts and minds campaigns, but in showing people that the presence of British, Finnish and German forces in places such as Afghanistan can be to their benefit.

We are justly proud of the ability of the British armed forces to deploy quickly and lightly, as they did in Afghanistan. That capability is almost unique among our allies, so it most frequently falls to the UK to undertake such deployment as part of multinational operations. The willingness of our forces to live out of kit bags and to dig trenches for latrines does not mean that we should expect them to live in primitive conditions for months on end, especially when our allies then deploy with equipment and facilities that our troops view with considerable envy. I recall from Defence Committee visits to Kosovo the problems in moving our forces out of tents and into more weatherproof and suitable accommodation. We must ask whether we are properly equipping our forces for the expeditionary deployments that they are now undertaking as a matter of routine.

We do brilliantly to get our people in quickly, but how we develop our set-up over the ensuing few months needs more attention. Multinational operations have many benefits, but they give our forces the opportunity to compare their kit with that of their counterparts from other countries, and that comparison is not always in our favour.

I shall not spend any time on the deployments of the Royal Marines, who are in a dangerous part of the world. As always, they will discharge their responsibilities

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with incredible competence and bravery. The Defence Committee is concerned about operational tempo. All the UK personnel whom we met in Kabul told us that they were delighted to be involved in the mission, and regarded it as an extremely valuable experience. What is more difficult for them and their families, especially the engineers and the logistic units, is that this latest deployment follows on from deployments to deal with the foot and mouth crisis this time last year and the weapons-gathering mission in Macedonia last summer. It was important to them that, when they return to the UK, they are given sufficient down-time to spent with their families and to undertake necessary training before they are asked to go on another deployment.

That message is not new, but the more missions we take on around the world, the more difficult it becomes to allow our troops time to take leave and to train. We must ensure that we do not ask them to do too much. Their positive attitude to the harsh conditions that they endured when they arrived in Kabul, and the success they have achieved so far in very difficult circumstances, should impress everyone; but we should not jeopardise that commitment and success by imposing too many demands on them.

Because we still have forces in Bosnia and Kosovo, and because our leadership of ISAF in Afghanistan now seems likely to last beyond the period originally envisaged—or, at any rate, we are likely to be there beyond that period—great care must be taken to ensure that our forces are not stretched too far.

Let me say something about defence medical services and the "year zero" phenomenon. Certainly much remains to be done to improve medical services. I recently wrote an article entitled "Stretcher-case or walking wounded? An assessment of the state of the Defence Medical Services". It was a critical article. Moreover, in 1996 the Defence Committee—which had spent some time examining Defence Costs Study 15—said that the state of our defence medical services had dropped to such a level that we doubted they would ever recover. When those services are being criticised, it is fair to point out that the crisis has not suddenly crept up on us, but has been a long time coming.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman seems keen to suggest that the Opposition are viewing the debate from a "year zero". Will he confirm that the critical report on a Conservative Government was carried by all members of the Committee, including Conservatives? Does that not suggest that we entirely accept that mistakes have been made?

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I just hope that his willingness to criticise his own party sustains his time on the Front Bench—or, preferably, that his forthrightness will not be tolerated by his colleagues, that they will kick him out, and that he will then devote all the time he has to spend on defence to the Defence Committee. We would welcome his full return with, literally, open arms.

As I have spent nearly all my career in the House of Commons criticising the Labour party in relation to defence, it is a sheer delight for me to be able to endorse almost entirely things that it is doing. *[Interruption.]* I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for being provoked by the Minister of State into specifying other things that have prompted some dissent. Examples are the reserve forces, the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—although that problem seems to have been remedied—and the defence budget.

Let me say what I think most people here will say. There may be one or two exceptions, but I think the overwhelming majority will agree that we cannot sustain the current level of activity with a budget that is around 2.5 per cent. of gross domestic product. One option is to reduce commitments, to cut procurement, and to do what the strategic defence review said would be done—match commitments and resources. Another option is to continue to limp on from one problem to another—I will not say "from one crisis to another"—leading a hand-to-mouth existence, and praying that the Treasury will splatter some additional goodies.

The third option is what I hope will happen. I hope the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will say that the military is one of the most effective and revered institutions in British society today. That status, however, can only remain if the Treasury dips its hand into its bag, brings out some money and gives it to the Ministry of Defence, allowing soldiers to obtain the kit they require and the accommodation in which they deserve to live. Such action would end the present haemorrhaging of personnel.

It is wonderful that we are now employing pilots from New Zealand. I said to the New Zealand high commissioner, in a politically incorrect way, "Thank you very much for allowing us to take your pilots. Is there not some truth in the suggestion that you have pilots and no air force, while we have an air force and no pilots?". That may have been taking the case a little too far, but there was enough in what I said to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. If we cannot obtain our forces from Walsall, Stafford and Wolverhampton, it may be necessary to turn to countries that have historically provided troops for us in times of war and now, hopefully, in times of peace.

I cannot understand why, given that over the years we have seen an inevitable decline in the number of applicants to the armed forces, we have persistently made cuts in a group of people who must be, if not the best soldiers in the world, among the very best. I refer to the Gurkhas. Perhaps if they were a foot taller the Army would want to recruit more of them. One suspects that the enthusiasm for Fijians and Tongans relates more to their singing ability and ability on the rugby field than to anything else—although I welcome them to the Staffordshire regiment. In any event, if we cannot find the troops we need, is there not still time for us to look to the Gurkhas again? Could they not enhance our capabilities, at least in the short term?

4.16 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): It is a privilege to follow the Chairman of the Defence Committee in a defence debate. He may find that I do not agree with everything he said, but he will find that I happen to agree with some of it.

Let me associate myself with the tributes paid by Front Benchers to the role of our armed forces in commemorating Her Majesty the Queen Mother. They did

it superbly. I also pay tribute to the ex-military staff of the Palace of Westminster for all that they did to enable so many members of the public to convey their respects in person.

I served in the Territorial Army for some seven years. As an ex-Royal Anglian, I offer my condolences to the family of a young soldier from that regiment who recently lost his life in Afghanistan. I suspect that the whole House supports me in that.

I wish to raise two specific issues relating to defence personnel. The first is the use of personnel by the Territorial Army; the second concerns overstretch in the regular forces, particularly the Regular Army.

The Government's strategic defence review reoriented Britain's armed forces towards an essentially expeditionary strategy. Commenting on the military situation in the aftermath of the cold war and on the rationale behind the SDR, the then Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson—now Lord Robertson—said:

"If the war is no longer going to come to us, then we may have to go to the war".

However, the events of 11 September showed graphically that the war could still come to us or our allies, perhaps in ways we had least expected. In the light of those events, the recent new chapter of the SDR asked for suggestions on, inter alia, how the reserve forces might be able to contribute to the new scenario following the attack on the twin towers.

I believe that TA personnel could play an important role in defending the country against terrorist attack. That does not just mean manpower for the static guarding of sites. I do not think that the TA would want to be solely assigned to that, and I see that the Minister agrees. In fact, it goes much wider.

Let us envisage for a moment the rather unpalatable scenario of a concerted asymmetric attack on the United Kingdom, in which a considerable number of civilians were killed or injured by attacks on public buildings and transport networks through the use of chemical and/or biological weapons. In the event of such an attack, and the media hysteria that would inevitably result, there would be a pressing need for large numbers of trained troops to give protection and reassurance to the civilian population to allow some semblance of normality to continue. The Regular Army is too small to provide such protection on its own; besides, it will always be partially deployed overseas—for reasons that have already been thoroughly discussed this afternoon.

Mr. Swayne: Does my hon. Friend recall the Brave Defender exercises that took place once every two years during the late 1980s and which rehearsed with both Regular and Territorial Army forces the very scenario that he described?

Mr. Francois: I certainly do remember that. I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I also recall that the Territorial Army performed admirably in those exercises.

In the type of scenario that I outlined—unpalatable though it may be to think about—a revamped and retrained Territorial Army could help to fill the gap as regards the lack of manpower. It could provide units specifically trained to deal with homeland security and to give first aid to chemical and biological casualties.

I urge Ministers actively to consider the possibility of bringing back several of the infantry battalions that were culled during the SDR and optimising them for such tasks. In addition, given the inherent flexibility of military units, other elements of the TA, such as those with basic nuclear, biological and chemical training, could also have utility, without detracting from their other specialist roles—for example, as engineers or signallers.

To put things bluntly, if a concerted attack was launched on the civilian population of the United Kingdom, we should need many more trained troops than we have at present. At one fifth to one eighth of the cost of a Regular soldier, TA personnel offer a cost-effective way of providing those extra troops. I hope that that point will not be lost even on the hard-nosed men of Her Majesty's Treasury.

I look forward with interest to the outcome of the consultation on the new chapter of the SDR. In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State intimated that we might see the conclusion of that process in the early summer. I hope that it will include a proposal to give an enhanced role to an enlarged Territorial Army.

Patrick Mercer: Has my hon. Friend given any thought to the resurrection of the Home Service Force?

Mr. Francois: My hon. Friend has touched on that point on other occasions, including during a debate in Westminster Hall. The Home Service Force, which mainly existed in the 1980s, was used primarily for the defence of important key targets. The two forces are not incompatible.

I also want to consider the wider subject of overstretch, as its effect on retention is serious. As I noted in an intervention, I accept that the Ministry of Defence has made strenuous efforts on recruitment, and that even during a buoyant economy, its measures have met with some success. However, the real problem is not recruitment but retention. The critical numbers are the net inflow and outflow of armed forces personnel—in other words, the relationship between recruitment and retention. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) pointed out from the Dispatch Box, the figures show clearly that there is a continuing net outflow of trained personnel from all three services.

In fact, the situation is even worse than the bare figures suggest, because those who are leaving are experienced—especially officers and NCOs—but they are being replaced by raw recruits. Even with all the enthusiasm in the world, a raw recruit cannot make up for the 15 years or so of experience, accumulated at great public expense, which is lost when a senior NCO leaves the Army. Indeed, if the Defence Analytical Services Agency could calculate the net outflow figures in terms of years of military experience, there would be an even starker picture than that revealed by the bare numbers.

Why are experienced personnel leaving in such numbers? One important factor is obviously tour intervals, particularly in specialist units that are in high demand. For young, single people the forces provide a wonderful life, but once soldiers take on family commitments things become much more complicated. The days are long gone when partners—many of whom now have careers in their own right—blithely followed the flag.

A simple summary of the "why people leave" syndrome would be as follows. A junior NCO in the Army, perhaps married and with small children, is posted

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abroad for six months without his wife and family on a so-called "unaccompanied tour". His wife is left without her husband for half a year and misses him badly.

A few months after his return his unit is posted to a new location and his family are expected to follow him. His wife has to give up the part-time job that she has obtained locally. She may have difficulty in finding another one and that creates money worries for the family. They also find that the quarters that they have been allocated are in need of repair. While they are trying to sort that out with the not always highly efficient Defence Housing Executive, they face the challenge of getting their eldest child into a local school that is already heavily subscribed by parents who already live in the area—as indeed are the dentists and GP services with whom they also try to register.

In the midst of all those problems, the NCO is given a warning order that he is again being posted abroad on another unaccompanied tour. While he is away he spends a good part of his limited telephone allowance listening to the legitimate concerns of his wife and, incidentally, being told that her mother was right all along when she told her not to marry a soldier in the first place.

The next time that the NCO is posted away at short notice, he returns to find that his wife has had enough: she has already mentally left the Army and will brook no further argument. She presents him with a stark choice: "It's the Army or me and the kids." If he chooses the Army, we retain him—but society has another broken family to deal with. If he chooses his family—for wholly admirable reasons—he is lost to the Army.

I have used the Army as an example, but the problem is similar in the other services. The armed forces personify the meaning of "no-strike agreement". Ultimately, they face a stark choice: they can put up with all that I have described or vote with their feet and leave. Crucially, experienced personnel increasingly choose option B.

What is the answer? One solution would be radically to reduce commitments, to allow for much greater stability and fewer tours—especially unaccompanied tours at relatively short notice. However, if that is currently impossible for foreign policy reasons—it would appear that, at least for the present, the Government are arguing that case—the alternative is to take measures that meaningfully improve the quality of life for service personnel and their families so that, even given all the pressures, they will not want to leave the Army. That means taking action such as increasing the time during which soldiers who are abroad can communicate with their families at home. I take the point about the 20 minutes of phone calls and electronic blueys—I accept that Ministers are trying, but they need to do much more about that.

We must accelerate improvements to the housing stock and we must markedly improve the repairs service. Sometimes, partners are most upset by the niggling things. When they have spent three months trying to get a window mended or a shower fixed and have been on the phone about it to their husbands abroad, it is no wonder that they believe their Government and their Ministry of Defence do not really care about them.

We need to improve the warning time for moves on the tour plot, so that families can plan properly. The Secretary of State made some reference to that in his remarks and it is only fair that we welcome it. There must also be special arrangements to improve access to schooling when soldiers relocate to avoid the chicken and egg dilemma that they cannot get a school place until they have a new address, but by the time they have an address all the places in decent schools have gone. We need to pay more attention to practical, nitty-gritty, everyday detail, but we must also spend money—a lot of it—on retention-related measures so that people will not continue to leave for the sake of their families. If the Government wish to pursue an activist foreign policy, they must provide the resources to do that. That includes providing resources for looking after the people whom they expect to do the fighting and, in extremis, the dying for them. If they carry on like this, within a few years, Ministers will face the prospect of issuing orders to deploy Regular units that are so hollowed out that they have effectively ceased to exist.

If we really care for our service men—we have all said this afternoon that we do—we must somehow find the resources to underpin our words and give them practical effect. When we are wrestling with these issues, I would humbly remind the House that it is the first duty of the Government, above all others, to ensure the defence of the realm. Our history shows repeatedly, ad nauseam, that we forget that vital lesson at our peril.

4.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The purpose of this contribution is to raise one subject and one subject only, which is this: what on earth are we now getting into in Afghanistan? It does not matter at all that some of us thought we should not have gone in in the first place, and that the way to deal with the situation was by intelligence and, frankly, by bribery. That is the past, and we are in a here and now situation.

We have a choice this spring or summer. Either we bring it to an end, or we reconcile ourselves to something that may be unpalatable and uncomfortable; a long-term commitment in Afghanistan, certainly for my lifetime and probably for the lifetime of the youngest among us. There is an awkward fact—the Taliban have not gone away. Members of the Taliban, I am informed, are sitting sipping tea in the tea houses of Peshawar across the Pakistan border. I am not sure that there is even a border, which I gather is very elastic and permeable. People go to and fro and there is not much supervision of the border.

In those circumstances, it may be that they are just biding their time, as they always did. If I had a personal interest to declare, it would be that the bones of some of my relatives are somewhere to be found in Afghanistan as a result of what happened in the century before last and at the turn of the last century. The whole history of the British among these people is a pretty sad one. The truth is that the Pashtun adore fighting. It is what they are about, and what they live for. The idea that they have gone away is, I fear, fanciful.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Father of House for giving way to me, and I intervene on him with great respect. I was one of the party that went to Kabul. Does he accept that the presence of our armed forces in Kabul as part of the ISAF mission has had a positive effect on the local population? On the streets, we were told that they were rejoicing because they had peace and security in their city for the first time for

decades. Markets were opening and women were walking about without their burkas on. These are positive developments of civil society.

Mr. Dalyell: There is no substitute in this House or elsewhere for first-hand information and I certainly respect that view. In a sense, I hope that my hon. Friend is right and that somehow it has solved a situation. But is that true outside Kabul? I have not been to Afghanistan, but I have been to Iran, its neighbour. That gives me a perspective. One wonders how long the commitment will last, and I would like an assessment from Ministers with regard to what my hon. Friend and I have said.

On 20 March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said that

"the action that the international community has taken has been remarkably successful. As I said on Monday, Afghanistan is now a very different country. The decision to deploy considerable military force against the terrorists and their supporters has been vindicated. Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network have been dealt a heavy blow."

They have been dealt a heavy blow maybe, but the leaders have not been found. My right hon. Friend continued:

"The Taliban regime, whose support was so vital for al-Qaeda is no more."

That was on 20 March. On 11 April, are we quite so sure that the Taliban regime is no more? There must be comment on the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) and, indeed, on the qualms of some of the rest of us.

Harry Cohen: The nation-building in Afghanistan has to be done, but my hon. Friend is right to point out that it is a costly, difficult and lengthy process. Does he agree that it would be foolhardy for this country to try to do that nation-building in two countries simultaneously: Afghanistan and, for example, Iraq?

Mr. Dalyell: This is one of those cases on which I could not agree more: it would be folly, as my hon. Friend and I think, to embark on commitments against Iraq.

I wish to refer to the whole nature of the British involvement. Again on 20 March, my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) asked:

"Given the fact that when Russia had its troops in Afghanistan, it got a bloody nose and got bogged down, particularly in the mountains, what is the difference now between the two conflicts?"

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied:

"That is one of the things that I did discuss this morning with the Russian Foreign Minister. *[Interruption.]* I am amazed that the Opposition find that remarkable. Surely it is vital that we should discuss the situation in Afghanistan . . . the difference is the way in which the Soviet Union tried to deal with Afghanistan—largely by occupying ground, which obviously made it vulnerable to attack, whereas the whole purpose of the operation we are discussing today is to ensure that in swift search-and-strike operations, we remove any threat".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 333-36.]

What I wonder is: can we remove any threat without occupying ground?

I undertook, as is my wont, to be short. My question to be answered in the winding-up speech is this: what is the Government's thinking on the timing of the Afghan operation? Do they think, as I do, that there is an either/or situation? When we give way to the Turks, do we make it clear that Britain does not follow the Turks, and that perhaps someone else—or no one else—does? Or do we face up to what may be the horrendous obligation of being in Afghanistan for the lifetime of the youngest among us? That is a question that at least must be addressed, as it is vital in terms of our commitments on service personnel and the future of the deployment of personnel, which is what the debate is about.

4.39 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): It is a great pleasure to follow the Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I declare an interest as, since 1981, I have been a member of the defence medical services, first as a regular member of the Royal Navy and now as a member of the Royal Naval Reserve.

In March, the Secretary of State announced that 45 Commando would be deployed to Afghanistan—about 1,700 people. At about that time also the Czechs announced that they were deploying a field hospital to that theatre of operations. It is poignant to note that we can provide only four field hospitals out of a requirement of 14. Our men and women are willing and able to put themselves in the line of fire but in return they expect us to ensure that, if the worst comes to the worst, there is the wherewithal to ensure that they are treated adequately. Given the present state of the defence medical services, I fear that we cannot give them that commitment.

Sierra Leone demonstrated that we are not only falling short in offering field hospitals, but woefully inadequate at ensuring that people are fit and able to be deployed in the first place. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me that on this occasion our troops are fit in all respects.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Although I am not replying to the debate, the defence medical services are my responsibility. There were mistakes made when the regiment deployed to Sierra Leone, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that they have been taken on board. Nowadays nobody is deployed who has not had their vaccination and health status properly checked.

Dr. Murrison: I thank the Minister for that reassurance.

Indifference to military medicine in the near east has caused Governments real problems in the past and I fear that the Government might be heading for problems in this theatre. It is now 60 years since McIndoe pioneered his important surgery on Spitfire pilots and it is salutary to remind the House that the defence medical services has three burns specialists against a requirement of 11. Particularly in this theatre of operations, we should remember that we do not have dedicated chemical warfare medical specialists. Fortunately the Czechs do—indeed they are renowned for that area of expertise—and that may be one reason why they are deploying to Afghanistan. They are very welcome indeed.

A Ministry of Defence source recently said:

"If any of Our Boys die because the medical help they needed wasn't available, it will be like someone in Whitehall helping an al-Qaeda sniper pull the trigger."

That is emotive and graphic, but the buck stops with the Government and although we have heard some facetious remarks about 1997 and year zero, the Government cannot shelter from their responsibility in this respect. They are

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responsible for ensuring that the defence medical services and the field hospitals on the ground are up to the task of protecting our service men in a particularly dangerous theatre of operations.

On 10 February, on the BBC's "On the Record", the Secretary of State said:

"We are operating at the limits of our capability."

Those strong words gave us some insight into what is actually happening in terms of overstretch. Since then, troops have been deployed to the middle east in the largest numbers since the Gulf war. Taking the Secretary of State's comments to their logical conclusion, he is saying that we are overstretched. Perhaps the Minister will reflect on that in his reply. Words mean what they say. In February, we were

"operating at the limits of our capability."

Where are we now?

This week the Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Army Medical Corps was laid to rest. The Queen Mother took a special interest in defence medicine and it is fitting that we should discuss it here today as part of this important debate on defence personnel.

No doubt we will hear that recruitment into the defence medical services has improved. It has improved slightly, but the difficulty lies with the retention of staff and in that respect, we have real problems. The Royal Army Medical Corps needs 882 officers. At the moment it has 661. If we drill down further, the picture becomes much worse because the problem lies predominantly in the middle ranks, among those who have recently completed their specialist training. It is particularly acute among surgical support teams. For example, there are only 26 anaesthetists—whom we colloquially call gas men—in the defence medical services, when there should be 120. There are 16 general surgeons against a requirement of 44; there are just 10 orthopaedic surgeons against a requirement of 28. The Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps is short of 270 nurses. Florence Nightingale in her alma mater just across the river would have a sense of déjà vu, bless her, particularly when we consider our troops in the near east.

There is some good news, however. The Royal Army Veterinary Corps is very nearly up to strength. I am told that it is short of just two vets. No doubt veterinary manpower will be improved even further given the Government's current assault on the countryside and country pursuits. Every cloud has a silver lining.

Recruitment to the defence medical services is improving, but people are leaving in droves. That suggests that a military career for medics is attractive—people want to join—but at some point they become disillusioned. They become so disillusioned that they are prepared to enter that other cauldron of discontent—the national health service. At a time when service in the NHS also has its problems, people view it as a more attractive option than the defence medical services. That is something of an indictment.

I am a reasonable man and I am certainly not about to pretend that the problems started in 1997. They started well before then. I joined the defence medical services in 1981—more than two decades ago—so I have seen good and bad. The strategic defence review and the implementation of the Lawrence report have made matters a lot worse.

The centrepiece of new Labour's thinking on medical provision for the armed forces is the creation of the Centre for Defence Medicine. I have no objection to the CDM—I thought that it was called Fort Blockhouse in Gosport—but its reinvention in Selly Oak was truly inspirational, even for this Government. It is unloved, it is definitely unmilitary and it is in truth the unsung millennium dome of the west midlands. The forces have been sold a pup. They thought that they were getting something to be proud of; they did not expect to be shunted into an obscure corner of a peripheral hospital. Service men joined the DMS to be part of the action. They want to exist in close approximation to the teeth elements of the armed forces. Those front-line units are concentrated in Hampshire and Wiltshire, not Selly Oak.

Mr. Keetch: I have visited constituents who have received excellent care at Selly Oak. Although the hon. Gentleman may have a view about the closure of Gosport, I hope that he will not conclude his remarks without paying tribute to the nurses and doctors who work at Selly Oak, from whom my constituents received excellent attention.

Dr. Murrison: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that I was criticising the siting of the Centre for Defence Medicine in Selly Oak, not condemning Birmingham hospitals or anything to do with the national health service.

Over the years, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has been a champion of the Royal Hospital Haslar and rightly so. I had the pleasure and honour of working there when it was the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar. Post DCS15—defence cost study 15—this was promised as the core hospital of the DMS. It is about to shut at a time when France is opening its 15th military hospital. One of us has got it wrong; I wonder which.

The demise of the Royal Hospital Haslar stems from the no longer fashionable view of the medical royal colleges that small hospitals do not have a future because they cannot sustain postgraduate training. I am afraid that that was always an example of the tail wagging the dog. What we expect of our medical establishment is to titrate medical training to address the needs of patients. Clearly, that is not what was happening on this occasion. We now seem to be having a more mature debate of that view of hospital provision. I welcome, for example, the Government's recent stance on the creation of units to cope with cold surgery, particularly orthopaedics, in smaller hospitals and dedicated hospitals. It is perhaps important to remember that orthopaedics is an area in which the DMS has traditionally specialised and excelled, not surprisingly given the youthfulness of its client base.

We hear a great deal about joined-up Government, but, since 1997, this Government have missed a wonderful opportunity by failing to join up Fort Blockhouse, Haslar and Southampton university hospitals. It would have been much better had those three amalgamated, as we must have an amalgamation between the national health service and the defence medical services. It made no sense to break up that very obvious synergy. A great deal of the lack of morale and lack of service ethos in the DMS, which has contributed to a large extent to the reduction in numbers, can be attributed directly to that.

I conclude by issuing a cri de coeur. I think that there is cross-party support for the action in Afghanistan. I seek the Minister's assurance, however, that a full assessment

has been made of the casualties that we are likely to take during the operation. That is important, because the country needs to be prepared for what might be in store. I am sure that the Government will have made a full and accurate assessment of the likely casualties, both from hostile fire, and, regrettably, from friendly fire. That is also important from a practical standpoint—that of the provision of medical services to support the casualties that, sadly, we are likely to take. When the Minister winds up, will he comment on whether he can provide us with the reassurance that the defence medical services and the field hospitals deployed in Afghanistan can support the operation on which we are embarked?

4.53 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I want to make a brief contribution on the MOD's recent decision to put many public servants into the private sector at naval dockyards, and to support the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). I apologise because, owing to prior commitments, I cannot be present for the winding-up speeches, but I hope that I obtain a response from the Minister then.

My main interest is in the decision that naval dockyard work on the Clyde, including work on nuclear submarines, should be done in a partnership between the Royal Navy and Babcock's. That has implications not just for the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton but for mine, because a substantial number of the workers live there. I am largely concerned about how the decision was announced and especially by the letter that was sent to some hon. Members about it. I was surprised that there was no statement in the House, although I concede that there were troublesome announcements to be made about Consignia and Railtrack on the same day. A statement should have been made because the decision constitutes a significant change of armed forces policy in that a significant number of people who will be responsible for our nuclear submarines at Faslane are going into the private sector.

Failing a statement, it would have been helpful if local Members had received a briefing on the implications of the decision. We could have asked questions that arose from the decision and obtained answers for our constituents. We did not receive such a briefing. There should have been a publication to show that the many concerns about this significant area of policy had been addressed. Instead, like my hon. Friend, I received a letter letting me know the Government's decision. It is interesting that, independently, we reacted in the same way—we felt let down. I did not find the letter as helpful as I would have wished. As the Minister said, the news had been well trailed in Scotland by the trade unions, which made the letter easier to understand as I had had the translation of the letter in advance, but it was not a clear letter.

The letter was not a serious attempt to explain and justify a major change of policy. Its most unsatisfying aspect is that it does not answer the question that we most wanted to be answered. The figures that in the newspapers about job losses varied widely: 500, 750 or 1,000 and so on. The basic information that we would have liked was how many jobs would be lost and when. I shall quote all that the letter says, on what is a major change of policy, about the Clyde. It states:

> "For the Clyde this means that about 1,750 Naval Base civilian posts will transfer to Babcock Naval Services Ltd a newly formed, wholly owned subsidiary of BRDL with around 500 RN staff on secondment. Both the Company and Naval Base management will be reviewing levels of employment across all areas of the Naval Base as these arrangements bed in."

That was all the information that we received to cope with the protests that there would be in Scotland, on the Clyde, from constituents. That was what we were equipped with. We did not even have the basic information about how many jobs would be lost—the MOD refuses to say. We have already been told, however, that the whole project for all the yards will save the MOD £300 million. We have also already been told that Babcock's will consist totally of staff—not plant or equipment—and brings nothing to the party. How on earth can Babcock's put in a bill without costing for staff? If the Ministry knows the extent of the savings, it must know what staff savings would be made, so it must know, with some accuracy, how many jobs will be lost. However, it is unwilling to tell local Members and the work force what the figure is. We would understand if the figures that the Ministry gave covered a range.

Babcock's and the Government have agreed not to say how many jobs are involved. What on earth was the business case built on? How could the Government make this statement, which appeared in the letter that I received? They said:

> "these changes will ensure a continuation of the current level of support to the Fleet, maintaining operational capability and with no compromise on safety and security at the Naval Bases."

How could that statement have been made in honestly if staffing levels had not been considered and approved?

The lack of openness has led to distrust. Mr. Howie, Babcock's chief executive, made a strange statement to the company's work force when he said:

> "I am certain that the message portrayed by the press of 500 redundancies will have caused a great deal of concern about the immediate future."

However, the concern was caused not by the press but by the unwillingness of Babcock's and the Ministry to be open and honest. It seems that the jobs will be transferred to Babcock's, and that many will then be lost, but that the Government will avoid the responsibility. That has not worked as a tactic, and there is great bitterness.

Mr. McFall: In this case, perception is reality, and the trade unions believe that the Secretary of State told them in February that the transfer of jobs to Babcock's had nothing to do with the Government. They therefore feel cast adrift. There is an urgent need for close communication between the Secretary of State and hon. Members so that rumours are not allowed to gather.

Tony Worthington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for identifying exactly what has been wrong with the approach. However, many other issues involved in this development have received no public debate, and no written explanation of what is going on has been offered. I have enormous respect for my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, and I believe that he will be able to win back the respect that has been lost, but a serious document that explains matters in full must be produced.

[Tony Worthington]

What will be the relationship between Babcock's and the 500 Navy personnel who will be working for the company? What will be the command and control structure? It is obvious that it will be in Babcock's interest for a greater share of the work to be done by Navy personnel, and I bet that the company will not want the number of Navy personnel to be cut.

Can we accept the assurance from the Ministry that there will be no compromise in security when private-sector personnel are involved? The very short letter sent to me does not deal with that, but the public have the right to be shown that the Government have thought about such matters.

It is claimed that improved repair techniques will lead to savings, but the claim appears to be based on the fact that Babcock's will improve the skills of the existing work force. The gains from those skills will accrue to Babcock's, but such figures probably will not appear in the in-house bid.

In conclusion, I want to express my sadness at the way in which this matter has been handled. It is unfair to the work force, and especially to the local MP, that the letter sent out in respect of a major policy change should be only seven lines long. As far as we know, that change will cause major job losses in the area. I hope that that can be put right.

5.3 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington). During the recent visit by the Select Committee on Defence to the naval bases and shipyards in Scotland, we all learned a great deal. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

I want to underline what was said by the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who demanded extra spending on defence commitments. Sadly, he is no longer in the Chamber. Were he here, I would have to raise my voice, as my hearing was damaged as a result of sharing a tent with the right hon. Gentleman for one night in Afghanistan. I do not know how the right hon. Gentleman can be aware that he drowned out the noise of the generator, as he was asleep—no one else in the party was, though.

I wish that the right hon. Member for Walsall, South were here, as I want to take issue with him about his "year zero" comments. We all know that certain problems go with defence. I make no pretence of defending the Conservative party's record on that. We clearly got things wrong. However, we now stand on the brink of a grave national emergency, if we are not already in one. The matters that we are discussing are far too important for us to concern ourselves with the trivialities of inter-party point scoring.

The trip to Afghanistan was seminal for all of us who went on it. It was extremely informative. I want to use the example of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment, which calls itself the Vikings, to illuminate one or two points. There is no doubt that the Royal Anglians and other infantry battalions are disturbed and destabilised by the length of the commitment to Afghanistan. I was due to lunch tomorrow with an infantry commanding officer, but his adjutant phoned today to say, "Frightfully sorry, but he's too busy to lunch with you because he's lobbying to get his battalion to Afghanistan." We should be beyond that: commanding officers should not have to lobby to know what the arms plot is.

The Royal Welch Fusiliers are dying to go to Afghanistan and think that they are. The 2nd Battalion of the Royal Anglians thinks that it is going to replace the 1st Battalion. No one knows what is happening. Is it not time we came clean? To echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), we need to know exactly how long the commitment will last, what it will involve and the number of troops necessary to sustain it. Ministers should make a clear statement on the implications for the arms plot. It is only by creating stability in the arms plot that we will help to stem the haemorrhage of trained personnel, especially from the infantry regiments.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex explained, it was interesting to note that when we went on patrol with soldiers of the Royal Anglian Regiment we were surrounded not just by the khaki berets of the Royal Anglians, but by the plum-coloured berets of the King's Royal Hussars—cavalry men who were forming part of an infantry patrol. The 1st Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment is well recruited in a difficult part of the country for infantry recruiting. Fortunately, my constituency lies in Nottinghamshire, on the edge of Royal Anglian country. It is interesting to see how those two battalions approach the problem of recruitment. Despite the fact that the 1st Battalion is only marginally under strength, it has had difficulties deploying to Afghanistan and finding the manpower that it needs.

The commanding officer—strangely enough, quite well known to me—pointed out that he had to leave almost 40 men behind in Pirbright because they were sick. They could not be deployed on operations not because of temporary illness, but because of chronic difficulties for which medical discharges could not be procured. The soldiers were capable of sedentary duties, but there are not many sedentary duties to perform in an infantry regiment. So the regiment called on soldiers from its battle group—men of the King's Royal Hussars—to help them with the problem.

The commanding officer also pointed out a fascinating fact, which relates to an issue raised by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch). The battalion spent two years serving in Londonderry, which made it less than enthusiastic for other tasks. The deployment was gruelling, not very exciting and numbers had fallen. Yet as soon as the news spread through the battalion that it was to deploy to Afghanistan, and 1 Royal Anglian realised that it was going to be allowed to do a task that had been reserved for the units of 16 Air Assault Brigade and that the two-tier Army was being put on the back burner, a dozen men withdrew their notice to sign off, became good, loyal and motivated soldiers again, and were slavering for operations. It was clear to the officer that part of the retention problem, at least as far as he was concerned, turned on the tasks that the battalion was being given. The men understood two years in Londonderry, but—by golly—they preferred a good, exciting tour in Afghanistan.

The commanding officer made another interesting point: "One of the reasons why I'm short of manpower is that I've had to leave 20 men behind to recruit." It would

have been naive of me to ask, "Why on earth are you doing that?" The answer is that the recruiting group cannot or will not do the job.

I was fascinated to hear the Secretary of State refer to new and imaginative means of recruiting. I welcome that, and I am sure that several measures have already been used successfully. He invited Conservative Members to suggest other measures; I shall not disappoint him.

The men who are recruiting are not recruiters—they are snipers, machine-gunners, non-commissioned officers and mortar men. All those men are back in East Anglia, Lincolnshire and the south using their salaries to recruit—in other words, abusing their salaries. The Army describes that as the black economy. Those men should be on operations helping out and ensuring that men from the King's Royal Hussars do not need to plug the gaps in 1st Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment.

I have asked the Ministry of Defence to provide me with the estimated cost of recruiting a humble private soldier for the infantry; apparently it is unavailable. One can conduct an interesting analysis by looking at the cost of running the recruiting group and putting on top of that the costs of all the salaries that should be used in the field being misemployed in recruiting back in England. The humble hewer of wood and carrier of water—the man who shoulders the pike in the British infantry—is probably one of the most expensive public servants to be used to recruit in the whole gamut of public service.

After visiting the Royal Anglian Regiment, we went on to the joint Army and Royal Air Force nuclear, biological and chemical warfare regiment in Kabul—the first experimental unit of RAF aircrew and Army soldiers to be formed for a highly specialist task. Without going into too much detail, much of the evidence that they have discovered in Kabul and its surroundings is fascinating. Their task is difficult, and the commanding officer of 1st Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment, which provides the Army elements of the regiment, is having grave difficulty keeping his recruiting up to snuff. He has had to go to what the Army describes as a recruiting witch doctor—in civilian life, he would be described as a consultant. Several people in the Army are not employed in recruiting but have remarkably successful records as recruiters in their own right.

Next month, 1st Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment will deploy to Liverpool with one of those witch doctors at the helm. He is a major who should be teaching tactics at the all-arms tactics wing, but is out helping the Royal Armoured Corps to recruit—completely under its own auspices, with no assistance from the recruiting group, and with men yet again misemployed in the black economy trying to make up the numbers that should already be provided by the normal recruiting chain.

Recruiting is very much the Army's main effort. Operations must clearly take priority, but after that every unit has to be topped up with the correct number of men and women. In the past, the Army has declared that to be "main effort"—a technical term meaning that every resource, expertise and ability is dedicated to the task in hand. Why, then, do the Army, Navy and Air Force rely on retired officers and time-expired non-commissioned officers to try to recruit their young men and women? I ask the Minister to answer that question, if he can, in summing up.

Why should young people necessarily be appealed to by retired officers—men in their mid-50s or early 60s? Are they the right people to do the job? Should not the young, sparky staff officers grade 2—young majors and the equivalent who pass out of staff college—be given that crucial task? I ask the Minister at least to think about that.

Without damning the MOD's recruiting group too much, I also pay tribute to the breadth of thinking that has gone on in recruiting soldiers, sailors and, to a lesser extent, airmen from the Commonwealth. I recently visited the Army Training Regiment at Lichfield and it was fascinating to see the mixture of nationalities in the ranks of the platoons that were passing out. It is a good idea and it has worked well. Why has it taken so long to be implemented?

I should like to join many other hon. Members in paying tribute to the Queen Mother, but I should like to iterate the point that three of her brothers served in the Black Watch and one of them was killed at Loos in 1915. That regiment was particularly dear to Her Majesty, and I am sorry that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) is not here because he had the privilege of serving in that regiment earlier in his military career.

The 42nd is one of our oldest and finest regiments, raised in the 1740s. *The Times* carried an article last week saying that, with the sad demise of the Queen Mother, that regiment, which could not be properly recruited, was bound to go, as someone said earlier, as the result of being hollowed out to the point where it does not exist. I suggest that there is no difficulty in recruiting. Certain regiments have no difficulty in taking imaginative and lateral approaches to recruiting and bringing themselves well above establishment. It would not only be a disgrace if the Black Watch were allowed to perish, but a dishonour to the Queen Mother.

5.16 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): May I tell the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) that, as the Black Watch is my local regiment, I will certainly pledge myself to supporting the continuation of its tremendous role and history in the defence of this country?

May I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to our armed forces? They are simply the best, whether acting as a superb funeral cortege for the Queen Mother; acting in a war fighting capacity, as they are currently doing in Operation Jacana in Afghanistan; or operating in a peacekeeping role in what are often tense, complex and unstable environments.

May I also join the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) in expressing my deep sympathy to the family of the young soldier from the Royal Anglian Regiment who tragically died this week? It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the other armed services personnel who have died or suffered severe injury in the service of their country, especially as we remember this year the 20th anniversary of the Falklands war.

The House's responsibility to our armed forces personnel and their families has to be deep and far reaching. We must seek to provide them with the training,

[Rachel Squire]

equipment and support that they need. The MOD's overarching personnel strategy states that the ultimate aim of the policy regarding service personnel is

"to generate and maintain modern, joint, battle winning forces, by placing Service personnel and their families at the centre of our plans, investing in them and giving them confidence in their future."

I welcome the fact that, under this Government, defence has received the first real-terms, year-on-year increase in investment since the end of the cold war, but I will be blunt and join others in saying that I do not think that the increase is enough and I hope to see more. Although real progress has been made in purchasing new and better equipment and in improving conditions, more needs to be done. One of the benefits of being a member of the Select Committee on Defence, and having been through the armed forces parliamentary scheme, is that it has given me and others the opportunity to listen to what all ranks of our armed forces are saying, and to come back and convey that to Ministers.

I want to raise a few concerns, especially in connection with equipment and support. First I shall pick up the points made by the Secretary of State, by my hon. Friends and by other hon. Members about the importance of decent sanitation and washing facilities, including showers and hot water, and sleeping accommodation, especially for our peacekeeping forces.

I recognise the fact that, in Pristina for instance, there was uncertainty about how long our forces would be present, and hence about whether it was justifiable to invest in more permanent facilities for them. I hope that the lessons from those operations have been learned and that our forces serving in Operation Fingal in Kabul will quickly be given mobile facilities—decent washing, sanitation and other facilities—although we hope that they will be there for only a short time.

The second issue that I want to mention is the importance of giving all ranks the opportunity to tell us what they think they need, and to comment on their current equipment and its future design. Like other members of the Defence Committee, I was somewhat taken aback when we visited the US Marines base in Quantico and found that the Marines designed their own rifles. I am not saying that we should encourage our own Marines to do that, but it was clear that the comments of Marines using the equipment on the battlefield were fed directly back to those who were manufacturing the weapons, and the weapons were adapted to suit the Marines' requirements and needs.

We have all heard time and time again about the frustration of people who say, "We've been saying this for years. When will things be improved?", and about other problems, especially the delay in obtaining spare parts and other essential equipment. When the Defence Committee recently visited the Defence Procurement Agency, I was pleased to be assured that all ranks do get the chance to have their say, but I hope that that will be built upon further and extended.

We all recognise the impact on morale of poor and inadequate equipment. One of the main lessons of Operation Saif Sareea 2 was that some equipment was still failing in spite of the fact that problems with it had been identified some years earlier in the Gulf conflict—problems with the SA80 rifle and with the Challenger tank, to mention just two.

It is right and proper to pay tribute in the debate to the support staff and civilian personnel who manufacture and provide equipment, and act as support staff in our bases and dockyards. I think that my hon. Friends and other hon. Members would be surprised if I did not use this opportunity to praise the skills and professionalism of the Rosyth dockyard work force, who have taken on major changes and challenges over the past few years, but still deliver on cost and on time. They have recently been highly praised for the work that they have carried out for the Royal Navy—on the refit of HMS Ark Royal, for instance.

I am aware that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall just make one or two further points about families. What the hon. Member for Rayleigh said about the reality of life for Army families was valuable.

As we all know, it is very important for all of us to ensure that we go out there to hear what the public are saying. I decided to begin this week in a healthy way by going to a local swimming baths, where I found myself eavesdropping on a conversation between two Army wives. One was telling the other of how she had had no heating or hot water over the weekend, had rung the emergency number and not got an answer, and had rung the main line and was told to ring the emergency number. When she said that she had already done so, she was given another number, which she discovered was a private residential number. It was clear that that was not her first experience of being passed from pillar to post. As she said to her friend before—unfortunately—I had to wander off elsewhere, "They need a site meeting to change four light bulbs." I thought that that was a rather good comment.

The benefits of good family support are so important, particularly to retention and maintaining morale. What will that woman's husband think if he rings from Afghanistan to find that his wife and family have not had hot water and heating over the weekend? Although I certainly welcome the achievements so far of the service families taskforce, I hope that it will be allowed to continue and that all families will be aware of its presence and work.

Obviously, many other issues have been raised, but many of them have already been eloquently spoken about, so it would not be right for me to take up the time of other hon. Members who still want to speak. Clearly, we shall all keep a close watch on the defence medical services. I join the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) in praising the defence medical staff at Selly Oak, who cared so deeply in recent months for the son of one of my constituents.

We need to consider further what security we provide for our forces and their families, particularly post-11 September. We could do with a debate just on veterans issues, especially addressing further subjects such as pensions and compensation. We could certainly continue our debate on recruitment and retention, and related problems and issues that have been highlighted.

We need to do more to promote the role of cadet forces, which I particularly praise, in recruiting young people. We should encourage their presence in schools far more. At presentations by the Army cadet force that I have attended, I have met young people who reckon that the cadet forces took them away from a life of petty crime towards which they were heading, which would have led

to more serious offences. I particularly want to mention my local sea cadet air training corps and of course the Dunfermline Territorial Army base.

I end as I began by saying that our forces are simply the best and that our job in this House is to ensure that they have what they need to stay the best and to continue to be held in very high regard in all parts of the world.

5.29 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I should like to concentrate my remarks on the retention and recruitment of armed forces personnel. The Minister will know that, according to a written answer on 1 February, the shortfall in personnel was 7,477—a 6 per cent. shortfall. If 25,000 people are joining the Army every year, a similar number must be leaving it each year. That means that over the Government's lifetime the number of people who have left the Army is roughly the same as those who are in it, so there is a massive turnover. Recruitment appears to be working, but we need to concentrate on the retention of personnel. I concur with the comments that have just been made about the Army cadets, and I would include the territorial and reserve forces: they are a potential source of recruitment.

Tours of duty and overstretch are critical factors in retention. Interestingly, as we have heard, the prospect of real action in Afghanistan made people enthusiastic about overseas tours, so it is largely a question of the duties that the soldiers are being called upon to perform.

Can the Minister confirm that while some support is given to employers who allow members of their work force to join the territorial and reserve forces, more needs to be done to encourage that?

As a graduate of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I was advised that many would-be recruits had to be sent away to acquire sufficient fitness to train to be soldiers. Would the Minister care to discuss that with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills? Clearly, school sports and physical education programmes are producing young people who are less fit than their parents and grandparents were. That needs to be considered.

Will the Minister and his advisers consider my Adjournment debate of 25 October 1999 relating to education for military personnel? An organisation known as the National Association of State Schools for Service Children has produced evidence showing that more needs to be done to support the education of children of service personnel. The phrase used to describe the problem is "the turbulence factor." The number of schools that such children go to affects their education. That is all part and parcel of the need to improve retention.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) gave us a graphic example of how the domestic scene affects family life in the Army. Representing a garrison town, I receive many letters, phone calls and visits to my advice bureau from Army families, but I only see the tip of the iceberg. I pay tribute to the welfare services provided by the Army. They have never been better. In particular, I praise the garrison commander in Colchester, Colonel Julian Lacey, and others engaged in welfare work. The importance of their work was particularly brought home to me when the troops went to Kosovo, Bosnia and, more recently, Afghanistan. The Army provides a marvellous welfare net but that on its own is not sufficient given the current tours of duty and the overstretch that results.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) referred to the housing problems experienced by two Army wives in another part of the country. We need to consider recommendation 48 of the fourth special report of the Select Committee on Defence published on 2 May 2001, almost 12 months ago. It states:

"A high standard of accommodation should be available to all Service families who want it. Achieving the upgrade of the estate in a reasonable time span is essential. This is one area where more money would have immediate and beneficial effects for Service personnel and their families and, in consequence, massive potential benefits for the Services in terms of morale and retention. The Treasury took a huge amount of money from the sale of the married quarters estate in 1996—nearly £1.7 billion. It let the MoD keep only £100 million, a sum clearly inadequate for the promised upgrading of the married quarters. We recommend that more of the proceeds of the sale should go back to the . . . Defence Housing Executive specifically for the upgrade of the Service Families Accommodation."

I invite the Minister to tell us what has been done in the past year and what further action will be taken.

As part of the feel-good factor, we need to concentrate on better welfare, housing and education for the Army family; other hon. Members have spoken eloquently about other issues, but I am concentrating purely on retention. Some good will could be shown at minimal cost, not least in relation to some of the old soldiers. In my capacity as parliamentary adviser to the Royal British Legion, I should like to make a suggestion to the Minister about the 2,200 members of the retired officer corps, who, although they are not official members of Her Majesty's armed forces, are still in service—indeed, many of them are required to wear uniform at work. Without exception, they do jobs that would otherwise be occupied by serving personnel, but they are being told that they cannot have the Queen's jubilee medal. The request for the medal is a small one and could be granted. I invite the Minister to use his connections with those who make decisions on such matters to ensure that those 2,200 members of the retired officer corps will have the medal. It would cost nothing, but the good will that would be generated would be worth having. My second such suggestion concerns the old soldiers who were in the Suez canal zone in 1951–54. Why on earth cannot those national service men from all those years ago have a medal to commemorate their service for King and then Queen and country?

Finally, I should like to mention the new garrison at Colchester for 16 Air Assault Brigade. In raising the issue, I want to associate myself with the remarks made earlier about the home regiment for Essex, the Royal Anglians. Can the Minister inform me, the House and my constituents exactly where we are with the new proposals for the Colchester garrison? I feel that firm decisions should have been made by now, but for some reason, there appears to be a logjam. Clearly, it is in the interests of the wider military family in Colchester that that new garrison be built. In terms of retention, the accommodation has to be the best that can be provided. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to say exactly where we are—if he cannot do so, perhaps he can write—and when we can look for progress on the Colchester garrison.

5.38 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Many of the 41,000 armed forces personnel in the south-west are, of course, based in Plymouth, and many of them are based in Plymouth, Sutton. The Devonport naval base is the largest

[Linda Gilroy]

such base in western Europe and the base port for the Royal Navy's biggest vessel, which is currently on deployment in the middle east: the helicopter landing ship HMS Ocean. It is also the base for 14 type 22 and type 23 frigates, seven Trafalgar class submarines and six hydrographic survey ships. The base employs about 2,500 people, with whom many families are associated, just as many families in the area are associated with the Royal Marines, who have a big presence in the south-west generally and especially in Plymouth, where the headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade, the Stonehouse barracks, and the 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery is situated. The latter is based at the historic citadel and provides gunnery support to the Royal Marines. On the outskirts of Plymouth is situated a base for 42 Commando at Bickleigh.

Royal Marine units from the south-west have recently seen service in Kosovo, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone and are being deployed to Afghanistan as we speak. Some 110 personnel from 29 Commando and 200 personnel from 3 Commando, which is based in Plymouth, are on a rolling programme of deployment this week. Some may be travelling or arriving and familiarising themselves with the terrain and continuing their exercise and training as we speak.

The armed forces personnel strategy, which emerged from the strategic defence review, recognised that military operations are physically and mentally demanding, extremely unpredictable and—of course—inherently dangerous. In the end, they depend for success on teamwork, which comes from first-class training, good leadership and mutual trust. In recent weeks, as deployments were made in Afghanistan, and during Exercise Saif Sareea, the *Evening Herald*—our local evening paper—gave detailed, balanced and interesting coverage of the actions on our behalf of armed forces based in Plymouth. We ask a lot of them, especially when preparing for, or in the aftermath of, operations.

Many hon. Members have given graphic descriptions of exactly what is involved for those who are deployed, and for the families that they leave behind. The demands do not stop at the front line. Other hon. Members have also referred to families, and I want to concentrate the bulk of my remarks on that issue. During his opening speech, the Secretary of State said that personnel welfare, particularly in relation to families, is a key concern for his Department. Well-motivated and well-cared-for personnel are absolutely crucial to the strength of the armed forces, and how we look after their families matters greatly.

In that regard, communication is exceedingly important. The Department has acted positively by identifying in the strategic defence review a role for the new service families taskforce. It has also brought together and given voice to family associations such as the Association of Royal Naval and Royal Marines Families. Others have already mentioned the Army Families Federation and Airwaves, the RAF family association.

It is not easy to reconcile the demands of the front line with those of the family, but it is possible. Officers based in Plymouth who are members of the Association of Royal Naval and Royal Marines Families are working hard to ensure that it is an independent voice that represents families' interests and concerns in an open, observable and accountable way. The service families taskforce, established under "Policy for People", has provided a focus for that voice. It enables my hon. Friends to engage in dialogue with their ministerial colleagues, and it forms the basis for progress already made on some of the issues that I want to raise. Those issues, which were identified in the taskforce survey, relate to health and education, and arise from the high levels of mobility that service life often requires. They include school admissions, access to dentists and doctors, registration with general practitioners, and hospital waiting lists and appointments. The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) is nodding—he is obviously familiar with them.

I pay tribute to the work of the strategic defence review, which has enabled Ministers to help service families. However, I want to discuss some issues that constitute work in progress, as it were, such as schools admissions. Discussions have led to new statutory guidance on schools' admissions policy, which recognises the needs of service personnel's children and has enhanced nursery school provision. However, it is still not easy for service families to access their local community school.

Often, the transition for families moving from Scotland to Plymouth is made a great deal easier if they become part of the community school in the area in which they are to live. I know that the welfare associations will raise aspects of the appeals procedure with Ministers through the services taskforce families forum, which is to meet in the near future. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister listens carefully to what they have to say, as they have practical and positive proposals to make with respect to appeals.

Bullying is another example in which parental interest in a school may have particular dimensions for service families, and some schools in Plymouth have positive programmes for tackling it. An incident was reported during the Kosovo deployment: the children of a service man were bullied in the playground and told that their father was a murderer. We all know what role service personnel from my community in Plymouth and elsewhere played in Kosovo—it was very far from that—and the House will understand the importance that parents attach to the ability to select a school that they are confident has an adequate policy on bullying. Those issues, and the health issues, which I know are being progressed through the taskforce, are the challenges that the services always face.

I want to deal with welfare for families while service personnel are in theatre. The provision of 20 minutes of phone calls has been greatly welcomed and well received, but it of course depends on lines being available. Often, the practical experience is that those in a queue of service personnel waiting to phone their families are conscious of wanting to let the next person have their turn. Although significant progress has been made, I hope that we keep that provision under review and build on it. We should also consider how e-communications facilitate contact between families and service personnel on deployment.

I want to say a word about warrants. The family issues differ between the Army and the Navy, where deployments may be particularly long and distant. Warrants are available for the next of kin, but it may be helpful, for example, for a young woman who is having perhaps her second or third child and whose partner is on a lengthy deployment to have the support of her parents or a sibling. Such a woman could get on a train and go to

her family, but that is not easy with two or three young children. Indeed, although it may be financially difficult, it may be a great deal easier in practical terms for the grandparents or a sibling to go to her.

I hope that consideration is given to extending the warrant scheme. Given the number of people in such circumstances, the cost would not be huge and such an extension would go a long way to help people in service communities to feel that the Government continue to understand and value their role in service life.

Service families frequently take up with me the great need to make relevant information available as quickly as possible. Ministers make great efforts to ensure that that is done, and family briefings direct from the MOD in case of deployment are important, but I am not sure that they run as smoothly as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently implied in answer to my intervention on his statement to the House.

Ministers understand the importance of making information available, but some armchair generals and commentators go in for hype and melodrama. There has been column inch after column inch of speculation. As I said in my intervention, service families can deal with facts, but not with the gossip to which such speculation gives rise in their communities. Hon. Members who share an interest in defence, either through serving on the Defence Committee or because they represent a defence community, know the importance of being measured and restrained, and considerate of the families' circumstances.

I hope that hon. Members will be interested to hear that on 4 April, just a few days ago, the Royal Naval and Royal Marine Families Association launched what I think is the first interactive website, on www.rnrmfa.com.

Mr. Ingram *indicated assent.*

Linda Gilroy: My right hon. Friend has heard of it. The site not only gives information on access to services that service families might need and to the latest information, but it has password-protected access so that families can share information and gain support from each other. I gather from talking to those involved just this morning that the site is already serving a useful purpose in bringing people together. When I visited my local Royal Navy community centre last November and talked with a large number of service women, I was surprised to learn that they were sometimes a little slower to receive direct information than we are given to understand.

The website represents an innovative self-help resource, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will look carefully at the resourcing of welfare services, especially the support groups that surround naval community centres, as they will have a critical role to play for some of my constituents in the weeks ahead.

There are many other issues that I could raise. I have already intervened on the subject of the warship maintenance and modernisation initiative. I share the concern expressed by other hon. Members who represent constituencies that are affected by the initiative and I am deeply disappointed that it has not been possible to progress with the trade union proposal.

I greatly welcome the fact that we are able to keep the Millbay Territorial Army centre. It is a beautiful modern centre that brings many young students studying at Plymouth university into the territorial armed services. I look forward to continuing to visit the centre and to maintaining my relationship with it.

I cannot let this occasion pass without mentioning the opening of Trident dock No. 154 in Plymouth, which took place recently in the presence of the Duke of Edinburgh. Obviously, that has huge implications for service families and support workers in Plymouth, and Plymouth is very proud of it.

I make no apology for using my time in this debate to emphasise the value and importance of our service families and to reflect their appreciation of the work that is being carried out through the service families taskforce. I encourage my right hon. Friends to continue to build on the relationship that is being developed through the taskforce and to listen carefully to its views.

5.53 pm

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Unfortunately, I had to leave the debate after the opening speeches by Front-Bench Members to attend the Board of Management of the House, so I hope that colleagues will forgive me for not hearing all the speeches. Those that I heard were illuminating.

I am glad to be in the Chamber with my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger), because several thousand years ago he and I served together in the Territorial Army battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. Time has been kinder to him than it has to me, but we have happy memories. The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers now has more Members of Parliament than any other regiment, which is encouraging.

I shall be brief because other colleagues wish to contribute to the debate, but I wish to focus on the Territorial Army and the fact that its strength has gone down from 56,200 to just over 39,000. That fall of 16,300 since the Government came to office is a great shame, and also a great mistake.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) refer to the value of the cadets in the community. I echo that view, because that is another aspect of the Territorial Army. Its military role should be defined: that is what people join for, and what they enjoy. However, the House should not underestimate the contribution that the TA makes to the community. When we witness civic parades and the rest, we should appreciate the value that our voluntary armed forces bring to their communities. The hon. Lady made the point that the Territorial Army takes its cadet forces from among those who may not have had the best start in life or the best chances. It gives them an opportunity to experience personal self-discipline, not the unthinking discipline that many without military experience expect. That is of huge value to our society.

In their opening remarks, the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) dwelt on the issue of recruitment and retention, which is unquestionably a problem in the Regular Army. The demands on limited resources are too great, and the line is too taut. That is having an effect on training, morale and retention.

There is a great belief in the House of Commons and, I suspect, even in Downing street that every time there is a crisis we should send for the special forces. People do

[Derek Conway]

not always realise where the special forces' training ground is: it is in the regiments of the line. If we continually depress the opportunity of people to serve in their geographically based regiments, heaven alone knows where we will get our special forces from in the next 20 years. I am sure that the Defence Committee will give that matter consideration at some stage.

I want to pay particular tribute to the often unsung but much valued work of the service charities in keeping up the morale of our service men and their families at difficult times. One of the areas that we sadly did not address when my party was in government—and the present Government are certainly not doing so now—is the poor home acquisition, especially of those who serve in the Army. It is much better for those in the Royal Navy, and even better for personnel in the Royal Air Force. Home ownership in the Army is extremely poor. Assistance, explanations and encouragement are not what they need to be to help that vital family aspect.

This and all other debates that we have on armed forces personnel rightly enable Members to pay tribute to their local areas. In the royal funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, we witnessed the standards that people believe have disappeared in this country. Perhaps they have disappeared in certain areas of life, but without doubt they have not disappeared from our armed forces. That sense of personal discipline, loyalty and efficiency above all is much valued.

On a personal note, whenever I have contact with the private offices of the Secretary of State or any of his departmental Ministers, the response is always quick, helpful and efficient. If every Department of State operated in the same way, our governance would be well served. I hope that those who do not wear a uniform but who help the armed forces realise that they are appreciated as well.

Many hon. Members want to contribute, so I shall just put on record my concern about the human rights campaign against children serving in the armed forces. We must not let that affect the work of the cadet forces, which provide the seedcorn for future generations, especially the adult instructors, and make a huge contribution to our society. It has been encouraging that support for them in the debate has come from both sides of the House, and they will need that support in the coming year or two.

5.58 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I want to raise two issues that have an impact on our armed forces operating abroad: cluster bombs and the treatment of prisoners of war.

We are having this debate when British troops are involved in operations in many places overseas, from Kosovo to Afghanistan. British troops are among the best in the world. Although they may not be perfect, the country is rightly proud of what they are capable of and achieve when deployed. In all situations, the safety of British troops should be paramount. It is easy to focus on this issue at the moment, as soldiers are dispatched overseas, but we need to think about the risk to our forces earlier in the process.

In Kosovo and Afghanistan, deployments were preceded by major military air activities that included the dropping of many types of weapons, including cluster bombs. The dropping of those weapons took place when it was possible, if not probable, that British ground forces would later be deployed in the areas under attack. One of the greatest hazards facing British soldiers in Kosovo and Afghanistan is the unexploded remnants of war that result from cluster bomblets that have failed to detonate. That was acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Defence in the House on 1 November. What he said can be found at columns 1024 and 1025 of the *Official Report*, but I shall paraphrase. He said that soldiers could well die in the aftermath of the dropping of cluster bombs, and that that was just a factor in the balance of the war effort.

During the same debate, the Secretary of State for International Development said

"None of the cluster bombs dropped over Afghanistan contained delayed action minelets or land mines."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 1099.]

That is acknowledged. We know that what is done is not deliberate. Nevertheless, a high percentage of bomblets do not explode as a matter of course, and there is the same delayed action. On 23 March, *The Guardian* quoted the Secretary of State for International Development, saying

"The UN mine action service estimates that 1,152 cluster bombs were dropped by the US . . . and there were 'up to 14,000 unexploded bomblets as a result'.

The true figure could not be confirmed until more clearance work was done and the US had provided more information about where cluster bombs were dropped".

I ask the Minister now whether the United States has provided that information.

Patrick Mercer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Harry Cohen: No. I do not have enough time.

In an article in this month's issue of *CAAT News*, the Campaign Against Arms Trade magazine, Richard Lloyd of Landmine Action writes

"In Afghanistan, the US Air Force told mine clearance NGOs that they dropped more than 244,000 cluster bomblets."

At least 10 per cent., he says,

"are thought to be left on the ground, live and extremely dangerous."

That clearly poses a risk to our United Kingdom soldiers in the region.

I shall curtail my comments about cluster bombs. Let me just say that there is a campaign, led by Landmine Action and reported in *CAAT News*, for the establishment of a new international law placing responsibility for the clearance of all explosive weapons, including cluster bombs, on those who have used them. The campaign also demands a moratorium on the use, manufacture, sale and export of cluster bombs until the introduction of a new international law on their use and clearance. I strongly support that campaign.

Jim Knight *rose—*

Harry Cohen: I will give way to my hon. Friend, as he may not be able to make a speech today.

Jim Knight: May I say something by way of reassurance? When I was in Kabul last week, I spoke to Lieutenant-Colonel Alistair Sheppard, commanding officer of 36 Engineers Regiment, and raised this specific issue. His troops had cleared 200,000 unexploded

ordnance, land mines and the like. When I asked how much of that was cluster-bomb material, I was told that it was a negligible amount in the overall context. I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but he should see the situation within that overall framework.

Harry Cohen: I note my hon. Friend's experience, but there are clearly severe risks to soldiers and, certainly, to civilians from unexploded ordnance and cluster bombs. I repeat that I support the campaign that I mentioned.

Patrick Mercer *rose—*

Harry Cohen: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman very briefly.

Patrick Mercer: No munition that is fired, be it mortar round, artillery round, aircraft bomb or cluster bomb, has a 100 per cent. detonation rate. The hon. Gentleman will know that during peacetime training UK forces, certainly, are not allowed to skirmish, walk or otherwise move over ground on which artillery ammunition has fallen, for that very reason. But if it is suggested that cluster bombs should not be used to protect our own troops, surely the next step is to suggest that our troops should be deprived of artillery or mortar bombardments. That takes the whole argument to an absurd level.

Harry Cohen: The hon. Gentleman is coming from the wrong direction. The effect of the bomblets in cluster bombs is the same as that of land mines. There is a clear record of enormous damage to civilians, and to British soldiers. That was acknowledged by the Secretary of State on 1 November.

We will continue the important debate on cluster bombs in due course, but I now want to say something about prisoners of war. Thankfully no British soldiers have been taken prisoner by any of the factions involved in the war in Afghanistan, but if there were any British prisoners we would want to ensure that they were treated with due care and respect. That is one of the key reasons why I believe it is important for rules relating to prisoners of war taken by British troops to be published. One of the protections that we can provide for our troops is transparency in the rules that we apply to our prisoners.

I accept that certain details should not be made public, such as contingency plans as regards the location of holding centres, but some features should be made clear. Through parliamentary questions, I have been able to establish that there are no standard guidelines for coalition partners; and that the UK guidelines comply with the 1977 additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva conventions—the second additional protocol applies the conventions to military actions that are not taking place between states, although I am not sure that the United States accepts that. I also established that the guidelines were not updated after the uprising at Qala-i-Jhangi fort, near Mazar-e-Sharif, where all the prisoners were killed.

The "Manual of Military Law" gives a large amount of detail. The manual is a public document about the treatment of prisoners of war. Presumably, the guidance for Afghanistan complies with the manual, but I ask the Minister to state that clearly. It seems strange—indeed, alarming—that the guidance is kept secret. Even stranger is the refusal, under exemption 1(a) of the code of practice on access to public information, of my request that the guidance be placed in the Library.

In a letter to me of 7 March, the Secretary of State wrote:

"I am not prepared to disclose operational details of this sort."

I was not asking for details. How can guidance be operational? It is a matter of principle. The letter continued:

"As for the dates on which the guidance was issued, this would reveal operational details which we still regard as classified."

I do not believe that can still be the case. What has the Ministry of Defence got to hide? Were the guidelines issued too late? Were they issued but ignored by the armed forces; or did everything go smoothly? There are doubts. Everyone was killed at Qala-i-Jhangi fort. Was that in line with UK guidance? UK soldiers took part in crushing that uprising. I realise that a United States soldier was killed by the US pro-Taliban man, but all the prisoners were killed—they were not given the opportunity to surrender. There are clearly issues of appropriateness and proportionality.

Perhaps we have merely fallen in with the more barbaric US treatment of prisoners. We need answers. At least the main guidance for the UK treatment of prisoners should be published. This new secrecy has, in effect, wiped out hard-won humanitarian rules for dealing with prisoners of war, painstakingly built up during the second half of the last century.

That is a serious matter for our troops. For example, the UK and the US have taken military action that was not declared as war. The US has recently diminished the importance of the Geneva conventions and the rules—if any exist—for dealing with prisoners are kept secret. If a prisoner is insolent or sullen, can he be shot?

What would we say if Saddam Hussein used that precedent in any future war in Iraq? That is why the matter is so important for our troops. Let us deal with the problem seriously and openly, and publish the general principles and guidelines for coping with prisoners of war.

6.9 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway), who pointed out that he was somewhat older than me when we joined the Fusiliers. However, the name of that regiment has changed four times since 1967. It is now the Tyne Tees Regiment—that sounds like a margarine spread—and is an amalgamation of three regiments. Therein lies the problem.

We have heard an enormous amount about the future of the military. We have a two-tier military. Until the SDR, there was a two-year training cycle; our armed forces were either preparing to go into action or they were in action. There is now a three-year training cycle: a training year; a year building up to deployment; and a deployment year. The problem is that that does not work.

Up to 28 per cent. of the military are now totally committed. I was horrified to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) that the Royal Anglian Regiment is having to take people from other regiments to keep up the numbers, and it is a well-recruited regiment. The 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in the Gulf—hon. Members may remember the friendly fire incident—was made up of five different regiments to get the numbers to a level at which they were operationally effective. That was 10 years ago.

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

Our problem is that the military is not being given the time and the training to do the job that it is so willing to do. As a result, it is losing people. We cannot expect personnel to go from one operation to another. They physically cannot do it, especially in this day and age.

I joined the Territorial Army in 1980, at the very start of the big exercises that took place every two years. My first one was Crusader, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) was an infantry officer, like me. In those days, we had a defensive role. We knew that we were going to the River Wiese to hold the bridge and when the friendly forces had crossed, we blew the bridge up and disappeared back to Dunkirk. Now, there is no role for the TA. In the old days we fought as formed units; one fought as a Fusilier or an Anglian. Now the role is either home defence, or as part of a battlefield replacement programme, not as members of formed units.

Why should a recruit join the TA? What is his incentive? He comes out of basic training and does his "boot camp"—an American term—and then what? What hope does he have? What does he have to look forward to? There is not the equipment, the mandate or the money. I was talking to a TA unit and was told that it had been to Gibraltar. I remember going to Germany and America to do the job that we were supposed to do, which was to hold or defend areas. We trained with the army with which we were most likely to work. We understood the job that they were trying to do, and vice versa.

One of the biggest problems for the TA is getting equipment that works. The SA80 apparently has had more than 100 modifications since it first came into service. I believe that it now works; my hon. Friend the Member for Newark can tell me if I am wrong. The Army needs decent equipment. If it does not have it, the Army will not function. I was watching the Marines getting out of their aircraft in Afghanistan, and one could see that they were still using the old equipment, such as webbing and Bergens. Why are they not being upgraded for a potential action situation? Interestingly, the Anglians seemed to have updated equipment.

Yesterday we had a debate about ordnance. At present we are looking to move the production of our ordnance elsewhere. Our personnel want ordnance that works and on which they can rely. If we do not have continuity of supply in this country, we will not be in a position to support our own troops. In the long term, we must encourage the people whom we want to come in.

The turnover of the TA is 33 per cent., much of which is due to people disappearing after basic training. They have nothing to look forward to. If the Minister wants to continue to use these people, he should give them the chance to do the job that they set out to do. A Royal Marine from Minehead in my constituency stated that he signed up to do a job, and knew that the Marines would take casualties. However, they did not mind because that is what they set out to do. Any soldier feels that. I remember sitting on the Wiese, wondering how long we would last. Our life expectancy in those days was 24 hours if the Russians came over to say hello. That is not good. The situation is now a lot better, yet we still have problems with retention, and they are getting worse. As that is the case, surely incentives must be considered.

The Territorial Army has a system of bonuses—bounties—which one works up to throughout training. Could it not be extended? If we want to keep personnel such as the thrusting captains, majors, sergeant-majors and sergeants whom my hon. Friend the Member for Newark mentioned, as we need them for the future, we must give them some sort of golden handcuff. It happens in industry, so why can it not apply to military life too?

Another problem is maintaining cadet numbers. Cadet trainers are not paid, so what is their incentive to do the job? At present there are 60 sea cadets in Bridgwater, but their numbers fluctuate greatly because when a good trainer goes, he cannot be replaced. Where can a replacement be found? Service personnel are no longer able to do the job. Eventually, people are recruited from the British Legion. There is no doubt that their ideas about training are well out of date.

I do not agree that cadets can supply the needs of the military. Hopefully, they will go on to join the Territorial Army or the regulars. However, an enormous amount of good is done by getting youngsters into something that gives them a structured life. Military personnel realise that, as it is the reason why many people join the military in the first place.

We are debating the retention of military personnel. Unless we give them incentives, we will not manage that. The training cycle is too tight and the military cannot cope with it because the commitments are too high. If the Minister can give military personnel some assurance that they will have a home life and a family life in a training cycle that works, long-term retention will become much easier.

6.16 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I shall be brief as I am keen to hear the winding-up speech of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), my comrade on the Defence Committee. I want to pay tribute to our armed forces personnel, particularly as I saw them in Kabul last week.

In previous defence debates I have made clear my view, which is that of the Defence Committee as articulated by its Chairman, that more resources need to be put into defence and that there is strain, particularly in terms of logistics and support group work. I would have reinforced that in my speech had there been more time, but I did not want to skip over the tribute that I want to pay to the work of our armed forces in Kabul.

I was hugely impressed by the leadership of the international security assistance force by General McColl and his staff. He paid tribute to the unique role of PJHQ—permanent joint headquarters—in providing capability for rapid deployment. General McColl is performing a tremendous role in pulling together the multinational force of 19 countries. I was particularly impressed by his ability in the delicate task of negotiating with and maintaining a good relationship with the various disparate elements within Afghanistan civil society and with the Interim Administration. His intelligence work must also be praised. Therefore, I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that Turkey may not be taking over until after the Loya Jirga. Those relationships are so very delicate that perhaps there is strength in General McColl remaining in charge of sustaining them as matters become increasingly difficult leading up to the important meeting in the summer.

I would say in passing to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that there is a strong difference between what is going on now in Kabul and the Russian occupation. We are there in support of the Interim Administration; we are not an occupying force. The civilian population understand that, and certainly our armed forces are clear about their role.

Our ability to deploy rapidly was exceptionally impressive, particularly in regard to the airport. When our troops did the recce in December they found the damage caused by eight 2,000 lb bombs dropped by the United States Air Force, including five huge craters on the runway. Within six days of their arrival there on 11 January, the airport had been opened and supplies were coming in for both military and civilian support. The first plane to arrive was on a humanitarian flight.

It is very important that the public get the message that our armed forces in Kabul are performing an extraordinary humanitarian mission. We saw Royal Engineers working on schools, on sanitation, on roads and on mine clearance, as I mentioned earlier. We saw the Brigade support group bringing in supplies with only 200 out of the 1,500 British deployment; the Germans, for example, have 80 per cent. support for only 20 per cent. active troops. Our armed forces are doing a tremendous job. The professionalism and experience of the Royal Anglians was also superb. The Royal Engineers raised funds themselves to carry out some of that humanitarian work—for example, $1,000 for a playground to be renovated in one village as part of the facilities being provided.

I am sorry that I have not been able to say more but I am keen to hear the contribution of the hon. Member for Aldershot. In conclusion, I echo what has been said about support for the armed forces and about making sure that they have a good home life. They are superb and internationally respected. They need more resources, which I would love to see being provided in the Budget next week. In particular, I ask Ministers to pay attention to the quality of life of the armed forces, both at home and on deployment overseas.

6.21 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): This has been an extremely good debate. There have been some very thoughtful and knowledgeable contributions, including that of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) who along with my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) have brought to the House their recent experiences in Afghanistan. As the right hon. Member for Walsall, South said, this debate often appears to be peopled by those who are on the Defence Committee, were on the Defence Committee or want to be on the Defence Committee. That is probably very true. Although we may not be large in number, the quality of today's debate has been good.

I join right hon. and hon. Members who have paid tribute to all those who are currently serving with Her Majesty's forces at home and overseas, especially those who are in active deployment in Afghanistan, the Balkans and Sierra Leone. We should also remember especially, as the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) did at the outset of the debate, those Royal Air Force pilots who, as we speak, are policing the no-fly zone in Iraq, and who do so day in, day out, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and who put their lives at risk in so doing.

The House has paid its customary and heartfelt tribute to the professionalism of our armed forces. They are trained for war fighting, and we must remember that, as we speak, not only do members of the RAF police the no-fly zone but members of the Royal Marines have been called on to undertake very difficult operations in Afghanistan alongside other members of our forces. It is a tribute to our armed forces that the United States has sought their support in these difficult operations in Afghanistan.

As other contributors to this afternoon's debate have said, we have also been privileged in the past week to see the other side of our armed forces, as they have shown such extraordinary professionalism, maintained such high standards and shown such extraordinary precision in the way they have performed their duties in respect of the lying in state and the funeral of the late Queen Mother. It was a moment to be savoured by everyone. The precision on display gave me an enormous sense of pride. The whole nation has been reminded, in this somewhat sombre hour, of just how good our armed forces are—both in the hills of Afghanistan and when showing such extraordinary dignity and professionalism here in London. They have sent out to the rest of the world the message that we are the best, and that no one does it like the British.

It is no accident that those twin facets of our armed forces should have been portrayed in such an excellent fashion. The training to which they are subject has created the quality armed forces that this country has. We have the best training, and we must ensure that that remains the case.

However, we must also remember the families of those elements of our armed forces that are serving at present. Times have been difficult for them since 11 September. I am sure that our hearts go out to all the armed forces families around the country, and especially in the garrison towns. Those families have to contend with being separated from loved ones whose jobs mean that they might be putting their lives at risk in the service of the rest of us.

We must remember too that only a small proportion of the British population is at war in Afghanistan. The rest of the population is getting on with ordinary business, and that is another reason for paying special attention to the families involved. We must ensure that they get the support that they need.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) made an extremely good speech. He painted a vivid picture of the reality of life in the armed forces today. It is fine for the squaddie going out and visiting different parts of the world as a young man: he has no responsibility, is well trained and is doing what he wants to do. However, it is different for people who have acquired the responsibilities of wife and family. My hon. Friend painted a clear picture of the tensions that can arise in such families.

We must ensure that a lesser burden is placed on the senior NCOs, upon whom so much responsibility rests. They are highly trained, but they must be able to continue to command the support of their families. Without that support, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh said, such people will be forced to decide between Army and family. That is not a choice with which we should present them. We should ensure that they can maintain both family and career. To do that, we need more people to

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

take on the jobs. What has happened is that we have taken on more jobs and commitments, yet we have fewer people to perform those jobs and meet those commitments.

As has been noted already, training is suffering as a result of the constraints being placed on our armed forces. Our troops do not get the training they need because they are spending too much time on operational duties. Ultimately, that will impact on the quality of the operational service they can provide. That is another reason why we must ensure that we have enough soldiers and service personnel to undertake the tasks being placed upon them.

Opposition Members support the Government's desire to deploy our armed forces in Britain's interests overseas, but we are not uncritical. It is our duty to pose questions, and many hon. Members of all parties have done just that in this debate. I can tell the right hon. Member for Walsall, South that we do not take the year-zero approach and assume that everything was completely correct before 1997, and that everything has gone wrong since.

However, it is no good the Government saying that everything is the fault of the Conservative Government. This Government have been in office for five years. They have had the opportunity to put matters right, and they have set out their proposals in the strategic defence review. They must be held to account for the state of our armed forces, and they must balance that state against the commitments that they wish those forces to undertake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) made some good points about the defence medical services. I have visited the Centre for Defence Medicine in Selly Oak, Birmingham and agree that it is in the wrong place. It is a military unit in a goldfish bowl. It is isolated and a fish out of water. Its staff were not allowed to wear their uniforms in public in the immediate aftermath of 11 September. The unit is 45 minutes away from the nearest defence establishment. I must tell the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) that I cast no aspersions on the service that it provides, which is first class; all I am saying is that it is in the wrong place and the Government need to act urgently to rebuild the defence medical services. It does not encourage the troops that we send into action to know that they have to rely on contingents of foreign field hospitals to receive the best treatment.

Dr. Moonie: Why?

Mr. Howarth: None of us is saying that the quality of the medical services provided elsewhere is substandard, but our service men must think that something is wrong if the Government cannot provide the medical services that they need when they are sent into battle. That problem has to be addressed.

Accommodation was mentioned by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy). I accept that the Government recognise that much work needs to be done on accommodation, especially single-living accommodation. The Minister knows about the shocking state of accommodation in Aldershot and elsewhere. In addition, *The Mirror*, which does not support the Conservative party, said that the Paras were put into substandard accommodation when they returned from Afghanistan. One of their senior NCOs said:

"It hardly makes you feel your service is valued by the powers that be if this is all you get for putting your life on the line."

No one expects results overnight, but the Government have to ensure that there is a programme of refurbishment of accommodation so that it is up to a standard that our service men and women are entitled to expect. Indeed, the Select Committee report said that the

"last thing servicemen need when deployed on operations is to be worrying about the standards of accommodation back home".

The Government should take that assertion to heart and do something about it, as they should with so many of the Committee's deliberations. I hope that the Minister will say what will happen on that score.

Pensions remain a subject of debate. It is a concern that there is no resolution to the proposals that the Government introduced some time ago. When they launched the pensions review in 1998, the Minister then responsible, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), said:

"We need to ensure that the Armed Forces Scheme is in line with the best modern practice".

It is now more than 12 months since the Government's proposals were published. Although consultation is welcome, it is time for them to deal with the serious concerns expressed by some highly reputable organisations, such as the Royal British Legion and the Forces Pensions Society. As the society said, the current scheme has already fallen behind modern, good or even standard practice.

The Minister of State told the Select Committee last month that

"the cost neutrality aspect was not an original driver".

Now, however, we are told that improvements have to be found within the existing budget and there will be no recourse to new money. It is unacceptable for the Government to continue to claim that they want to improve the pensions of our armed forces to bring them up to the best in the commercial world while failing to deliver because they say that cost neutrality is now a baseline consideration. A comparison of various costs of benefits per year of service as a percentage of pensionable salary shows that the armed forces are not an exceptional burden, at 15 per cent. Comparable figures are 22 per cent. for the police and 16 per cent. for the civil service. I ask the Minister to take the one-off opportunity of this first serious review in 30 years to ensure that pensions are tackled properly and that if more money is needed to ensure that pension arrangements are in line with best practice in the commercial world, that money will be found and there will be no penny-pinching.

The important role of the cadet forces was mentioned by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway). I think that all hon. Members will welcome their remarks. The cadet forces make a huge contribution not only to our local communities but to giving young people the military ethos and, as the hon. Lady said, to keeping them off the streets where they might be led astray. Forty-five per cent. of the Royal Air Force's air crew recruits of all ranks come from the air cadets.

Last week I was with the Royal Engineers at Gibraltar barracks, where I met people from the university officer training corps, which is represented in 19 universities. They were having a fantastic time and were hugely committed, and large numbers of young people in our universities are joining them. When Ministers make financial decisions, I hope that they will not be tempted to think that the cadets are an easy option that can be knocked off to save a few bob, because the long-term cost will be hugely disproportionate.

We heard about the Territorial Army, which is 1,300 below strength. The Government are increasingly having recourse to our reservists, and the Secretary of State himself acknowledged that fortunately his plans to cut the Territorial Army were insufficiently far advanced to have done all the damage that might otherwise have been done. My hon. Friends the Members for Rayleigh and for Newark were right to say that we must consider the role of our reserve forces as we decide how best to tackle the defence of the United Kingdom homeland against the threat of international terrorism. They have a role to play, albeit that none of us wants them to spend all their time being recruited to go and sit by some key installation, because that is not their function. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) said, the TA should again provide formed units.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) mentioned the case of retired officers, and I support his comments 100 per cent. It is unfortunate that the Government did not include them among those who are to receive the golden jubilee medal, because they make a large contribution to the running of establishments around the country. They work extremely hard, but are paid less than a corporal. I shall give the Minister some examples of what they do. One is a nuclear propulsion naval liaison officer with Rolls-Royce in Derby; another is a staff officer to the Chief of the General Staff; another is a housing commandant at Aldergrove. The Commander-in-Chief, Land, General Sir Mike Jackson, has said that his command would come to a halt without those people. It is time for the Government to review their decision and include them among those who are to receive the medal.

I have one or two other queries for the Minister. For example, we need information from the Government on what they intend to do about women on the front line. We also need information about the Government's intentions for courts martial given the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. If they had followed our advice and ensured that Britain had a derogation from the European convention on human rights for our defence services, we would not have had this problem in the first place. The Government should have listened to us.

The Government are keen to call upon our armed forces to defend Britain's interests and those of our allies around the world. We support them in their endeavours. The Government are fortunate that they can take pride in the commitment and professionalism of our forces, but the clear message from both sides of the House is that the current levels of commitment cannot be maintained given the resources being provided. Under this Government, defence spending has fallen consistently as a percentage of GDP—from 3 per cent. in 1995–96 to 2.5 per cent. last year. It is expected to fall further to 2.3 per cent. next year.

The obvious strain of that shrinking budget is clear for all to see. Too much reliance on the dedication of our existing personnel cannot be allowed to continue. If we are to maintain the effectiveness of the forces in whom we take so much pride, we must will the means to provide them with the best available equipment and ensure that they and their families can enjoy a quality of life commensurate with the commitment that they give to our country.

6.41 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): This has been an informed and wide-ranging debate, as others have said. I am genuinely grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions. In the time available, I will do my best to respond to many of the detailed points raised. If it is not possible to deal with them all, I shall respond in writing.

I contend that the Government are working hard for all our people in the armed forces. Given what we as a nation ask of our armed forces, especially when they have to be deployed into unexpected and often dangerous situations, that is only right. As we speak, more than 28,000 men and women in our armed forces are deployed around the world. As has been recognised, it is the quality of our people—both service and civilian personnel—that is the single most important element of our defence capability.

Although this debate is about the armed forces, it would be remiss of me not to mention in passing their civilian counterparts in the Ministry of Defence. Increasingly, they are called on to support the armed forces very close to the front line in, for example, the Gulf, Kosovo, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Oman and Afghanistan. The Government recognise their vital contribution to the defence effort. They do a first-class job.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) mentioned warship support modernisation. I hear what they say and, in my intervention, I tried to explain the way in which we have dealt with the matter. We made a commitment to make a statement to the House through the normal process of a parliamentary question—we could obviously have used other means—and I did not want to breach that commitment. If I had entered into the debate over the weekend, I would have done so before informing the House of our decision. I believe in all sincerity that that would have been the wrong approach and that it would have been wrong to indicate in depth our arguments to individual Members of Parliament—even to my hon. Friends—and to ask them to take those arguments on for me. I believe that I acted with honesty and integrity.

I fully understand the depth of feeling that accompanied our announcement to proceed with the partnering arrangements. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West that it is not a privatisation; it is a partnering arrangement. The non-industrial staff on the Clyde will take a day of industrial action tomorrow and that reflects the unease that some of the work force undoubtedly feel. However, our decision, which was announced in the House on 21 March, was the right one to take at this time in our defence interests. That does not mean that I or my ministerial colleagues value any less the outstanding work that has been done over the years at the dockyards.

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

All the options offer significant benefits compared with the current costs of undertaking warship repairs and maintenance, but the company proposals offer the best overall value for the defence pound. A projected saving of £300 million over five years will make a considerable contribution to the better delivery of front-line services.

My hon. Friends will take the view that the status quo was not an option in that determination. If the status quo is not an option and hon. Members are concerned about a contraction in posts and jobs as a consequence, they should tell us how many job losses they would be prepared to accept. The reality is that, although we are talking about some 750 jobs being lost over five years at three yards, the situation will be well managed by the companies involved. It will become a matter between the unions and those companies.

I had a very productive meeting with the trade unions yesterday. They set out their main concerns—the five points mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall)—and we have made some progress on them. We are sensitive to the issue, but we also have to make progress in delivering the best services at the yards.

Mr. McFall: I thank the Minister for his efforts with the unions yesterday, but there is a still a big job to do in assuaging concerns, so will he and perhaps the Secretary of State and others ensure that they will visit the yards? In particular, will the Minister visit Faslane with me, so that we achieve that co-operative effort and ensure that best practice, which has been maintained at that yard, will continue?

Mr. Ingram: I can tell the House that Portsmouth council has asked to meet me, along with local Members of Parliament and, I suspect, trade union representatives. I have agreed to that meeting. If the unions requested a meeting at the facility, I would not refuse it. If my hon. Friend's local authority made a similar request, I would not refuse it. However, I do not want to impose myself into that debate if those involved do not wish me to be there.

Linda Gilroy: The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), will meet Plymouth city council a week tomorrow to discuss a number of issues related to the dockyard, including the one that the Minister mentions. Would the Minister agree to meet representatives of the council if that is their wish?

Mr. Ingram: Yes, because I believe that we have a strong and sustainable case and it is right to deal with it in that way. However, at the end of the day, the relationship is with the trade unions in one sense and, more importantly, with the employees in those dockyards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said that the way in which we are dealing with nuclear refit represents a new departure. Contractors already deal with nuclear refit, so there is no new departure. There is already a mixed economy in those dockyards and what we are doing represents a step change in that approach.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. I have spoken at length about that issue.

Mr. Gray *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: Very well.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister reconsider the privatisation of the defence fire service?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman should await the outcome of the study into providing those services and let me consider all the options that are put to me at that time. If he has any answers to deal with what is undoubtedly a range of inefficiencies in the delivery of those services, I shall be interested to hear them. We are trying to address the issue by examining the options, so that we can maximise the return on the defence pound and the money saved can then go into the front line.

I visited Sierra Leone a few weeks ago. I was able to visit and speak to our men and women in Afghanistan last week. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) and the hon. Members for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and, of course, for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) accompanied me on that visit and, as they said, it was very worth while.

Mr. Jenkin: Some of it was.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is not complimentary about the visit, but that is a matter for him. I was greatly impressed by what I saw during those visits.

In Sierra Leone there are about 360 personnel, providing highly valued military training and assistance to the Sierra Leone armed forces and ministry of defence. On the ground in Afghanistan, in the separate roles of security assistance in Kabul and combat against terrorist groups, by the end of this month, there will be a total of about 3,000 service personnel.

Those men and women are working tirelessly to ensure that our promises to root out evil and bring hope and stability to the battered populations in Afghanistan are delivered on. Our supporting maritime deployment consists of nearly 1,900 personnel on 12 vessels. Everyone to whom I talked was highly motivated, dedicated and committed to what has been asked of them. I accept that that is recognised throughout the House.

The Government recognise the unique position that our armed forces occupy in our society. We ask our men and women to make an open-ended commitment that imposes limitations on their individual freedoms, and requires self-sacrifice not only from them but from their families.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South talked about expeditionary campaigns, and how we deliver the infrastructure for them. We procured an improved tented camp as an urgent operational requirement during the Kosovo campaign. That provides

much, but not all, of what is needed to support deployed forces. It is available for use by ISAF and the other elements deployed in Afghanistan.

That is undoubtedly an improvement on the pre-Kosovo equipment but it does not provide everything that we need in a form as easily deployable as we would like. We are therefore also working quickly to procure a much improved expeditionary campaign infrastructure, which will provide a fully integrated stand-alone capability, with power generation, ablution facilities, sewage treatment, and laundry and catering facilities for more than 5,000 troops. That capability will come into service during 2003-04, and it will be among the best in the world. We shall feed the lessons that we are learning in ISAF, and those that we learned through Saif Sareea 2 and Kosovo, including best practice from other countries, into the project.

The question of the food available to our forces has been raised. The food available to our forces deployed in Afghanistan is the envy of the other forces deployed alongside them. *[Interruption.]* Those who accompanied me on the visit may not agree, but that is what those who consume the food say—and it shows the great success of our new arrangements for contracting for food and delivering it to the front line. We should never minimise that part of the logistic chain. Good quality food and regular hot meals are important for people in very difficult circumstances.

The professionalism, loyalty and courage, both moral and physical, given so freely by the men and women of our armed forces create an obligation that has to be met. Ensuring that we continue to deliver on the strategic defence review's "A Policy for People" is one way in which we can begin to meet that obligation.

Before I deal with some of the personnel issues that have been raised, I should comment on what the hon. Member for North Essex said, and the debate that took place between him and his hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), about the joint Harrier force, and our decision to concentrate the development of that force on the Harrier GR7. That decision has already been explained by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—and of course, we upgraded to GR9 standard.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex suggested that our decision had frustrated a desire to deploy those aircraft in support of operations in Afghanistan. I wholly refute the suggestion that our forces in Afghanistan sought the deployment of Sea Harriers, or that that was at any stage a feature of our military planning. There was no operational need for UK air defence aircraft. As was made clear when we announced our investment strategy, the planned withdrawal of the Sea Harrier will not begin until 2004.

Mr. Soames: I was not talking about the deployment of Sea Harriers to Afghanistan. I was talking about the GR7. I should be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman clarified the point.

Mr. Ingram: If I have got it wrong, I apologise. The issue is the defence of the fleet, and the hon. Gentleman was referring to that in terms of Afghanistan.

Mr. Soames: The point that I was making was that, from the date on which the Sea Harrier is withdrawn from service, the fleet when deployed anywhere will not have its own integral air defence. That is wholly unacceptable and renders the Royal Navy a coastal force and no longer a blue-water force.

Mr. Ingram: That might be unacceptable to the hon. Gentleman, but it was of course part of the planned development concerning the expeditionary force—*[Interruption.]* Many issues have been raised in the debate, but I am sorry that I have touched on that one—not because I got it wrong, but because the hon. Gentleman has said that there would thereafter be no air defence of the fleet.

The new fleet—the type 45 destroyers and all the defensive aids and suites that go with them—will form a very sophisticated layer of defence. That is part of the planning assumption. We have of course been planning for strike capability—developing the expeditionary force so that we can destroy the threat on the ground rather than having the layer of defence dependent on equipment that will be phased out. If I have misinterpreted some of the hon. Gentleman's language, I apologise, but he and others are wrong in their allegations.

Mr. Francois: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, I am going to try to move on as I have only three minutes left.

There are five main pillars to our personnel delivery strategy: to cultivate, obtain, retain, sustain and remember. Many of the issues that right hon. and hon. Members have raised relate to all those elements. Cultivation is about creating a climate in the country in which the armed forces are still seen as relevant, necessary and desirable—an essential feature of what we are doing. Hon. Members have mentioned the role of the cadet forces in that respect, which is of course just one element to it. Many other initiatives are taken. The other pillar relating to overall policy is the obtaining of the resource that we need. The recruitment of individuals of the right calibre poses huge challenges for the armed forces.

Retention is undoubtedly a very big issue. The reality is that no single policy can address it. In raising the issue, some hon. Members have said, "Here's an example; now implement it." I hope that all hon. Members who have participated in the debate will accept that no one policy can address the issue. We need to understand what motivates or discourages individuals. That changes according to each individual's circumstances, so our approach must and does embrace a balanced and layered mix of measures, some addressing broad issues such as pay, pensions, training, families' accommodation and diversity, and other addressing issues of concern to particular high-value groups such as aircrew, engineers and medical personnel.

I have not even begun to touch on many of the issues raised in the debate. All hon. Members whose issues I have not addressed will of course be written to.

Personnel are thoroughly at the heart of this Government's endeavours on defence. The armed forces' overarching personnel strategy will play a pivotal role in maintaining that aim. It is both focused and comprehensive. This Government recognise that the character of conflict will continue to present a physical and moral challenge to service personnel, and that

[Mr. Ingram]

problems remain, but hon. Members of all parties should not think that we do not accept that more is required or that we have not implemented policies and strategies that address those problems—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without question put.

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM

Ordered,

That John McDonnell be discharged from the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform and Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas be added.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Ian Stillman

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

7 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I welcome the opportunity provided by this Adjournment debate to highlight the plight of Mr. Ian Stillman. The main reason for asking for the debate is to highlight the Foreign Office involvement in the case, which is ongoing, and to ask two simple questions: has the support given so far been adequate, and can the Foreign Office do better in future?

For the record, I need to explain how the case began and how events have progressed. My involvement arises because Ian's sister, Elspeth Dugdale, is a constituent. As I have learned more about the case and the family, I have developed a sense of outrage that Ian's human rights have been so completely ignored by the Indian authorities, and of extreme disappointment at the extent and nature of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's support. That has come as a complete shock to me.

Ian Stillman is British and a charity worker. He is profoundly deaf and has spent most of his adult life working with the deaf community in India. He founded an Indian charity and has advised the Indian Government and several non-governmental organisations. He has an Indian wife and loves the country and its people, and has stressed that this is a one-off situation rather than representative of the system at large.

Before I go any further it also needs to be understood that Ian has another disability. He lost a leg in a motorcycle accident in 1995 and has since had a false limb fitted. Anyone familiar with false limbs knows that it can be difficult for the owner to carry heavy weights, as the balance of the body is severely affected.

I come now to the circumstances in which Ian Stillman found himself in an Indian jail. On 27 August 2000, Ian was visiting the Kullu area in relation to his charity work and was arrested at a town called Menali. He was sleeping in the rear of a taxi which was stopped at a checkpoint. There were about 10 police and one other official who was not in uniform. That person appears on no police documentation and the prosecution has denied that he was present.

Ian was ordered out of the taxi. It was night and communication was impossible. The police carried out a brief search and said that they had found evidence of a suspicious substance in the taxi. Ian and the other occupants of the taxi were taken to the police station. The police later searched Ian's hotel room and the taxi and uncovered a green bag which was attributed to Ian. That was the first time that Ian had seen the bag, and to this day he does not know whether it was in the taxi where he was sleeping or what it contained.

Ian was then asked to sign a number of documents, most of which were in Hindi, a language that he does not speak or read. Initially, he refused to sign, but he had to give in to pressure.

It should be borne in mind that Ian is profoundly deaf, it was dark and he had little idea of what was going on. He gave the police the name and number of a local acquaintance who he thought could help with interpretation. It is not known whether the police made the call. It is a fact that no one turned up.

At about 4 pm the next day, Ian was brought before the local magistrate. On the basis of the police report and statement which was signed under duress, Ian was taken into custody pending formal charges. The other occupants of the taxi were released and Ian never saw them again. That is the background.

Ian was then taken to Kullu jail, which is a relatively small jail with up to 50 male prisoners. He was placed in a room measuring approximately 23 ft by 12 ft and he shared that space with up to 35 other prisoners. There was no glass in the window and at night it was freezing cold. There was one toilet for 35 men and each person had just under 2 ft of sleeping room on a concrete floor. That was in August.

What I find extremely hard to understand is why, according to the answer to my parliamentary question, the British high commissioner did not act to improve the conditions. Ian was in Kullu jail from August 2000 to June 2001. He was visited by consular officials on 5 September, 5 December and 21 February.

What I find beyond belief is that apparently the high commission staff thought that the standards were acceptable. Clearly they were not, and it is a damning indictment of our officials that they appeared to do so little at a time of such need. During that time it was clear that Ian's health was deteriorating and those conditions and a lack of a proper diet probably contributed to Ian's health problems.

The trial began on 14 March, but was delayed for six weeks because the police did not turn up. Most importantly, Ian was refused a deaf interpreter, despite the fact that he could not hear the court proceedings. He can lip-read English, but has no understanding of Hindi. That basic denial of Ian's human rights prevented him from receiving a fair trial. On 2 June, a guilty verdict was given. Stephen Jakobi of Fair Trials Abroad, who has been helping the family, described the verdict as

"the worst miscarriage of justice I have dealt with".

At this stage, I will give some credit to the Foreign Office, which made strong representations on welfare grounds at that time. The hope was that Ian would be able to access better medical treatment and see his family more often. Initially, his son was allowed to visit more frequently and bring supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables. Unfortunately, that did not last, and despite the family bringing the problem to the attention of Foreign Office officials, matters did not improve. In fact, it is fair to say that the family were frequently presented with this response: "But when we ask, they say that he is getting the agreed visits and provisions." Why does the Foreign Office appear far more ready to believe the Indian authorities than the family, who are reporting the problems at first hand? They do not want to make up these things; they have got enough to worry about.

Happily, in June and July last year, the Foreign Office moved things along considerably. There were concerns about a campaign of disinformation in India about Ian. The police were saying that he was wanted by Interpol, but that is completely untrue and the Foreign Office issued a press release putting the record straight and denying the suggestion completely. I am also aware that the Foreign Secretary raised the case on 26 June. That intervention and consequent action meant that the appeal hearing was held relatively quickly, in Indian terms. On behalf of the family, I should like to express appreciation for those efforts.

Unfortunately for Ian, after a catalogue of disasters connected with the appeal—sadly, I do not have time to detail them—it was unsuccessful. Naturally, everyone was completely devastated when the verdict was finally announced early this year. A key factor was that the Indian authorities refused to accept that Ian is deaf. Also, all this is happening at a time when there are ever-increasing concerns about Ian's health.

On 14 January, the family, Stephen Jakobi from Fair Trials Abroad and I met Foreign Office staff to raise the following issues. First, we raised problems to do with the trial. We pointed out that, as I mentioned, the other two occupants of the taxi had apparently been allowed to escape scot-free. Local police corruption was also an issue. Although the officials listened politely, they made it clear that that was a problem for the Indian legal system and that they could not get involved. Stephen Jakobi pointed out that all the defence arguments in the initial trial had apparently been wiped from the record. Again, the Foreign Office claimed that it could not become involved with the matter, as it related to a legal procedure. It is crucial that the information be taken into account in any appeal; the fact that it is missing could be detrimental to Ian's case.

Secondly, concerns about Ian's medical condition were again raised. Ian had described his symptoms and his sister showed the descriptions to a number of medically qualified people. All of them were convinced that he should receive immediate medical attention. The Foreign Office response was not particularly helpful, although I do not think that that was deliberate. The family were told that such second-hand reports were not enough and that notice would be taken only of an up-to-date report by an Indian doctor. That is especially problematic as the family were keen to put together sufficient information regarding Ian's health to use it as a basis for the bail hearing. They were told that Ian's old medical notes from England would not be suitable and that it would be necessary to provide the most up-to-date information from local doctors. No help was forthcoming to enable the family to obtain the necessary documents.

The one concession—if it can be called that—to come out of the meeting was this: the Foreign Office was about to set up a pro bono medical panel and suggested that this would be an ideal first case for it. Naturally, that gesture was greeted with enthusiasm, but we can imagine the family's dismay when they were recently contacted and asked if they still wanted to go ahead with the panel. However, there is another more fundamental issue, which is an example of muddled thinking: if the opinion of a local doctor is so essential in such cases, what is the point of having a medical panel of English doctors? Why is that necessary if we need the experience and expertise of the foreign doctors?

Thirdly, the family were still concerned that the local press was continuing to run the story about Ian's not being deaf and being a wanted criminal. They asked the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to issue a second press release setting the record straight. That request was repeated at a meeting with Baroness Amos in February. To date, no action has been taken, and I should be grateful if the Minister would explain why.

Fourthly, concerns were raised about the actions and advice of some of the consular officials. On the initial visit, Dinesh Kumar, one of those officials, had been accompanied by an unidentified female. Ian greeted that

[Sandra Gidley]

act with suspicion, and the family believe that the person was a journalist. The Foreign Office dismissed the matter, saying that it is not unusual for a third party to come along, but they have not provided the name of the mystery female so that she can be identified.

The incident is more important than it sounds. Ian's reluctance to talk on that occasion may have affected the way in which the Foreign Office regards the case. Other concerns focus on the fact that initial legal advice on finding a local lawyer was not the best. The locality is under the control of a single individual, and there is evidence of police and official corruption. Those concerns were repeated a couple of weeks later, when we met Baroness Amos, and medical papers describing the severity of the condition were handed over at that stage.

Unfortunately, even though the December visit had been missed, the next consular visit to Ian was not brought forward. Why was the December visit missed? The excuse given was that Ian was at the dentist. Bearing in mind the fact that the journey from New Delhi to the jail takes two days, it beggars belief that a consular official travelled all that way without making more strenuous efforts to see Ian. Does the Minister truly believe that that is a good enough standard of service?

Matters have moved on a little, and Ian is now seeing a doctor, but that is solely because of the family's strenuous efforts. If the family had been unable to visit India, and without relatives who could try to help, the story could have been completely different. Will the Minister please tell the House how long Ian Stillman would have waited to see a doctor had the family been naive enough to believe that the consular service was looking after him? It is telling that, when an appointment was finally arranged, Ian was immediately admitted to hospital and the suspected problem was confirmed. Had the condition been allowed to continue, it is highly likely that Ian would have lost his remaining good limb.

Before I turn to the future, I want to highlight a problem that touches on the Stillman family's relationship with the Foreign Office, and with British-based legal advisers on international law. Lawyers from Fair Trials Abroad have assisted Ian and his family since August 2001. The Stillmans deeply appreciate the trust's help, particularly on legal analysis, selection of the Indian supreme court appeals team, legal research into the Indian constitution, and effective participation in one's own trial as a human right—a crucial element in the grounds of appeal.

Nevertheless, two astonishing incidents occurred, involving attempts by the Foreign Office to interfere with solicitor-client relationships. Initially, the Stillmans were very grateful for the Foreign Office's unsolicited offer of a lawyer. They thought that they were being offered a pro bono Indian lawyer, but they subsequently discovered that the lawyer was English and had little knowledge or experience, as he had only recently joined the profession.

The Foreign Office's second intervention involved contacting the Stillman family to offer one of its approved lawyers to support Indira Jaising, the Indian barrister who was selected and instructed by Fair Trials Abroad. At no point did the Foreign Office contact Fair Trials Abroad. I have to question the conduct of the Foreign Office. Is it normal practice for it to offer a lawyer's services, when knew full well that a lawyer—one who rattles cages, at time[illegible] had already been appointed? It also knew that its recommended lawyer could offer no specialist help.

The trust is seeking a declaration from the Foreign Office that, in cases where the Foreign Office is aware that Fair Trials Abroad is engaged, any approach on matters falling within its mission should be made through the trust. I hope that the Minister will be able to give the appropriate assurances. It would also help all British citizens to know on what basis lawyers are recruited and recommended, and I hope that the Minister can enlighten us on that point. The trust regrets asking me to raise the matter in the House. It is keenly aware that a special relationship with the Foreign Office is essential to its client's best interests.

It is also a disappointment to the family that more strenuous attempts to plead Ian's case were not made when Ministers travelled to India. Answers to questions tabled by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) show that, although Foreign Office Ministers discussed Ian's case with Indian Home Office Ministers, the Prime Minister did not raise it with the President or the Indian Prime Minister during his visit to India in January. There has been no sustained ministerial pressure at the very highest level.

That is the record that the Government must answer for, but I am more interested in moving forward, and I seek the Minister's assurance that the following actions will be taken.

First, it would be much appreciated and very helpful to the appeal if the Foreign Office issued a press release as soon possible rebutting the unfounded allegations that are still being made against Ian. Secondly, the Government should rapidly get up to speed with the health problems and ensure that the identified care needs are dealt with and that the family have access to complete records. They should then intervene on health grounds to try to speed up the appeal to the supreme court. The Minister may be aware that it has been lodged today.

Thirdly, I ask that the Foreign Office intervene so that Ian is released on bail. There is a powerful case, because it is clear that there has been a dreadful contravention of Ian's human rights. I urge the Minister to undertake to follow through on those three actions. If an individual in the United Kingdom has a problem, he rightly expects his Member of Parliament to help. It is also expected that if someone gets into trouble abroad, the British embassy or high commission will fulfil that pastoral role. Please, Minister, reassure me that that is the case.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I hope to do so, and to reassure the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) that many of the allegations that she has directed towards our consular officials are unfounded. However, I first congratulate her on securing the debate on Ian Stillman. There has been extensive parliamentary and public interest in his case, and I welcome the opportunity to set out the action that we have taken so far on his behalf.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, my noble Friend Baroness Amos—the Minister with primary responsibility for such consular cases—and I have taken

an active role in Mr. Stillman's case, and Foreign Office officials have done a great deal on his behalf. I shall spell out some of what they have done.

The hon. Member for Romsey has outlined the background and we agree on it. Mr. Stillman made an appeal to the High Court against his conviction in October 2001, but it was rejected on 11 January 2002. Mr. Stillman intends to appeal to the supreme court.

We have done all we can to help Mr. Stillman since his arrest on 28 August 2000. The police first informed our high commission in New Delhi of his arrest on 30 August and Mr. Stillman spoke to a consular official on the telephone that same day. Mr. Stillman said that he was fine, that the police were treating him well and that a local friend would inform his family of his arrest.

A consular official visited Mr. Stillman on 5 September—less than a week later—at a jail in Kullu. Mr. Stillman had no complaints about his treatment and said that he was satisfied with the facilities provided by the prison authorities. Our consular official communicated with Mr. Stillman by writing notes, explained Indian legal procedures and gave him a list of English-speaking lawyers in India.

We have taken a close interest in Mr. Stillman's welfare since his arrest. Our consular staff in New Delhi have monitored it closely during consular visits, which generally take place every three months, and by liaising with Mr. Stillman's son, who visits him in prison approximately twice a week. Consular officials are also in touch with Mr. Stillman's wife, who lives in India, and have met members of his family who visited New Delhi. Most recently, senior officials met representatives from his family on 1 March and 5 March 2002.

Our consular staff in London are also in frequent contact with Mr. Stillman's family in the United Kingdom by telephone and e-mail. Consular officials also met his family on four occasions—14 May and 2 July 2001, and 14 January and 7 February 2002. As the hon. Member for Romsey pointed out, my noble Friend Baroness Amos discussed the case with Mr. Stillman's sister on 5 February.

Our consular staff have taken all possible measures to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately and they have been instrumental in achieving improvements to many aspects of his detention. I have to say to the hon. Lady that, before his conviction in 2001, we had not been asked to help with any transfer.

In June 2001, following the first request that we received, our consular staff helped to arrange for Mr. Stillman to be transferred to his current prison in Kanda, which is relatively new and has better conditions and facilities. We also helped to ensure that Mr. Stillman was provided with a wheelchair, and that he was able to use a computer and have better lighting in his cell. Mr. Stillman has his own room in Kanda prison and we understand that fellow inmates have been assisting.

Sandra Gidley: Does the Minister accept that the reason why Ian Stillman did not want to rock the boat initially was that he knew he was innocent and thought that he would soon be out of there? He thought that the best way to get a quick trial was by not making a fuss. Does the Minister still think it acceptable for somebody to be in such cramped conditions for so long?

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not for me to comment on Mr. Stillman's motives for not seeking consular help before his conviction. The implication of the hon. Lady's earlier allegations was that we did not do what was requested of us before his conviction. We did: we received a request only after conviction.

Throughout his detention, Mr. Stillman has received medical treatment from prison doctors. During a prison visit on 16 July 2001, our High Commission also sought permission for a visit by a specialist after Mr. Stillman's family informed us that he was experiencing phantom pains, thought to have been caused by his artificial leg. His family provided our high commission with details of the prosthetic specialist of their choice shortly thereafter, and a written formal request was sent to the prison authorities on 21 July 2001. Our high commission followed up those requests with the prison authorities, who granted permission for a prosthetic specialist to visit on 24 September 2001. Mr. Stillman's artificial leg was subsequently remoulded.

In January this year, Mr. Stillman's family informed consular officials in London that Mr. Stillman's health had deteriorated. We offered to refer his case to a doctor on the FCO's pro bono panel of doctors to obtain an independent assessment of any risk to his health and whether he was receiving proper medical treatment. We asked his family to send us copies of his medical reports from doctors who had examined him recently, as we do not have a legal right to obtain those documents ourselves. Mr. Stillman's father wrote to the prison requesting the records, and our high commission in New Delhi contacted the prison authorities in support of his request on 14 and 22 March. As soon as we receive Mr. Stillman's medical reports we shall refer his case to a doctor on our pro bono panel.

Our high commission in New Delhi has also been helping Mr. Stillman's family to arrange for a medical specialist of their choice to visit Mr. Stillman. It wrote to the additional director of prisons on 11 March this year in support of a recent request by Mr. Stillman's father for a specialist visit. We understand that the prison authorities have now agreed to such a visit. The authorities also permitted Mr. Stillman to be taken on 21 March this year to a hospital in Chandigarh, where he was examined by a neurologist, an orthopaedic surgeon, a psychiatrist and a general physician.

Consular officials visited Mr. Stillman while he was at the hospital and spent almost two hours with him and his son. Mr. Stillman raised a number of issues with them and asked whether the high commission could help arrange for a further visit by a prosthetic specialist and for his wheelchair to be repaired. On 22 March, a consular official raised those issues with the prison authorities, who agreed to Mr. Stillman's requests.

Our consular representative also asked the prison authorities if Mr. Stillman's son could continue to visit him frequently and interpret for him when he was taken

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to the hospital. Our high commission in New Delhi will continue to do all that it can to ensure that the Indian authorities meet Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements.

We recognise what a distressing experience Mr. Stillman's arrest has been both for him and for his family. I hope, however, that the hon. Lady will understand that international law prevents us from getting involved in the judicial process of another country. Our own judicial proceedings are similarly protected from outside interference.

Our objectives remain to ensure proper conditions for Mr. Stillman and a transparent and expeditious judicial process. It is not the case that interventions have not been made at a high level. On 26 June 2001, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Mr. Stillman's welfare and our hope that his appeal to the high court would be heard as quickly as possible with the Indian high commissioner and Prime Minister Vajpayee's Principal Secretary, Brajesh Mishra. On 4 July 2001, the Deputy Prime Minister raised his case with the Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, and Mr. Mishra. I also raised it with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah, on 18 February 2002 during my visit to New Delhi, and I asked that Mr. Stillman's appeal to the supreme court be heard as quickly as possible once it has been submitted. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the issue again most recently with the Indian Home Minister, Mr. Advani, on 27 February 2002.

I should like to respond to a couple of the specific points that the hon. Lady raised. She asked about the allegation that was being made in the Indian media and by others that Mr. Stillman was not deaf, and that he was a criminal and wanted in the United Kingdom. Our high commission in New Delhi issued a press statement on 3 July 2001 making it absolutely clear that Mr. Stillman was not a wanted criminal in the UK. However, it is for Mr. Stillman's lawyer to present the proof that Mr. Stillman is deaf during his appeal to the supreme court.

Sandra Gidley: I fully accept that that useful action was taken by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at that time. It helped considerably, because the misinformation campaign stopped. However, it has now started again, so could the Foreign and Commonwealth Office repeat its previous action?

Mr. Bradshaw: I have no objection to re-issuing the press release, but the implication of the hon. Lady's question was that we had not already taken such action. I am perfectly happy to issue a press release again.

The hon. Lady also asked about the first consular visit to Mr. Stillman on 5 September 2000. A friend of our consular representative accompanied him on that visit. Our consular representative asked Mr. Stillman whether he had any objections to the friend being present. The suggestion was made—perhaps not by the hon. Lady—that the friend may have been a journalist, and that may have inhibited Mr. Stillman from talking. I assure her that that was not the case, and he was not inhibited from talking.

We have also offered Mr. Stillman the assistance of a British lawyer from our pro bono panel. The panel consists of 53 UK-qualified barristers and solicitors. Among other services, they are able to offer free legal advice to the local lawyers of British prisoners abroad on human rights issues, such as fair trials.

I am aware of the allegation by the director of Fair Trials Abroad, Stephen Jakobi, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office interfered in his relationship with his client because it offered to put Mr. Stillman in touch with a lawyer from our pro bono panel. I wish to point out that neither Mr. Stillman nor his family informed our consular staff that Mr. Jakobi had been formally instructed as Mr. Stillman's lawyer in the UK. Indeed, Mr. Stillman accepted our offer to put him in touch with a British lawyer from our pro bono panel in February. Ultimately, it is for Mr. Stillman to choose which lawyer he would like to represent him.

I hope that I have made it clear that, contrary to what the hon. Lady suggests, our consular officials have acted properly in this case. They have done everything possible, including paying regular visits and providing regular access to our consular officials in Delhi and in this country, and they will continue to do all they can to ensure that Mr. Stillman is well treated while he is in detention and that his appeal to the supreme court is heard as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 12 April 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

Mr. Secretary Blunkett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Reid, Mr. Secretary Murphy and Angela Eagle, presented a Bill to make provision about nationality, immigration and asylum; to create offences in connection with international traffic in prostitution; to make provision about international projects connected with migration; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time Monday next, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 119].

Point of Order

9.31 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

On 14 February, I wrote to a Minister at the Department of Health on behalf of a constituent, Mrs. Anne Cann of Crediton, who was concerned, following a report that was commissioned by the *Express and Echo* newspaper from Exeter university, about the dangers that were perceived to be affecting her household as a result of a nearby telecommunications mast. I followed up with a chaser letter, and, having had no response from the Department of Health at all, I raised the matter in some detail during the debate on the Easter Adjournment.

It is a matter of great concern to me that despite offering the Department of Health the full report from Exeter university, chasing my correspondence and offering to go to talk to the Minister personally, I have had no response whatsoever after nearly two months. The way in which the Department is treating a serious Back-Bench inquiry is getting close to contempt. Can you give me some advice, Mr. Speaker, on what I can do to assist my constituent?

Mr. Speaker: I am very concerned when I hear complaints about Back Benchers not receiving replies from Ministers. The hon. Lady has put the matter on record, and I look forward to the Minister responding.

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 1

POWER TO REFUSE DECREE ABSOLUTE IF STEPS NOT TAKEN TO DISSOLVE RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE

9.33 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 8, leave out from "Jews" to "must" in line 10.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 4, in page 2, line 8, leave out from "to" to "House" in line 9 and insert—

'approval by resolution of each'.

No. 1, in page 2, line 10, at end insert—

'10B Prescribed religious usages

The Lord Chancellor shall report annually to Parliament on any representations he has received about the use of section 10A(1)(a)(ii), and whether he intends to make an order under section 10A(6).".'.

Mr. Thomas: I assure the House that in tabling the amendment I am not trying to wreck the Bill or to stop its progress. Indeed, I do not intend to detain hon. Members long on the issues as I have already raised them privately with the Minister and the promoter of the Bill. I realise that they could also be considered in more detail in the House of Lords.

I tabled the amendment in the spirit of seeking clarification from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who deserves considerable congratulation on his piloting of the Bill through the House. My prime concern relates to the Bill's potential knock-on consequences for other religions in relation to the process that it introduces for consideration of the needs of other religions in similar situations if they arise.

I have received strong representations in support of the Bill from senior members of the Jewish community, especially senior members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and others who live in my constituency. The Bill is designed to remedy an injustice, with which hon. Members are now familiar, that affects Jewish men and women who want a divorce but are prevented from achieving a civil divorce by the actions of their partners.

During the previous Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon and Lord Lester suggested that the Bill leaves open the possibility that a similar situation may arise in relation to those of the Muslim faith. In Standing Committee on 7 November, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) asked whether the Bill applied to the Muslim faith and whether that had been properly consulted on.

During the previous Parliament, when Lord Lester proposed legislation to achieve a similar result to that sought by my hon. Friend, he highlighted counsel's opinion from a Mr. Rabinder Singh, an expert on human rights law, who had been brought in by the Government to advise on the Bill's compatibility with the European Union convention on human rights. His one concern about the original Bill was whether it was discriminatory in requiring that a religious divorce should be granted before

[Mr. Thomas]

a civil one was obtained for Jewish spouses, but not for Muslim spouses. That may be why the provisions that amendment No. 2 would delete were included in the Bill. According to Lord Lester, Mr. Singh argued that the Bill, by treating a Jewish husband less favourably than a Muslim husband, was potentially discriminatory. He felt that that issue needed resolution if the Bill was to be compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. I seek further clarification from the Minister or from my hon. Friend on whether that is the reason for the provision. The position is certainly unclear.

In his advice, Mr. Singh said that, in his judgment, Islamic law was similar to Jewish law in this regard. However, Lord Lester quoted from the textbook "Muslim Family Law" by Judge David Pearl and Werner Menski, both of whom are senior figures in the legal world. They explained that English Muslim law requires the husband to give his wife a talaq in order for a divorce to be recognised by Sharia law, and that a woman who obtains a civil divorce but then fails to obtain a talaq is left in a limping marriage, which is similar to the situation of Jewish women who have been refused a get, which was the driving force behind my hon. Friend's Bill.

Lord Lester argued that, from his understanding of that textbook on Muslim family law, under English Muslim law the United Kingdom Islamic Sharia Council can grant a khula to the wife, which would enable an immediate dissolution of the marriage that would be recognised in Islamic law. Unlike Jewish women in a similar situation, a Muslim woman in a limping marriage could obtain a valid religious divorce against the wishes of her husband.

My purpose in setting out the position is to ask whether Lord Lester was right in his view. Is there an issue with the Muslim faith or with any other religious faith? Why do we need to give the Government a power to deal with other religions if they do not face this difficulty?

I have taken the trouble to speak to a number of my constituents. Those of the Hindu faith are clear that there is no problem in their religion on the issue that Jewish women face. My amendment No. 2 would ensure that no other religions were covered by the Bill. My hon. Friend and the Minister should consider whether we need to allow that additional width in the Bill.

I recognise that the position regarding the Muslim faith may be a little confused. I have spoken to senior Muslim figures in my constituency, who have slightly different views on whether this is an issue. I hope that the Minister and my hon. Friend can clarify the situation. I pray in aid the comments that the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) made in Committee. He thought that the question whether the law should intervene in a matter of faith was a philosophical issue. That is an entirely reasonable concern to raise. The Jewish religious authorities are clear that there is a need for intervention, and on that basis it is right that we give additional powers in that respect.

9.45 am

If there is a problem or the potential for a problem in the Muslim faith, Parliament must recognise that it has a responsibility to improve its response to such a situation. There has perhaps been a collective failure over a number of years, but we have now reached the stage of finally being able to resolve this issue. The Jewish community has had to wait for resolution of this problem at last to be on offer, and I do not want other religions to have to suffer delays in tackling the injustice that has been identified.

Amendment No. 1 would ensure that there is a duty on the Lord Chancellor to report to the House if other religious authorities raise similar difficulties. Such a requirement on the Lord Chancellor's Department would be a spur to Parliament to act with more speed in future.

Amendment No. 4 would require approval by both Houses of Parliament using the affirmative resolution procedure. Intervention in religious matters is something that Parliament should not undertake lightly. The involvement of both Houses and the widening of the pool of legal and religious expertise and knowledge is a sensible precaution to ensure that we get the right resolution of these problems. The use of the affirmative resolution procedure would help to clear up any confusion about who the religious authorities were, and would ensure that all sectors of the community would be able to bring their concerns to Members of Parliament so that the right way forward could be found.

As I said, these are probing amendments. I hope that the Bill will make progress, but we need to be clear that we have the right process in place and that there are sensible opportunities for other religions in a similar situation to bring concerns before the House and for Parliament to act with more speed and more success on this issue than it has until now.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising these important issues and for enabling me to explain the background to these provisions.

By way of preamble, I want to correct him on one point. He referred to the European Union convention on human rights, but the European convention on human rights has nothing to do with the European Union. That is a popular misconception, which I hope is not shared by the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). The European convention on human rights emanates from the Council of Europe, which is a different body. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that the correct constitutional position is explained in the House and to the people at large, because there is much confusion in this country about the European convention and where it comes from. The fact that some people may have certain views about the European Union does not necessarily mean that they have the same views about the Council of Europe and the convention.

My hon. Friend is right that the provision has been incorporated in the Bill to ensure that it complies with the European convention on human rights and our own human rights legislation. He may be suggesting that that is a belt-and-braces approach, and it may be seen as that, but he gave the reasons for that at the end of his contribution.

The Bill is designed to deal with the particular problem of divorce within the Jewish community, but it is appropriate to make provision in the legislation should other faiths want to raise their own concerns at a later stage. The mechanism provided by the Bill is designed to deal with the difficulties caused by husbands who refuse to give their wives a get. I am not sure whether other

religions have an exact parallel of the problem facing the Jewish community, but the mechanism would be available should that be the case.

I have received letters from Catholics who are concerned about a possible impact on the Catholic faith, which does not recognise divorce. There is nothing in the Bill that creates a right of divorce—either civil or religious—where one does not already exist. There is nothing for Catholics to worry about in that context. The purpose of the Bill is not to interfere with religion. It is framed to enable civil authorities to deal with a technical problem that has arisen within the Jewish community.

My hon. Friend is right to refer to the Muslim community. I am grateful to him for bringing to the attention of the House the comments made in another place and in Committee. He has obviously done a great deal of work in researching the law and in discussions with members of the Muslim community in his constituency.

There has been no demand from members of the Muslim community for provisions similar to those in the Bill to apply to them. The answer may lie in what my hon. Friend says—that within existing arrangements for Sharia law in Britain, a way has been found round the problem, with the Muslim authorities if necessary being able to override the failure of a husband to grant a talaq divorce.

There is some doubt within some sections of the Muslim community as to whether that is a legitimate approach. There is no guarantee that the practice adopted by the Muslim authorities in Britain will continue indefinitely. However, a provision is available should the Muslim community come forward with a clear consensus that there should be implementation. I perceive no demand for that at present.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the position of Roman Catholics. Has he had consultation with Church authorities, or is he merely referring to representations that have come from individuals within his constituency, or others?

Mr. Dismore: I am referring to representations from individual correspondents, not from my constituency but from one or two other places. A problem has not been perceived. I have received two or three letters.

I return to my main point, which is that there is nothing in the Bill that creates a new right of divorce or interferes with rights of religion in that connection. There is nothing to worry about. That is probably why I have not received any correspondence from Roman Catholic authorities. I know from previous experience in this place that they are not slow to come forward if they feel that their faith is likely in any way to be affected by activities in the House.

We are dealing with a provision that I hope will never have to be used. If it has to be used, that will show a change of approach from the more progressive attitude that has been adopted by the Muslim community in finding a way round the problem.

It is worth understanding why there is a problem for the Jewish community. Jewish law goes back much further than 2,000 years in this context and it cannot be changed. The situation goes back to the destruction of the temple by Titus, son of Vespasian, in 70 AD. To change Jewish law, there has to be a Sanhedrin, which is a gathering of the rabbis, which can take place only in the temple of Jerusalem. The temple having been destroyed, there cannot be a Sanhedrin, so the fundamental tenets of Jewish law cannot be changed. That means that we must devise other ways to overcome what is perceived as a problem within the Jewish community. As far as I am aware—no doubt my hon. Friend will correct me if I am wrong—a similar problem does not apply within the Muslim faith.

We need the provision so that if a problem is identified in future, we will not have to go through the rigmarole of taking new legislation through Parliament. There will already be provisions available to deal with the problem. As I have said, there is no sign that there is a problem, and there has been no demand for change.

To deal with my hon. Friend's point about the affirmative resolution procedure, let me say that there will be no prospect of change unless there is a clear consensus throughout a faith that there should be change.

The proposal that relates to Jewish divorce, which the Bill is designed to deal with, has the unanimous support of Jewish authorities. There is a clear consensus behind the Bill throughout the Jewish community. There is no argument or debate about whether it is the right thing to do. I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor's Department for its support for the Bill. I am pretty sure—no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will make this absolutely clear—that there is no question of the clause being activated if there is no clear consensus within any other particular faith. As I have said, I am not aware of any particular demand for that at present.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) has moved the amendments in the spirit of probing and certainly not that of wrecking. I know how hard he has worked in campaigning for the Bill and the changes that it will make. He has made representations to me and I know how strongly he feels about the issue.

The effect of amendment No. 2 would be to limit the scope of the Bill to Jewish religious marriages. I understand that my hon. Friend has some concerns about the compatibility of the Bill with the Human Rights Act 1998. The Government's view is that the amendment would make the Bill less likely to comply with that Act.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of Muslim women. It might be helpful if I reinforce the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). The position of Muslim women differs from that of Jewish women in respect of religious divorce. Where the husband has pronounced the talaq and any subsequent procedures required by law have been completed, the marriage is at an end. After the divorce, the wife is obliged to refrain from marriage for a period, which is commonly held to be four months and 10 days. Once that period is completed, there are no religious restrictions on the woman remarrying.

Perhaps I should clarify and confirm that where a Muslim woman wants a religious divorce it is open to her, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said, to approach the Muslim Law Shariah Council to ask for the

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

marriage to be dissolved. Sonia Nurin Shah-Kazemi of the university of Westminster, in her paper entitled "Untying the Knot—Muslim Women, Divorce and the Shariah", states:

"Unlike the legal situation of women in the Jewish community, civil law mechanisms are not necessary for Muslim women to dissolve their marriage contracts."

Perhaps I can recommend that paper to my hon. Friend.

The Government would still be willing to consider any representations that the Muslim community may wish to make on this issue. However, we are confident that the position differs in terms of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The amendment would make the Bill identical in scope to a Bill that was introduced in another place by Lord Lester of Herne Hill in 2000. The Government suggested amendments to it in the light of legal advice that limiting the measure to only one religious group would risk offending against article 14—the right of freedom from discrimination—together with article 12—the right of freedom to marry—of the European convention on human rights. The Government believe that the Bill as drafted is fully compliant with the Human Rights Act 1998 and, therefore, with the convention.

10 am

Amendment No. 4 would substitute the affirmative resolution procedure for the negative resolution procedure in the event that the Lord Chancellor makes a statutory instrument under clause 1(6) extending the provisions of the Bill to other religious groups. The Government's view is that the negative resolution procedure represents the appropriate level of parliamentary scrutiny in this case.

The Government have made it clear, and I am happy to assure the House today, that the Lord Chancellor would make such an order to extend the provisions of the Bill to other religious groups only where they requested it. The Lord Chancellor would want to be satisfied that such a request represented a consensus of the appropriate religious authorities and community leaders of any groups concerned. There is no question of the Government seeking to foist the provisions on any group that does not wish to have them.

The effect of amendment No. 1 would be to require the Lord Chancellor to make an annual report to Parliament on any representations he had received on extending the provisions of the Bill to other faith groups, and to indicate whether he intends to make such an order extending its provisions.

Mr. Cash: The references to "religion" and "religious" are somewhat controversial because some sects' and faiths' description of themselves as religious is hotly disputed. Do the Government intend to analyse that and work out whether the provisions should apply to recognised religions? After all, the request could come from almost anyone.

Ms Winterton: Of course, the Lord Chancellor would have to be satisfied that any representations represented the views not only of many within any religious group, but community leaders. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there would be wide consultation before any decision was made to extend the provisions to other groups.

The Government's view is that amendment No. 1 is unnecessary. In the event that the Lord Chancellor received representations—again, I assure the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that they would have to be of a sufficiently authoritative nature—from religious groups asking for the legislation to be extended to them, a statutory instrument would be required. Parliament would then have an opportunity to scrutinise the instrument through the negative resolution procedure.

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps I could help my hon. Friend out with the intervention from the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). Is not the answer to the hon. Gentleman's point that, although there can obviously be difficulties in deciding whether a particular organisation is a religion or not, it can only be brought within the terms of the Bill if the Lord Chancellor believes it to be a religion. Both Houses of Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise the actions of the Lord Chancellor and to decide whether they agree.

Ms Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That was exactly the point that I was coming on to make. Through that process, Parliament would have the opportunity to make representations, if there were any worries about the nature of any group. I reiterate that there is no question either of the Bill being foisted on religious groups or of Parliament not having the opportunity for further scrutiny of any decisions. I hope that with those reassurances, my hon. Friend will consider withdrawing his amendment.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am grateful to both my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for their words of clarification. I will of course withdraw the amendment as it was intended to be a probing amendment. I do so with one reservation. I will re-read the paper from the legal expert at the university of Westminster. As the university is close to my constituency, I recognise all the more the importance of that paper. I hope that the Lord Chancellor's Department will be able to clarify the views of the Muslim religious authorities before the Bill makes its passage through the other place.

I wish the Bill speedy progress through the other place. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

10.6 am

Mr. Dismore: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to move that the Bill be read the Third time. The Bill is not a new idea. This is the third attempt in which I have been involved to take it through the House. It is the second attempt that I have made personally. The first attempt was when I tried to take through the House the Bill that had been introduced in another place by Lord Lester. On the two previous occasions, the Bill failed through lack of time.

I am doubly pleased, as this is a ten-minute Bill. To be able to take a ten-minute Bill through all the stages in the House is quite an accomplishment and could be achieved

only because of the broad consensus that the Bill has been able to attract from all sides of the House and from all hon. Members.

I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department and indeed the Lord Chancellor himself, and for the support that the Bill has been able to attract from all the Opposition parties. I am particularly grateful to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who may have had reservations about the Bill but now seems to be convinced of its merits.

The Bill will remedy a major disadvantage suffered by Jewish men and women who are prevented from remarrying because of the refusal of their partners to grant or accept a religious divorce. In practice, the disadvantage is usually suffered by the wife, rather than the husband.

The basic Jewish laws relating to marriage and divorce are biblical, and theoretically, as I mentioned on Report, can be changed only by a Sanhedrin. As there has not been a Sanhedrin for nearly 2,000 years, it is important that we see what we can do through the civil law to deal with this particular problem.

In Jewish law, marriage and divorce are consensual processes. An individual cannot be married or divorced against his or her will. Although that encourages a couple to try to work together to solve their difficulties, which obviously is a worthwhile objective and an outcome that we would all like to see, occasionally there can be problems where one party seeks to end the marriage, and the other refuses to grant the religious divorce, called in Hebrew a get.

The husband has to go before a Beth Din, a Jewish court, personally or by proxy, to have the get document written and prepared. It must then be delivered to his wife. Only when she receives it from him can a divorce take effect. If the husband fails to do so, the wife cannot remarry in Jewish law, although the husband may be able to do so in limited cases.

Jewish authorities have long been sensitive to the problem, especially where it is the wife who is trapped in a marriage that she seeks to end. She is called, in Hebrew, an agunah—the plural is agunot—meaning one who is chained to a spouse against her will.

An active campaign organisation, the agunot campaign, has been operating for a number of years to bring pressure to bear. It works hard to publicise the practical effects of the injustices of the present laws and to embarrass reluctant husbands into compliance.

There have been attempts to deal with the problem. Two rabbis in the United States have been granting annulments anyway, despite the lack of co-operation of the husbands. However, those American rabbis have a different interpretation of Jewish law, which is not accepted as a valid interpretation by Orthodox Jewish authorities anywhere in the world. Even with such an annulment, remarriage remains impossible within the Jewish faith.

Through its rabbinical courts, the Jewish community in Britain has done all it can internally to alleviate the situation. It has brought in prenuptial agreements, currently signed by the majority of couples. The agreement binds them, should their marriage fail, to attend a Jewish court to resolve their outstanding differences.

Mr. Cash: The Bill does not extend to Scotland. Does the hon. Gentleman have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Dismore: I intended to mention Scotland later in my speech. Family law, in this context, is a devolved responsibility for the Scottish Parliament. There have been discussions in Scotland about whether such a provision should be brought in. I would very much hope that the Scottish Parliament, which is now a little behind the English Parliament in this context, will take our example and propose similar legislation as promptly as possible.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I pay tribute to the efforts made by my hon. Friend on his Bill but, in the spirit of correction and accuracy, may I remind him that this is the British Parliament and not the English Parliament?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is entirely right. This is the British Parliament but, in this context, it is legislating only for England and Wales. My hon. Friend is quite right to correct me on the constitutional niceties. Having corrected my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on the constitutional niceties of European law, I am hoist by my own petard.

The prenuptial agreement can be only a voluntary undertaking and there is considerable doubt whether it can have legal effect as a matter of civil law. Synagogue bodies have tried to institute communal sanctions against recalcitrant spouses. However, a determined spouse can simply ignore those, driven by the ill-will that often accompanies divorce. A well-publicised example of this was the case at the end of 2000, when a rabbi took an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* to name and shame a recalcitrant husband, but that did not achieve the objective.

More recently, there is now a regular Sunday morning picket, which I joined last year, organised by the agunot campaign outside the house of a Golders Green husband who has refused to grant his wife a get for decades. A civil divorce on the grounds of cruelty was granted in 1962. There was a terrible custody battle and arguments over access in which the husband felt aggrieved at his wife, who took the daughter out of the jurisdiction for a number of years. Now, 40 years on, the husband still refuses to release his wife, despite the extensive publicity given to the case.

It can be appreciated that Jewish women who wish to conduct their family relationships within the framework of their religious beliefs have virtually no power to compel a reluctant husband to grant them a get. Without a get, a divorcee who has a child by her subsequent partner—even if married in civil law—is defined as an adulteress under Jewish law. The child is classed as a mamzer, an illegitimate outcast. This stigma lasts for many future generations, affecting the child's own descendants for centuries.

If a wife refuses to accept her husband's get, he is known as an agun. However, he does not suffer from the same disadvantages as a woman, as status in Jewish law

[Mr. Dismore]

passes through the female and not the male line, and biblical law makes different provisions in relation to men and to women.

The consequences of that go beyond the right of a wife to remarry. As a result of the husband's right to withhold a get, a lack of balance is created in negotiations around family breakdown, often over ancillary relief or child custody arrangements. A husband can effectively hold his wife to ransom, and can demand money, property or other unfair or inappropriate rights concerning custody or child maintenance in return for the get.

There are no reliable statistics of the total number of women affected, but seven cases in the Hendon area have been referred to me as the constituency MP. No doubt there are others in my own constituency of which I am unaware and throughout the Jewish community nationwide. It is difficult to get a grip on the figures, because much stigma is still attached to the problem. Some of the cases reported to me illustrate the problems that arise. I referred to them on Second Reading and I do not propose to do so again; anyone who wants to familiarise themselves with these tragic cases can read the *Official Report*.

The Bill will not help every woman in these tragic circumstances. If the husband does not want or need a civil divorce, or a civil divorce has already been granted in the past—the Bill cannot be retrospective—the problem will remain. This is the sad position of a number of women active in the agunot campaign. However, the Bill will provide a real remedy for women in the future who are confronted with these problems, such as those in the cases that I have previously described, if any civil proceedings have not reached decree absolute. It rectifies a serious anomaly in English civil law, which creates this extremely undesirable state of affairs for future cases where civil proceedings have not commenced or been finalised.

The Bill enables the court to require the dissolution of the religious marriage before granting a civil divorce. This provides a lever, whereby pressure could be brought to bear on the husband to agree to a get. Where he unjustly refuses to co-operate, he would not be granted a civil divorce, which is normally sufficient for his purposes, without first agreeing to a religious divorce, which his wife needs to avoid the stigma that I described. The playing field for ancillary relief would also be levelled, avoiding the risk of blackmail over financial settlements or custody or access to children.

Similar provisions have been enacted previously but were not brought into force for reasons wholly unconnected with this Bill, as a result of the previous reform of family law. Similar provisions already apply in parts of Canadian, South African and New York state law, and are currently under consideration in Scotland. The Bill would not solve all cases, but it would resolve many, where the husband needs a civil divorce.

It is also important to understand that the Jewish community is not seeking the assistance of the civil law to solve a Jewish problem. First, the community seeks to end the anomaly whereby a Jewish marriage is also a civil marriage, but a civil divorce may be unaccompanied by a Jewish divorce. Secondly, the Jewish community is seeking the assistance of the civil courts in bringing the couple to a Jewish court, which itself undertakes to resolve the dispute, allowing both parties to remarry according to their religious convictions.

The Bill has the support of all synagogue bodies in Anglo-Jewry, Orthodox and Progressive, as well as the Chief Rabbi, the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Marriage Council and the agunot campaign.

I conclude by expressing my thanks and appreciation to the many people who have written to me in support of the Bill and especially those who have given me such active and vigorous help. First, I thank the Chief Rabbi for his personal encouragement and support—particularly after the two previous failed attempts—to persevere with the campaign for reform. I thank Judy Nagler and Jeremy Newmark from the Chief Rabbi's office. I wish to thank my constituent and friend, the president of the Board of Deputies, Mrs. Jo Wagerman, for her help. Neville Nagler and Fiona MacCauley from the board have also been of assistance.

Jeffrey Blumenfeld of the Jewish Marriage Council gave me help in identifying the sad and tragic cases that I have used to illustrate the real need for the Bill. Gloria Proops of the agunot campaign, while realising that most of her members would not benefit for the reasons that I have given, has nevertheless supported my efforts to help women who may suffer similar problems to her members.

I must also thank my legal advisers, Dayan Berkovits of the Federation of Synagogues, Miss Eleanor Platt QC and, perhaps above all, Judge Myrella Cohen QC, my constituent, who has spent many patient hours explaining the intricacies of Jewish law and custom to me, proving to me how a millennia-old problem could be considerably eased by a modest measure such as this. I am grateful for her considerable talent for diplomatically correcting my various drafts and comments over the months as I have been working on the Bill.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), without whose tireless efforts behind the scenes we might not have been able to reach Third Reading today. In that context, I thank the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who has also been co-operative behind the scenes on behalf of the Opposition.

I commend the Bill to the House.

10.19 am

Mr. Cash: I am glad to be able to say that the Opposition support the Bill, which seeks to rectify an anomaly that exists in English law. Currently, religious marriage between two Jews is recognised by the state as creating a civil marriage, provided that notice has been given to a superintendent registrar. The religious marriage creates a duel bond, both civil and religious, yet in dissolving that dual bond, the state only requires that there should be a civil divorce, leaving the religious marriage intact and limping on. The parties are left in a state of limbo, unable to remarry in an Orthodox religious ceremony until the husband grants his wife a get, or bill of religious divorce. If the husband refuses to give his wife a get, she is known as an agunah, or chained wife, as the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) pointed out.

The current proposal has the support of virtually the entire Jewish community. During its initial stage, before the 1996 legislation was passed—that legislation was

never brought into operation because it was included in part II of the Family Law Act 1996, which the Government intend to repeal—a meeting was convened by the Chief Rabbi and the Board of Deputies, at which representatives of the six main Orthodox and Reform movements were present. They are all united in supporting the proposed legislation. This is perhaps the first time that so comprehensive an array of support has been assembled.

Some have argued that the problem is internal to the Jewish community, so it should be solved within it. In fact, the Jewish community, through the initiative of the Chief Rabbi, has instituted unprecedented measures to alleviate the problem of individuals whose spouses refuse to grant or receive a Jewish bill of divorce, known as a get. They include a pre-nuptial agreement, currently signed by the majority of couples marrying under the aegis of the Chief Rabbi; communal sanctions against recalcitrant spouses; a taskforce whose remit includes pre-marital counselling for couples; relationship education in schools; and the training of mediators to resolve difficult cases. It should be put on record that the Chief Rabbi himself has intervened to resolve some of the most difficult cases.

The British Jewish community has done as much as it can—perhaps more than any other Jewish community in the world—to alleviate the problem. However, in the final analysis, Jewish communities in modern nation states are voluntary associations. They have no way, other than through education and persuasion, of changing the minds of determined individuals such as those to which the hon. Member for Hendon referred. That is why they seek the assistance of English law to end, or at least to mitigate, the anomaly whereby a civil divorce may proceed in the absence of a Jewish divorce, thus leaving one partner—usually the woman—unable to remarry.

It is wrong to say, however, that the rabbinate has not done all that it can to resolve the problem. It has recognised the need for action and, as far as possible within the parameters of Jewish law, it has taken action. Beyond that it cannot go. The assistance of the courts would be a powerful step forward, and would alleviate much human misery. We therefore give our support to the proposals.

10.22 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said that his Bill enjoys all-party support, and that is certainly true as far as I am concerned. I was not privileged to work on his Committee, but I have read his cogent, well written, well argued and compelling article explaining the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that a powerful humanitarian case exists. A small number of women are subject to considerable misery, and the legislation will alleviate their difficulty without causing detriment to anyone else. That seems an admirable basis for proceeding.

Before I came to the Chamber, I had some slight doubts, which were captured in the discussion prompted by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). However, the Minister's answers, particularly in relation to the Catholic Church—the need for consensus, and the fact that no changes will be imposed on other religions—satisfied my doubts. Although it is not sufficient to persuade me to oppose the Bill, something still troubles me slightly, however: the principle—attributed to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell)—of our legislating in respect of other religions, even where consensus exists.

I shall illustrate the point with a hypothetical case. I am a non-Catholic who married a Catholic woman. Unfortunately, she has since died, but we had a very happy and loving marriage. We got married in a Catholic church, and beforehand I went along for instruction. It was clearly explained to me that the nature of marriage in the Catholic faith is that marriage is for life. As I said, our marriage was happy and loving, and the issue of divorce never arose.

Let us suppose, however, that I had been a different man in a different situation, and that I went off with another woman, or abused my wife, and obtained a civil divorce. My wife would then have been in an invidious position, because the Church would not have recognised the divorce. She might well have wanted to remarry—to marry another devout Catholic and bring up children in the faith—but she would have been unable to do so because her divorce would not have been recognised.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cable: Let me finish the point, so that the hon. Gentleman can consider whether he still wants to intervene. In practice, there would have been no problem, as mechanisms exist—annulments, and so on—that humane priests can use. However, in such a situation a woman could encounter a wall of theological difficulty. A priest could say, "Well, my dear, I sympathise entirely with your position, but you entered into the relationship voluntarily. Membership of this Church is voluntary—you do not have to belong—and you will have to resolve your problem somewhere else." She might get angry and say, "I'm going to talk to my MP. I have heard about a law relating to the Jewish faith. I am in the same position as a Jewish woman, so why can't Parliament change the law to solve my problem? It's unfair." The priest could reply, "I cannot accept that principle. Why should a group of atheists, Anglicans, Methodists, Jews and Muslims prescribe the law internal to my Church?"

In practice, there is no problem, because—as the hon. Member for Hendon has stressed—the Church authorities have expressed no concern. Moreover, as the Minister said, matters would have to proceed by consensus. None the less, I have slight doubts as to why Parliament—a multi-faith body—is legislating in respect of the internal affairs of a particular Church.

Mr. Dismore: I can answer the hon. Gentleman's point relatively quickly. The Jewish faith recognises divorce and remarriage within the faith, but the Catholic Church does not. We are trying to enable Jewish women to remarry within the faith—at the moment, they are prevented from doing so—but the situation does not arise within the Catholic faith because it does not recognise divorce and remarriage per se.

Dr. Cable: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has not misunderstood me—I am not trying to object to his Bill. He is absolutely right to draw that distinction, and as he stressed earlier, the Catholic Church and other faiths that

[Dr. Cable]

do not recognise divorce have raised no objections to his Bill. However, there is a deeper issue—it is in no sense an objection to the Bill—that we should all bear in mind. We are legislating for the internal affairs of a particular religion and faith, regardless of our own religion, and we should do so with some trepidation and care.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Although the hon. Gentleman's point has some validity, in this instance the call for Parliament to intervene comes from established Jewish authorities, including the Chief Rabbi. Given the circumstances, does he accept that the proposed course of action is the correct one?

Dr. Cable: It is entirely correct, and I have no objection to the Bill, which is properly and narrowly drawn, and correct both morally and legally. I simply reiterate that there is an underlying issue of principle. We are dealing with a religion to which most of us do not belong, so we should take care and think about the far-reaching action that we are taking. None the less, I fully support the Bill and applaud the hon. Member for Hendon for introducing it. I am happy to associate my colleagues with it.

10.28 am

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill last autumn, and I am proud to sponsor it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said, its purpose is to correct a great injustice suffered by Jewish women in particular. Many Jewish people live in my Ilford, North constituency and the London borough of Redbridge.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): As my hon. Friend knows, I am her constituency neighbour. Many of my Ilford, South constituents will be similarly delighted at the introduction of this Bill by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). It is long overdue and I congratulate him on introducing it.

Linda Perham: I am pleased to have my hon. Friend's support. I know that he shares our views, and my local Jewish community is pleased that—hopefully—the matter will be concluded this time.

I shared in the Israel independence day celebrations at Sinclair house—an excellent facility in my constituency—and I hope to do so again in a few days' time. I have visited it on many occasions since my time as a local councillor and mayor of the borough in 1994. At Sinclair house last September, I spoke at the annual meeting of Jewish Women's Aid. Many women present asked me about the Bill's progress and were anxious about it, and they told me how important it is to get the Bill through this time. Indeed, Jewish women constituents have come to me with problems arising from their inability to obtain a get.

I feel strongly that the issue involves not just religion, but human rights—equal rights between men and women who have entered the partnership of marriage. In the week in which I have celebrated my 30th wedding anniversary, I count myself most fortunate that my husband and I have enjoyed a long and happy marriage. I can only imagine the misery and despair of people trapped in a failing relationship from which there seems no escape. I feel compassion for the situation and circumstances in which so many have found themselves over the years, bound against their will into a marriage that has effectively ended.

I feel particularly strongly about Jewish women being stigmatised in a way that Jewish men are not—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon mentioned—in that a divorcee who has a child in a new relationship is branded an adulteress and her child illegitimate. I especially welcome the support of all the agencies to which he referred, such as the Board of Deputies and all the synagogue bodies in Anglo-Jewry.

The support of the Chief Rabbi is also appreciated. I am a vice-chair of Labour Friends of Israel, and in a letter to the organisation's director the Chief Rabbi says that he is

"deeply appreciative of the support MPs and Peers from all sides of the House have shown."

He also refers to the Bill as a "much needed measure".

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon on introducing the Bill. He has already earned the praise of the Jewish community in his successful campaign to establish holocaust memorial day in this county, and his Bill deserves to pass into statute. He is one of many of us who give the lie to those who believe that Back Benchers cannot make a difference. I hope that the House gives the measure its full support.

10.32 am

Mr. Jim Murphy: I take great pleasure in supporting the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who is one of the most assiduous Back Benchers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) said, he has already achieved recognition throughout the country for holocaust memorial day and I hope that he achieves the important, but perhaps less high profile, objective of securing support for this private Member's Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said, it is highly unusual for a ten-minute Bill to clear all the hurdles that are placed before it and garner support across the parties and throughout the country. On that, I congratulate him. The only problem is that my local Jewish community has asked, "How come he has managed to secure two substantial changes in Government policy and attitudes when you have achieved none?". That is an issue for the electorate come the election. Nevertheless, I support the proposals before the House, not only because the Bill is important in protecting Jewish women, but because it deals with human rights.

From my perspective, marriage is a meeting of equals and an equal partnership. Unfortunately, as Jewish law currently stipulates, when a marriage breaks up, for whatever reason, it ceases to be an arrangement of equals. There appears to be an inbuilt discrimination against the woman.

The Bill represents a learning experience for me, as I do not practise the Jewish faith. I am a Roman Catholic. When a marriage in the Jewish faith breaks up, the man has to go to a Beth Din court, either in person or by proxy, and the ethos of the Jewish faith dictates that the woman becomes an agunah, or chained, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said.

Children of the wife born in any future relationship are discriminated against and considered to be illegitimate, so the Bill is welcome not only for the women who are chained in marriages that no longer exist and which they no longer wish to be in, but for the children of such women. It will remove the stigma of illegitimacy. It is also necessary, even though Anglo-Jewry and the synagogue bodies have done all they can to mitigate the worst excesses of religious rulings and Jewish law.

I do not wish to make a habit of doing so, but may I correct my hon. Friend on one point? He is right to say that Jewish marriage and divorce laws are biblical and can be affected only by a Sanhedrin, the assembly of rabbis, and the temple of Jerusalem. He said that the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, but my reading suggests that it was destroyed in 74 AD. That is not a reason for me to fall out with him or to fail to support his Bill, but simply my attempt to inform my Jewish constituents that my hon. Friend is not always right.

Mr. Dismore: I thought that 74 AD was the right date, but I received several letters correcting me, saying that it is 70 AD. Last night, I checked the history books, and my researcher said that it is 70 AD. I suspect that, in those days, the calendar was probably flexible.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for that clarification. Perhaps we can split the difference.

I have a number of other points to make about the Bill and the Minister's thoughtful response to the amendments. In particular, I welcome the comments in respect of the Muslim faith and other faiths. I have the good fortune to represent a significant Muslim community and I welcome the commitment that the Lord Chancellor will ascertain whether there is widespread support in any other faith and among leaders of any other faith before any aspects of this or future Bills in any way affect or apply to any other recognised faith.

In respect of Roman Catholicism and divorce, it is my strong view that there are many good and practising Roman Catholics who are separated, divorced or remarried. That is my perspective on my faith, and I think no less of those who have had to face that tough choice as Catholics. Nevertheless, I am certain that the assurances given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon and the Minister will reassure the Catholic Church and Catholic agencies that their religious laws and our religious beliefs are not indirectly or unintentionally affected by the Bill, particularly in the absence of any serious or considerable consultation. The comments made this morning will be welcomed by the leaders of my faith.

The issue of Scotland has already attracted attention in the debate. I do not wish to chastise my hon. Friend for calling this the English Parliament; he is in good company. I hope I am not straying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the BBC unfortunately often calls this the English Parliament. I wish to put that marker down for my hon. Friend and others.

Mr. Cash: A number of comments were made about this earlier. There were references to a British Parliament and some references to an English Parliament, but—speaking as shadow Attorney-General—I want to put on record the fact that this is the United Kingdom Parliament. Let us leave it at that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We have strayed far enough.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is of course right. No doubt it pleases him that at least we are not talking about the European Parliament.

As has been said, there have been discussions about the position in Scotland. As my constituency contains approximately 80 per cent. of Scotland's entire Jewish community, there has been considerable discussion there. I have spoken to my Member of the Scottish Parliament, who is keen for similar legislation to apply in Scotland.

Although this aspect of family law has already been devolved to Scotland, the opportunities represented by Bills of this kind are broadly welcomed across the political divide. They can easily be amended to apply to Scotland. A relatively new procedure known as the Sewel motion, named after Lord Sewel, would simply require the insertion of the word "Scotland". Indeed, we were recently able to do that with the Proceeds of Crime Bill. If this Bill attracts the consensus in Scotland that it has attracted so far in the rest of the United Kingdom, perhaps such an arrangement could be considered in the other place. I see no reason, relating to law, religion or the level of support, for this welcome measure not to apply throughout the United Kingdom. All Jewish women and their future children could then enjoy the same rights and the same legal and religious protection.

10.42 am

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): I shall speak for less than a minute.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), whose constituency is next to mine, has made many people in Hendon pleased that he has made such good progress with the Bill. Many people in Finchley and Golders Green feel the same.

My hon. Friend thanked a number of people for their assistance. He has spent an enormous amount of time on research, and I congratulate him sincerely on the way in which he has pushed the Bill through.

Ms Rosie Winterton: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on his strong commitment to this important issue, and on the skill and determination that he has shown in piloting his Bill through the House. I echo the tribute that he paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty).

A number of Members have spoken, including my hon. Friends the Members for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) and for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). I was moved by the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North contrasted her 30 years of happy marriage—on which I congratulate her again—with the tragic tales brought to her surgery by constituents, and the dealings she has had with this difficult issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood mentioned Scotland. His comments will be taken on board, which I hope will ensure that the campaign is as successful in Scotland as it has been here.

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

I do not want to let this opportunity pass without paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin). He cannot speak for himself—unusually—but he has made a number of representations to me about the issue.

The support from Opposition parties is extremely welcome and will be appreciated by all, especially members of the Jewish community who have made representations.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) also made a moving speech. I understand his concerns, but I can reassure him that the Bill does not seek to change Jewish religious law or to interfere with its interpretation. It amends only the civil law, in order to place Jewish men and women who seek divorce on an equal footing.

The Government are certainly sympathetic in regard to the difficulties experienced by some Jewish women who are prevented from remarrying in a religious ceremony because their husbands refuse to grant them a religious divorce, known as a get. Jewish women in that position have been described as "chained women trapped in limping marriages". Our aim, which applies to all families, is to ensure that if marriages break down acrimony can be reduced for all concerned—especially, of course, the children. Limping marriages are far from that ideal, and we are very aware of the distressing consequences for such women and their children.

This is a short and straightforward Bill with an important aim. It seeks to remedy the injustice and suffering experienced by chained women and their children. Some Jewish women who obtain a civil divorce from a spouse who refuses to grant them the religious divorce—the get—can face grave difficulties. According to orthodox interpretations of Jewish religious law, a woman who does not obtain a get is still considered to be married, regardless of any civil divorce. The get is therefore essential if the marriage is to be properly dissolved for the purposes of Jewish religious law. Orthodox Jewish women who obtain a civil divorce, but whose husbands refuse to give them a get, may not remarry in a religious ceremony in a synagogue.

Chained women may suffer other serious consequences because of their husbands' refusal to give them a get. If a chained woman sought to remarry in, say, a civil ceremony without obtaining a get, her marriage would not be regarded as a valid Jewish marriage and any children of the union would be regarded as illegitimate, a status that would last for 10 generations.

Women who wish to remain part of the orthodox Jewish religious community can be put in an invidious position if their husbands choose to abuse the religious law in this way. They can be forced to choose between observing the laws and practices required by their religious faith, and the freedom to remarry and make a fresh start with a new spouse.

I am certainly no theologian, and I am not an expert in Jewish religious law; but I know that there are major obstacles in the way of the Jewish religious authorities' ability to resolve the problem of limping marriages without the assistance of the civil law. I feel that I am probably getting into dangerous waters now. Nevertheless, I intend to plough on and stand to be corrected on any of the dates that I may give.

As I understand it, the issue could be resolved only by the re-establishment of a supreme rabbinical court known as a Sanhedrin. The last time that such a body was in existence was nearly 2,000 years ago. This is where it gets difficult. The last Sanhedrin ceased to exist with the destruction of the temple by the Romans under the Emperor Vespasian in 70 AD. Those are the facts that I have. I am happy to settle for 72 AD.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is correct in saying that it was under the Emperor Vespasian, who seized power after the year of the four Emperors arising out of the chaos of the succession following the assassination of Nero. In fact, however, the destruction was carried out by Vespasian's son, Titus, who later became Emperor in his own right—the second Emperor of the Flavian dynasty.

Ms Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend. I knew it was a mistake to go down this route. If I may, I shall stick to 70 AD. I did refer to events under Emperor Vespasian.

Given the difficulties in this area, I am sure that the House will appreciate that there would be considerable problems in reconstituting such a body today. That is why the Jewish community has asked for the assistance of Parliament to alleviate the suffering of those trapped in limping marriages.

I should, perhaps, point out that not all the victims of limping marriages are women; there are cases in which wives have refused to agree to religious divorces. In those circumstances, Jewish men will be able to benefit from the provisions of this Bill. I understand, however, that the consequences of not complying with Jewish religious law by obtaining a get before re-marriage are more severe and enduring for women than for men.

I have heard of a number of very distressing cases in which husbands have refused to agree to a religious divorce for many years, thereby effectively depriving some Jewish women of the opportunity to re-marry and have children with a new spouse, to which many hon. Members have referred. The ability of husbands to withhold a get from their wives has also led to some situations that can be described only as blackmail. In those cases, husbands have used the threat of withholding the get to achieve a more advantageous financial settlement on divorce or to force women to agree to iniquitous terms relating to the children of the marriage. There are also cases in which husbands have demanded a cash payment in return for agreeing to a religious divorce.

I am aware that many in the Jewish community have sought to address the problems experienced by chained women by applying moral and other pressures to recalcitrant husbands. In some cases, this has led to the social ostracism and even the picketing of the businesses of some individuals in particularly notorious cases, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon referred. I am sure that all parts of the House, and the Jewish community, would prefer matters relating to marriage and the family to be dealt with in other less confrontational and stressful ways. This Bill will assist in that.

Leading representatives of the Jewish community, including the Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks and members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, have put a very compelling case to the Government on the need for a provision that will provide a remedy for the difficulties faced by some Jewish women when seeking a

religious divorce. Last September, I had the pleasure of meeting Jeffrey Blumenfeld, Her Honour Judge Dawn Freedman, Tayla Singer and other members of the Jewish Marriage Council. I am extremely grateful to members of the council for assisting me in understanding the issues that this Bill seeks to address. I also met Her Honour Myrella Cohen QC and Eleanor Platt QC of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who have worked so hard on behalf of chained women in the Jewish community. I understand that they gave much assistance to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon. The type of advice that they were able to give me was invaluable in understanding the complex issues in this difficult area.

As many hon. Members have said, the Bill would enable the court, when it considers it appropriate, to order that a decree of divorce is not to be made absolute until a declaration is made by both parties that they have taken the necessary steps to obtain a religious divorce. That would mean that the legal divorce would not be finalised until the religious divorce had been provided. The effect of the Bill is therefore to place the parties on an equal footing; neither would be able to re-marry until both agreed to a religious divorce and, after a religious divorce, both would be free to re-marry in a synagogue in a religious ceremony. Although the number of chained women is small, it is important to assist people in such tragic circumstances.

As other hon. Members have said, the Bill reflects the contents of a Bill that was introduced in another place by the noble Lord Lester of Herne Hill in 2000. That Bill was unable to complete its passage, however, due to a shortage of parliamentary time. The Government suggested amendments to that Bill during its passage to ensure that it would comply with the European convention on human rights. Those changes are reflected in this Bill.

As the House may also be aware, provisions similar to those introduced in this Bill are contained in section 9(3) and (4) of part II of the Family Law Act 1996. On 16 January last year, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor announced that, based on evidence from pilots and from concerns expressed by the judiciary and others about complexity and delay, the Government were not satisfied that it would be right to proceed with the implementation of part II. The Lord Chancellor also announced that he proposed to invite Parliament to repeal the relevant sections of the Family Law Act 1996 once a suitable legislative opportunity occurs. We remain committed to the principles set out in part I of the Act, namely, saving saveable marriages, and bringing marriages that have broken down to an end with the minimum distress to the parties and children affected.

In that respect, the Lord Chancellor's Department is taking forward many initiatives, such as providing information leaflets and parenting plans for divorcing and separating couples, and establishing family advice and information networks to ensure that the principles of part I of the Family Law Act 1996 are realised in practice. Legal advice has indicated that it is not possible for the Government to implement section 9(3) and (4) independently because its provisions are procedurally linked with the other provisions of Part II. This Bill is therefore the vehicle by which those sections can be implemented without the rest of part II and, sensibly, it takes the opportunity to repeal those sections in the Family Law Act.

Some hon. Members have expressed concern that the Bill seeks to legislate in what are essentially matters of religious doctrine and custom. I reassure them that the Government understand those concerns and would not support a Bill that purported to interfere in the interpretation of religious faith. We are satisfied that the Bill does not seek to involve the civil courts in questions of religious law. It only enables the court, when dealing with an application for a civil divorce, to withhold the decree absolute until the parties have taken the necessary steps to acquire a religious divorce from a Jewish religious court.

As I said during the debate on the amendments, the Bill contains provisions for the Lord Chancellor to extend its provisions to other religious groups, should they so wish. I reiterate that there is no intention of foisting provisions on other faith groups. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) raised the issue of other religious groups, so let me point out that the Bill will apply only in cases where a religious group or sect provides for some form of religious divorce. Only in those instances would there be any question of using the order-making power. It would not be a matter of providing a religious divorce in terms of any religion; the critical question that the Lord Chancellor would also have to consider is whether withholding a religious divorce would have serious consequences for any of the parties. That would have to be taken into account when considering divorce for any other religious groups.

I strongly believe that the Bill will have a positive impact on the lives of Jewish women threatened with being trapped in a limping marriage. The Bill will be able to help those women at no extra cost to the public purse. It enjoys wide support across the Jewish community and has been endorsed by leading members of that community.

I know that some right hon. and hon. Members are, quite properly, concerned to ensure that the private Member's route is not used for the promotion of inappropriate legislation. I hope that anyone who shares those legitimate concerns is reassured that my hon. Friend's Bill is an example of the appropriate use of the private Member's route. It is a tightly drafted Bill designed to provide a remedy for a very specific problem. The number of chained women may well be small, but as the Bill offers an effective and appropriately framed remedy, I hope that the House agrees that we should take the opportunity to improve their lot and that of their children.

I hope that the House also agrees that this is a worthwhile Bill. It would have been unlikely to find a place in the Government's programme due to demands on parliamentary time and could only have made progress thanks to the work of my hon. Friend. The Government support the Bill and I am happy to commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Copyright, Etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.
Order for Third Reading Read.

11.5 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a great privilege to introduce the Third Reading of the Bill. I shall be brief for two reasons. First, when the Bill passed through the House, there was no fundamental criticism of it and it did not attract amendments in Committee, so there is not a great deal to respond to. Secondly, I was up in the early hours of this morning not merely reminding myself of my own complicated legislation but trying to get to grips with pension annuities and Jewish divorce law, so my stamina for a long speech has been correspondingly reduced.

I take this opportunity to express appreciation to the various people who have helped the Bill to proceed thus far. I thank the Minister and her staff, who have been very supportive, and Government Back Benchers, especially the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who did much of the pioneering work on the Bill, building up acceptance for its necessity. I also thank Conservative Front and Back Benchers, who have been supportive and helpful during the Bill's passage.

I wish briefly to rehearse the reasons why the legislation is important. The essence of the problem is the importance that intellectual property now has in our economy, which is increasingly knowledge based rather than based on mass production processes. We all have thousands of constituents whose jobs depend on the success of knowledge-based industries—not just the IT industry, although that is the most important, but the entertainment industry and manufacturing industries, which depend on copyright ideas for their profitability and success. Thus theft of intellectual property and copyright—pirating—damages that new economy and we must be concerned about the economic consequences.

As discussions on the Bill have highlighted, this is an area where the interests of producers and consumers coincide. Consumers have often been exploited by copyright pirates and goods have been adulterated, sometimes in a dangerous way. The Bill would not only protect intellectual property for producers but is a consumer protection measure.

The Bill coincides with the interests of law and order because there is growing evidence from the criminal intelligence service and elsewhere that large-scale, organised crime has penetrated this area on a substantial scale, exploiting anomalies in the current legislation. It is important to get past the idea that this is a victimless crime—it clearly is not—and the province of the lovable old rogues, the Del Boy characters, who sell things off the back of a lorry. It is a nasty, organised crime carried out by people associated with the drug industry, for example, who use copyright theft as a way of recycling their funds, and it is important to have appropriate criminal penalties.

The only other points that I need to make are specific and relate to interventions made on Second Reading and in Committee. Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), asked about the relationship between the penalties for copyright theft, which is what the Bill is concerned with, and for comparable crimes such as those involving trade marks and fraud. The whole purpose of the Bill is to remove anomalies between those different aspects of the law. For entirely anomalous reasons, rather than by design, trade mark law is more punitive, with 10-year maximum sentences. Similarly, criminal fraud attracts the same level of sentence, but copyright theft has a much lower sentencing level with a maximum tariff of two years. There is evidence of criminals exploiting that anomaly, and the Bill seeks to close it.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) sought to be assured that the Bill would not lead to a proliferation of new criminal offences and sentences, and I was able to reassure him that it would not. There is already a sentence for the crime of copyright theft. The Bill is concerned with aligning it with other comparable offences. It does not create new offences or sentences.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) referred to the "Chanel" plant in his constituency and asked whether the Bill covered trade marks as well as copyright. Indeed, by its title it does. The provisions of the trademark law in relation to sentencing have been imported into the Bill to cover copyright; similarly, the copyright provisions on search warrants, for example, have been imported into the Bill to cover trade marks. The Bill reconciles different aspects of the law and makes them more consistent. It protects trade marks as well as copyright.

Finally, on Second Reading, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) drew attention to European copyright legislation. I understand that later this year the Government will introduce measures reflecting the copyright directive. I have been assured that there is no incompatibility between the different legislative routes. The EU copyright directive is primarily concerned with the information technology industry and the Bill relates primarily to large-scale reproduction through pirating. The two measures are fully consistent and complementary.

With those few words I ask the House to give the Bill a Third Reading. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have helped its passage through the House.

11.12 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who was previously involved in this great enterprise, and all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been involved in the passage of the Bill. It is a real achievement in improving the protection of intellectual property rights in the United Kingdom.

I do not want to sound churlish, but the only slight cloud hanging over the Bill is that it looks as though it should have been a Government Bill. It was clearly necessary to put right a deficiency in the body of law dealing with these matters. That said, the industries that depend on intellectual property and all hon. Members will be grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham and everyone else involved with the Bill, especially as it is unusually complex and lengthy for a private Member's

Bill. The hon. Gentleman deserves great credit for having piloted it through the House and mastered its complexities even if that occasionally involved getting up in the early hours of the morning.

The hon. Gentleman used a phrase that I had already jotted down: he said that intellectual property theft has too often been seen as a victimless crime. Which of us could honestly say that we have never photocopied a copyright map or recorded a copyright piece of music? However, over the past few years organised crime has moved into this area. Copyright theft is having a greater and more serious impact on our economy and is increasing all the time as our economy becomes more knowledge based and dependent on intellectual property and the rights that attach to it.

The development of new communications technologies, and certainly the realisation of their full potential, is critically dependent on effectively protecting the intellectual property in the content that they deliver. That is often achieved by technical means such as decoders. The Bill addresses the use of decoders as a contribution to protecting the content of the new converged communications systems. Protection will be enhanced through strengthening and simplifying enforcement procedures and that is the purpose of the Bill.

By focusing on this issue, Parliament is sending a clear message both to the industries that depend on intellectual property protection—those industries make a substantial contribution to the UK economy—and to those who would seek to abuse intellectual property rights. Theft of intellectual property is a serious issue: as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, it is both an economic issue and a consumer protection issue.

The Bill will help to ensure that those who seek unlawfully to benefit financially from the work, talent, creativity and investment of others are more readily, effectively and appropriately dealt with. It offers a significant measure of additional protection to our creative industries—a sector in which Britain is a world leader. It is essential that we protect this vital national asset base and this Bill does just that. The Opposition unreservedly welcome the Bill. Once again I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham on his handling of its passage through the House.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The discussion today has been knowledgeable and informative. I very much welcome the opportunity to discuss the Bill for the first time. Hon. Members will know that unfortunately I could not be present for the debates on its earlier stages and I appreciate the consideration that has been given to the important matters contained within it.

I am much heartened by the cross-party support extended to the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on having brought it this far. I join him in reminding the House of the earlier contributions by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) who was responsible for a similar private Member's Bill and who is present in the Chamber.

As has been evident from our discussion, the subject matter covered by copyright, which is the main area affected by this Bill, is wide ranging and touches many aspects of our daily lives. It is hard to think of many of life's pleasures and challenges that do not have some aspect of copyright bound up with them.

How we spend our leisure time is important to all of us. Art, books, music, theatre, newspapers, magazines, computer games, photography, television and films all involve copyright, although it does not normally include getting up in the early hours of the morning. The United Kingdom is active in all those areas, often as a world leader. As the hon. Gentlemen and my hon. Friend have said this morning, we have much in which to take pride. How much poorer our lives would be, how much greyer, less vibrant, without these areas of creativity.

What starts in the mind of an individual—a single moment of creative spark—is fanned both by imagination and by sheer hard work. The first moments when a new creation is set before the world can be like lighting a candle: it is all too easy to snuff it out. If that flame is protected—shielded by the law of copyright—miracles can happen. Imaginations can ignite and set the world on fire with a shared creative vision. Sparks in other minds flicker into life and the process continues. Copyright is the method by which creativity is rewarded and encouraged.

Copyright is not just concerned with individual creative genius. What may have started with a single creative thought is a matter of business, both big and small. Deals are done and contracts signed. Money changes hands. Making a living is important to all of us, whether we are a creator or an entrepreneur. We all like a return on our investment, after all, so whether we are talking about the original creator of the work or the organisation that may have put millions into the funding to make it all possible, there is a lot at stake.

However, it is all too easy for the unscrupulous to make a copy. To make many, many copies is, indeed, often very simple with such valuable property, and technology just keeps making it easier. We are all, I am sure, well aware of the ease with which perfect copies of copyright material can be made, and the opportunities provided by the internet for transmitting those copies all over the world.

I do not intend to dwell on copyright issues in the information society today. Hon. Members will know that last year a European directive on copyright and related rights in the information society was adopted, and we are now, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, in the process of implementing that in the United Kingdom. Although our copyright law already provides a high level of protection in the online environment, the regulations that we will introduce in due course to implement the directive will make further improvements in protection aimed specifically at that environment.

The Bill will tighten the provisions that apply when people are involved in making for sale and dealing in physical copies of copyright material in the knowledge that they do not have a licence from the copyright owners. In the main, this will involve illegal copies on compact discs or digital video discs or videos, and the copyright material will often be software: computer games and business software, music and films. Offences already exist that apply to such illegal activity, and they are not changed by the Bill, which is simply directed at the consequences for offenders.

It is important to remember that, with the making of counterfeit and fake copies, there is no recompense for the copyright owner. Nothing is given back to those who

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

made it all possible. There is no reward for the creator of the copyright material and nothing for the financial backer. If future creativity is to be encouraged, we must make it possible to deal appropriately with people who knowingly take part in the illegal behaviour that is caught by the offences in copyright law.

The enforcement agencies that try to stop counterfeiting and piracy have often turned to trade mark law in preference to copyright law in taking action in this area. In many instances, after all, trade marks have been infringed along with the copyright, but to consider only the trade mark infringement has somehow made copyright infringement appear a lesser offence when it is not. In many instances, the copyright infringement can lead to just as much damage to right holders as the trade mark infringement, and in both cases consumers and society in general are also victims. The theft—for it is theft—can be a serious crime, whether it be of copyright alone, copyright and trade marks, or just trade marks.

Until now, copyright theft has been considered the lesser theft, attracting lower maximum penalties, even though it can cause equal harm. The Bill is designed once and for all to give copyright theft equivalent standing to that of trade mark theft by copying into copyright law the better provisions on maximum penalties and forfeiture of infringing goods that already exist in trade mark law.

Copyright law is not in all ways less effective than trade mark law, however. The provisions in copyright law on police search warrants are useful, and the Bill seeks to extend them more widely, including into the trade mark area. Rights in trade marks can be just as valuable as copyright. They allow a reputation that may have been built up over many years to be protected. Trade marks are used to give consumers reassurance that the products that they buy under a particular brand name will have the usual quality that they expect from a particular manufacturer.

Illegal use of trade marks on poor or shoddy, or even malfunctioning or dangerous, goods undermines the trust that consumers have when they see that trade mark. That can have extremely serious consequences for the reputation that has been so carefully nurtured and developed over many years, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said.

The Bill is a package of harmonising or rationalising measures that copy the best provisions that already exist in one area into the others, so that both copyright and trade mark crime can be dealt with more efficiently, effectively and fairly. Copyright and trade mark rights are, of course, both forms of intellectual property. The Bill also covers other areas of intellectual property related to copyright, such as the rights granted to performers over recordings of their performances.

By harmonising the law in the areas that I have mentioned, the Bill makes it clear that copyright offences are not less than trade mark offences, and vice versa. Theft is theft. If people steal the intellectual property of others, be it by trade mark or copyright infringement, or in any of the areas related to copyright, they must bear in mind the consequences.

Before considering the detail of the Bill, I would like to return to the subject of harm and who is affected by intellectual property or IP crime. I stressed those issues last December when I launched the Crimestoppers national anti-counterfeiting campaign in London. That event was the culmination of collaboration between many interests, including right holders, enforcement agencies, and of course the charity known as the Crimestoppers Trust. It was just the start of a long-term campaign to raise people's awareness of the serious consequences of counterfeiting.

All of us here today are well aware that IP crime threatens not only our creative and innovative industries but consumers, jobs and society in general, but public understanding of the issues is very low. Raising awareness will need to be undertaken over a long and protracted time scale, but acting under the well-respected and well-known Crimestoppers logo does, I believe, provide a valuable way forward.

I said at the London launch on 3 December that it was just the start of the campaign. I was immensely pleased by the high level of media interest in that launch event, but the messages will need repeating again and again. Indeed, the first regional event to reinforce that campaign has now taken place. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was present at an event in Leicester in February that highlighted in particular the damage caused by counterfeiting to the legitimate clothing industry in that area, while also reinforcing the message that this is indeed a national and international problem, affecting many diverse areas. We hope to be able to support more events in the future, and that the media will continue to help us highlight the messages that we need to get across.

Of course, linking up with Crimestoppers has a dual purpose. As well as raising public awareness, the campaign is aimed at encouraging people to report the crime to the free, confidential Crimestoppers phone number. Many people will know where there are instances of IP crime. As both hon. Gentlemen said, many people are tempted to buy fake goods because they may appear to be bargains, but people may also know who is behind this illegal activity. Wherever people come across this crime, we hope that they will give information to the enforcement agencies or right holders or, if they prefer, to the Crimestoppers number, from where it will be passed on to the right people to deal with it.

We know that public perceptions of counterfeiting often derive from characters such as Del Boy, or a lovable rogue selling cheap fakes from a battered suitcase. Many people know that selling fakes is illegal and that the manufacturers of the genuine goods may be losing out, but the public often have more sympathy for the guy selling the fakes in the rain than for the business interests that may be damaged. In order to understand why working with Crimestoppers in this area is so important, we need to understand why those public perceptions are wrong and why we need to change them through the Bill.

Counterfeiting or IP crime involves stealing. It is the theft of property, intellectual property, and is no less serious than the theft of physical property. Indeed, it may even be more serious. By stealing just one brand name, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, or just one piece of copyright material such as a computer game, the criminal can make illegally many thousands or even millions of goods incorporating that material. The counterfeiter has spent no money creating and developing new products. The counterfeiter has not invested in building up a reputation for good-quality goods, backed

up by a reliable after-sales service. The counterfeiter fraudulently copies IP, and sometimes even has the cheek to charge the same price as that of the genuine article.

However, few fakes match the quality of the authentic goods, and we know that consumers can sometimes become extremely disappointed as a result. The lovable rogue will not be around to give a refund; fakes do not come with guarantees or an after-sales service.

Counterfeit and pirate goods that do not work properly or that come apart after a few uses at least lead to no more damage to the consumer beyond a hole in their purse. There are fakes, though, that can pose serious hazards to consumers. All too often they can be goods that are attractive to children. The counterfeiters are quick to profit, paying no regard to safety standards, so counterfeit toys with parts that come off too easily, leaving sharp ends, and children's nightwear that has the latest attractive logos but is highly flammable, have been found. There are also examples of damaging goods among products for which copyright is more important, such as computer software containing viruses that damage the computer. Anything else that the counterfeiters can copy will be available for those who want to take the risk.

Linking Crimestoppers and counterfeiting involves much more than concerns about consumer safety, though. As the Bill recognises, counterfeiting is a crime, and evidence is growing that organised crime groups are behind many of the characters at markets, car boot sales and on street corners who are selling fakes. Sometimes the web of criminal activity stretches over many countries. At other times, organised crime groups based only in the United Kingdom are involved.

The links between IP theft and other serious crimes are becoming more transparent. As the director of the Crimestoppers Trust said at the London launch of the anti-counterfeiting campaign, the guy selling the fakes may be only two handshakes away from someone like bin Laden. That is not just a fairytale idea; we have evidence that it may be close to the truth.

Last year's threat assessment by the National Criminal Intelligence Service highlighted two links with serious organised crime—with drug trafficking and immigration crime. I shall cite some quotations from that threat assessment:

"Counterfeiting is enormously profitable, and organised criminals are heavily involved in the production, the buying and importing and the distribution of all types of counterfeited products . . . The profits from IP theft can help organised crime groups to become more established and to fund other various criminal activities."

NCIS also said:

"Over two thirds of the organised crime groups reported to be involved in intellectual property theft were seen also to be involved in drug trafficking. Drug and intellectual property theft are very different areas of crime, except that both involve smuggling and selling, and the levels of risk attached are also very different. The links are not fully understood, but there are large profits to be made from counterfeit goods, and this may be the simple explanation."

I am sure that those quotations leave hon. Members in no doubt that what we are talking about, and what the Bill is about, is a serious area of crime.

Counterfeiting also leads to job losses and to the creation of fewer jobs—not just jobs in big business and in other countries, but those on the high street and in the UK. Big retailers may be able to recoup some of their losses owing to counterfeiting, probably by adding something to the cost of the genuine articles, but if counterfeiters move in with their goods, small high street shops may close down, putting local people out of a job. Intellectual property crime is therefore a problem in all our constituencies.

The consequences of IP crime are therefore far-reaching, and the publicity for the Crimestoppers campaign highlights some of those messages. We do not expect public perceptions to change overnight. We know from experience that raising public awareness will be a long and slow haul. However, because of the serious impact of IP theft, we know that it is important that the effort is made and that making it under the well-respected Crimestoppers logo is an excellent way forward.

Crimestoppers of course plays a role in gathering intelligence to fight crime generally. Last year, the Home Office published an independent evaluation of the work of the trust, which recognises the valuable contribution to crime reduction that the charity makes. The anonymous freephone number received more than 500,000 calls in 2000, and 17 per cent. of the calls on which action was taken resulted in an arrest, a charge or a caution. I fully agree with the recent comment of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety that

"Crimestoppers is a unique and effective route to gathering vital intelligence for the police and other law enforcement agencies."

I am particularly pleased that the launch of the Crimestoppers anti-counterfeiting campaign and the rolling programme of events around the country over the coming months have been made possible by the sponsorship of some industries that are affected by IP theft. We should encourage other industries to support the campaign as it develops. Crimestoppers has a history of voluntary and business interests working in partnership. The anti-counterfeiting campaign is a joint venture fitting that pattern entirely appropriately.

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Lady confirm that the Government are supporting the Bill? She has now been speaking for more than 20 minutes about a measure that commands complete support among Members of all parties and I am beginning to wonder whether she is trying to talk it out.

Miss Johnson: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I am certainly not trying to talk the Bill out. Indeed, I have been speaking entirely in support of it. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman had been listening carefully from the Opposition Front Bench, he would be fully aware that everything that I have said warmly supports the Bill, which also has the Government's full support.

I mentioned that the Crimestoppers' campaign is also supported by some law enforcement agencies. Their work is crucial to the fight against IP crime. The Bill will, I hope, give them more consistent and transparent tools to help their work. I also commend the excellent work of the law enforcement agencies, which already play an active role in fighting counterfeiting crime. This Bill will make their work even more valuable.

We should not lose sight of other ways of fighting IP crime. As well as bringing about rationalisation of the criminal remedies, the greater transparency of the consequences of IP crime that the Bill will deliver will—I hope—have a deterrent effect.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to page 544 of *Erskine May*, which tells us that the scope of Third Reading debates is not as wide as that on Second Reading, and that debate should be confined to the specific contents of the Bill? It seems odd that the Minister has informed us that the Bill has the support of the House, yet she seems to be taking, shall we say, a fairly wide approach to it, and is making a speech that would be more appropriate on Second Reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman has given the House a helpful reminder, of which I hope the Minister has taken note.

Miss Johnson: Of course, I certainly take note of anything you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been making the point, which I hope the hon. Gentleman well understands, that the Bill is very important. It will have many consequences for the economy, consumers and business. There is much need to highlight the significance of the issue, the Bill's importance to it and the effectiveness of fighting such crime. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that.

As I was saying, I hope that as a result of the Bill more people will be persuaded that the level of risk, which NCIS identified as very different from that for some other organised crimes, is more significant. I hope, too, that our efforts to raise public awareness may even persuade the public not to buy fakes. Reducing the market for counterfeit goods is one of the most effective crime reduction strategies.

I should like briefly to consider the detail of the Bill. We have naturally taken advice on the text and I can therefore confirm to the hon. Member for Twickenham that clause 1 raises the maximum penalties for copyright and related offences. The Bill does not change the offences, for which the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 provides. The maximum penalties are increased to those that currently exist for trade mark offences concerning product counterfeiting.

I have already said that there is no justification for the different maximum penalties that currently exist. Copyright piracy—the wilful theft of copyright material—can be just as serious as trade mark counterfeiting, which is the wilful theft of a brand name. Harmonising the maximum penalty at an unlimited fine and/or up to 10 years in prison is therefore right.

I understand that some of the most serious cases of copyright crime, in which criminals have been caught making and distributing large numbers of illegal compact discs or videos, have been tackled by prosecuting the offenders for conspiracy to defraud rather than copyright offences. That is because the existing maximum penalty in copyright law, which allows only up to two years in prison, was deemed inadequate for the seriousness of the offending behaviour. A prison sentence of 10 years is possible when a person is convicted for conspiracy to defraud. The Bill will therefore introduce greater transparency into the consequences of copyright theft, which should lead to a greater deterrent effect.

We have also considered clause 2 carefully and believe that it provides some useful rationalisation of existing search warrant provisions for the police. Specific search warrant provisions already apply to some of the copyright offences concerning making for sale or hire and dealing in infringing copies. However, we agree that the limitation to only some of the offences is unhelpful. It should be possible for the police to seek a search warrant when there are reasonable grounds for believing that any of the making for sale or hire or dealing offences has been or is about to be committed.

A corresponding amendment of the existing search warrant provision that relates to illicit recordings of performances is also useful. Moreover, it does not make sense to have no specific search warrant provisions for the criminal offences that relate to unauthorised decoders, which are related to copyright. We believe that the clause makes appropriate new provision for that, too.

I know that clause 3 appears complex, but hon. Members will understand that its purpose is to insert two new sections into copyright law that correspond to existing provision in trade mark law. During an investigation into copyright crime, it is not uncommon for the police or others to seize many illegal CDs, videos and so on as evidence. Trade marks law provides forfeiture provisions for goods seized during investigation of the counterfeiting offences that apply both when there has been a prosecution and when that has not been possible. I believe that the clause inserts corresponding provision into copyright law.

I understand that the trade mark provisions enacted in the Trade Marks Act 1994 were modelled on provisions for goods contravening a safety provision in the Consumer Protection Act 1987. Clauses 4 and 5 provide for forfeiture measures that are comparable to those provided by clause 3.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Third Reading speech to go through a Bill clause by clause? The measure has already been examined in detail in Committee and on Report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister is in order in dealing with the contents of the Bill, which is the prime purpose of a Third Reading debate. The Minister may have enlarged on that task earlier, but she is currently talking about the contents of the Bill, with, I hope, some awareness of the time that she has already taken.

Miss Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said earlier, clauses 4 and 5 provide for forfeiture measures that are comparable to those that clause 3 provides, but for illicit recordings of performances and unauthorised decoders for illegal access to conditional access transmissions such as satellite television. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) mentioned that in his contribution.

Although the police are able in some circumstances to obtain search warrants to investigate the trade mark counterfeiting offences using provisions in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, there is no specific provision in trade mark law equivalent to that in copyright law. I believe that clause 6 creates useful harmonisation on that by inserting a specific search warrant provision into trade mark law modelled on that in copyright law as amended by clause 2.

Let me deal finally with clause 7. Intellectual property is a reserved matter so it is right that this Bill extends to the whole of the United Kingdom. I understand that the devolved Administrations are aware of the Bill and are content to see it enacted. We have confirmed with the Council of Ministers in the Isle of Man that it is content for clause 6 to extend to that territory in the same way that trade mark law, which is amended by clause 6, currently so extends.

I hope that my comments today have given us a chance to review the way in which the Bill is designed to bring some rationalisation and transparency to the provisions on intellectual property crime. As I explained at the beginning, copyright owners are the major beneficiaries of the measures, and copyright is the form of intellectual property that should be familiar to us all, given its impact on and importance to the many sectors that bring us products to enrich our lives.

I should therefore like to confirm again that the Bill has the wholehearted support of the Government and warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham and the Bill's sponsors for giving us the opportunity to provide worthwhile improvements in a valuable aspect of law.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF THE INCOME AND CORPORATION TAXES ACT 1988

11.46 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 6, leave out—

'or sums for investment in a Retirement Failsafe Fund'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 1, in page 1, line 10, at end insert—

'or a Retirement Failsafe Fund'.

No. 2, in page 1, line 13, at end insert—

'(g) the payment to a member of income from a Retirement Failsafe Fund satisfying the conditions of section 637C.'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 23, leave out "section is" and insert "sections are".

No. 4, in page 2, line 42, at end insert—

'637C Retirement Failsafe Fund

(1) There shall be a vehicle for savings for retirement known as a Retirement Failsafe Fund.

(2) A member may transfer funds into a Retirement Failsafe Fund if he elects not to purchase an annuity.

(3) Regulations may make provision relating to Retirement Failsafe Funds, and in particular in connection with—

(a) the sums to be invested in the fund;

(b) withdrawals from the fund;

(c) the age at which a pension is payable;

(d) preventing the assignment or surrender of withdrawals from the fund.

(4) Regulations under subsection (3) shall be made by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

Ruth Kelly: The amendment was intended to correct a defect in the Bill as it left Committee. In Committee, the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) tabled an amendment on behalf of the Christian Brethren to allow a personal pension scheme to invest in a retirement failsafe fund. The Committee accepted that amendment but rejected another, which provided for the specification of a retirement failsafe fund and the conditions it would have to meet. Consequently, the Bill is defective. The amendment therefore corrects the defect by removing the reference to a retirement failsafe fund in the clause. It is worth taking some time to consider the substance of the group of amendments.

The amendments are designed to ensure a minimum retirement income without the necessity of buying an annuity. They are a genuine attempt to meet the needs of the Christian Brethren, whose beliefs will not let them participate in insurance products.

As we know, the first definition of a retirement failsafe fund put forward by the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Tiverton and Honiton did not

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survive the Committee stage. I have sympathy with the aims behind the amendments. I do not believe that they are designed, like the Bill, to extract money other than as retirement income, or to preserve it for heirs after the death of the scheme member. They are intended to provide an alternative means of securing a retirement income that does not involve buying an annuity. The intention is that the retirement failsafe fund will generate an income equivalent to the minimum retirement income, which the Bill defines elsewhere. However, the amendments are silent on the conditions that should apply.

It is not clear, for example, whether money can be placed in the retirement failsafe fund at any time after joining the pension scheme or only when benefits first come to be drawn. Instead, the amendments provided that all the details of exactly what a retirement failsafe fund is and how it would operate are left to regulations, rather than spelled out in the Bill.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does my hon. Friend share my incredulity that such an amendment should have been tabled, given the number of times that we have heard the reluctance of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) to accept anything that would lead to a Henry VIII clause, leaving the Government free to make their own regulations on a Bill, particularly a finance Bill? I have heard the hon. Gentleman wax lyrical on numerous occasions about the difficulties that that would pose. Does my hon. Friend share my view that the Opposition should not proceed in this way on this occasion?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I sympathise with the aim behind the amendment, which is to meet a genuine concern of the Christian Brethren. However, I do not and cannot sympathise with the way in which that concern would be met, or with the degree of power, to which my hon. Friend rightly refers, that the amendment would grant the Treasury through regulations.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Perhaps it would have helped the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and his new-found interest in the Bill if he had been present in Committee when it was made clear, in presenting the amendments on behalf of the Christian Brethren, that they have already been engaged in no fewer than four years' negotiations with the Inland Revenue on the matter. Given the implied agreement in the Minister's opening remarks that she is seeking to resolve the problem, I am surprised to hear such a mealy-mouthed intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. I have said that I sympathise with the aims of the amendment, but I do not think that the Bill can meet them in a successful fashion. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) rightly draws attention to some of the Bill's deficiencies.

Mr. Gardiner: On a point of explanation, I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) that I said on Second Reading—a debate for which she obviously was not here—that I had followed the subject of annuities very closely in the House over the past four or five years, that I am a member of the relevant all-party group and that I have been extremely active in these matters. If the hon. Lady had done her homework a little better, she would not be quite so flushed in the cheeks at the moment.

Ruth Kelly: I know the interest that my hon. Friend takes in these matters; I have regular discussions with him on these and other financial matters, in which he also takes a great interest.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Can we please get back to this very important issue of conscience? The Minister is herself a lady of religious conviction. Hers may not be the same religious conviction as that of the Christian Brethren, but they have an honest belief, and the Government must try and find a way forward. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) tabled the amendment in the way he did because if it had been prescriptive, the Government would have argued that it was defective and took the wrong approach. My hon. Friend cannot win. Will the Minister explain how she will meet the genuine beliefs of this small but important minority? Minorities are important, even if they are small.

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's point. These are valid concerns: I have taken a personal interest in them and would like the Inland Revenue to be able to meet them in a way that is compatible with the Government's overall aims. While I intend to address some of the technical deficiencies associated with this manner of meeting the concerns alluded to, I hope that, through the negotiations that I know are ongoing, we will find a different way of meeting those concerns.

As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, the Government recently published a consultation document on annuity reform on which the Christian Brethren have made representations to the Inland Revenue and the Treasury. I shall be looking at those representations extremely closely, and although this dialogue has been going on for a long time, perhaps in the future we will manage to find a way through it. However, we must bear it in mind that it is not compulsory for people to save in a pension fund. There are other ways of saving, so people have a choice about the way in which they save for their retirement. It is not incumbent on individuals who disagree with our approach to buy an annuity product. They have other methods at their disposal and other ways of saving for their retirement.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I should like clarification of the Government's intention. Is the Minister saying that they are now committed to meeting the concerns of this group and will seek to meet them through regulatory change or negotiations with the Inland Revenue even if primary legislation is not forthcoming? Is that a Government commitment?

Ruth Kelly: It is a commitment to try and understand its concerns and see whether there are ways in which we can meet them. I am afraid that I cannot today give a commitment that we will be able to meet them. Although there is a compulsion to buy an annuity if one saves

through a pension fund, there are of course other ways of saving for old age, and I shall bear that in mind when considering these issues.

I want to get back to the way in which the amendment has been tabled and the technical difficulties that the Opposition's proposals present. The essential problem remains—that of securing an income for the whole of a person's retirement, no matter how long that might be. The version of the retirement failsafe fund in Committee attempted to cover the detail in the Bill itself. Presumably, the general thrust that Members who tabled the amendments would like to see in regulations remains much the same.

The proposals made in Committee had many drawbacks and would not have provided the necessary guarantees. For example, they attempted to deal with the possibility of the fund running out over time by requiring the size of the retirement failsafe fund to be 150 per cent. of the fund size needed to generate an annual minimum retirement income, presumably by reference to what could be purchased on the annuity market. The minimum retirement income is to be whatever amount was set by the Chancellor for the year in question. It would have to increase each year by reference to increases in the retail prices index, capped at 5 per cent. How much of the fund would be necessary to achieve that were an annuity to be purchased on day one would depend on the age of the scheme member at that time. Even if there were enough money in the pension scheme to cover the 150 per cent. condition at the outset—and most funds would be well below the necessary fund size of around £83,000—there would be no guarantee that the failsafe fund would be able to generate the minimum retirement income year after year. A downturn in the investment fund could easily lead to a depletion of the fund size.

I understand the concerns of the Christian Brethren, but the fact remains that an annuity is the only means of guaranteeing a secure income for the whole of a person's life. A failsafe fund cannot do that. Apart from the possibility of a downturn in the investment market causing funds to deplete rapidly, the pension scheme member would be permanently exposed to mortality drag. That concept may seem arcane to the outside world, but we had discussions in Committee about the importance of mortality drag, and it remains critical to the debate. I think that it would be helpful if I explained the phenomenon in broad terms because of the importance that I attach to it.

Some people believe that it is better for a pensioner to wait to buy an annuity because annuity rates are higher for older people. It is certainly true that annuity rates are higher for older people, but that fact is only part of the story. Annuity providers set their rates by judging the life expectancy of their customers. The judgment determines how much capital they can afford to return each year to people who buy annuities, along with interest. Because older people are more likely to die, this mortality cross-subsidy allows the provider to give a bigger capital boost to its older annuity customers. That is why annuity rates rise with age.

If someone decides to start taking benefits from their pension savings, delays buying an annuity and draws income from their fund, part of their fund remains invested. After a period they could use the residual fund, with any investment growth, to buy an annuity at the rate for their age then. However, the residual fund needs a strong growth rate if it is to allow pensioners to buy the same level of annuity income as they could have achieved if they had bought an annuity when they first started drawing benefits from the fund. There are two reasons for this: first, the residual fund does not benefit from mortality cross-subsidy until it is used to buy an annuity. The delay means that older people get less benefit from the early deaths of people born at the same time, because their capital was never pooled with them.

Secondly, life expectancy increases with age. For example, a man of 65 might on average expect to reach age 82, but if he survives to age 75, he can expect to reach age 85. This may at first seem odd. It happens because people who die younger have fallen out of the picture when the life expectancy for people at any given age is calculated. So the older people are when they buy an annuity, the greater the age the annuity provider must expect them to achieve, and the longer the annuity has to last. Taken together, those two effects mean that the residual fund has to make sustained and reliable returns well above those of fixed interest securities such as gilts in order to keep pace with the income that an annuity would have provided.

12 noon

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. Have she or her officials done any research into the intended effect of the proposals? If they encouraged more and more people to take annuities later in life, how would the annuities market be affected? Might not rates automatically be depressed by the very phenomenon that the proposals seek to achieve?

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for his very interesting remarks. Clearly, substantial changes of the sort that hon. Members opposite propose would have a very significant impact on the annuity market in terms of rates, availability and types, and so forth. I intend to return to some of those issues when we discuss other amendments, and especially in relation to the effect of the proposal of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) to ask people to buy a compulsory annuity at 65. Presumably, that applies to people who describe themselves as non-Christian Brethren, although that is not clearly set out in the Bill. The proposal would also have a substantial impact on the gilt market—an issue to which I shall return, along with other matters; especially the affordability of the proposals.

Mortality drag is one of the factors that must be taken into account when income withdrawal or draw-down, as it is also known, is considered under the existing rules. However, the period of draw-down is limited to attaining the age of 75—after which the increased investment returns begin to look unsustainable. In that context, the proposal is that an annuity would never be purchased, possibly with dire consequences for the pension scheme member as they get older. I hope that I have at least shown that there is no quick and easy alternative to annuity purchase that would meet the Government's requirement that tax-relieved pension fund moneys should provide a secure income that is guaranteed to last for the whole of the pensioner's retirement, no matter how long they live.

I should also like to remind the House of some of the other elements of the retirement failsafe fund that would have taken effect under proposals previously tabled by hon. Members. Anyone whose fund size was more than

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that needed to meet the 150 per cent. condition would have the freedom to withdraw as much as they liked from the remaining personal pension fund before they reach 80, when all the remaining funds would be merged. Then and for every year afterwards, the fund would be divided by the number of years remaining to age 100, and that amount would be paid out as income.

There was nothing to stop the whole of the fund that remained after the failsafe fund has been set up from being withdrawn before age 80. Clearly, it would be the choice of many wealthy people to extract the maximum amount possible just before reaching 80 so that it was not subject to the rules that came into play at that age. The lack of any compulsion to annuitise and the provision of full access to the funds before age 80 would, like the Bill's main proposals, be an enormous encouragement to wealthy people to save much more of their income or transfer savings from elsewhere into tax-relieved pension funds.

The Exchequer costs of the extra tax reliefs that would be claimed as a result are estimated to run into hundreds of millions of pounds a year. I shall not explain the matter further at this stage, but I propose to return to it later in the debate. The point is that the reliefs would be given other than for their intended pension purpose. The proposals would have enabled those with large funds built up with the benefit of very generous tax reliefs to set aside only a small proportion for the provision of retirement income and use the rest for any purpose they wished. That is not an acceptable use of tax relief. The proposals considered in Committee also left unaddressed the critical question of what would happen if the scheme member lived to 100. Even if the fund had not run out beforehand, it was designed to do so at that age.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): His life expectancy would be 130 by then.

Ruth Kelly: The right hon. Gentleman points out that if people reach the age of 100, they may have a significant further period to live.

The hon. Members who tabled the amendments have argued in the past—they may do so again today—that it is precisely because of the need to address the difficulties that I have mentioned that they now propose that all that should be sorted out by regulations. I hope that I have made it clear that it is not that easy to solve some of these very difficult problems and that it cannot be done merely through regulation. I think that that shows that the proposals have not been thought through coherently.

Mr. Leigh: I think that we can take it as read that, for the technical reasons that the Minister has outlined, she and her officials are opposed to the retirement failsafe fund. That is fair enough; she is entitled to her point of view. However, the House is entitled to get an explanation before she sits down. Given that she holds those views, how does she intend to address the conscientious objection that people have registered?

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, which I know are genuine; indeed, I share those concerns. It would be beneficial if we could think of some way of meeting the concerns of the Christian Brethren while maintaining our basic principles for the use of tax relief, as has been clearly set out in our consultation document. Of course, we are still considering the results of the consultation, which is not designed to fit in neatly to the timetable of the Bill. We will consider those results and we take the issues extremely seriously.

Even if the principle behind the amendments were acceptable—I have pointed out that there are serious concerns even about the principle that they involve—they are still technically flawed. For example, amendment No. 1 still treats income invested in a retirement failsafe fund as benefit to be paid out of the personal pension scheme. However, there is no proposal to amend section 633 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, which defines the scope of benefits that a personal pension scheme can provide to include payments into such a fund. So the status of the retirement failsafe fund is again left unclear and uncertain. Regulations could not sort out that problem because they could not override section 633 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act.

There is also still the unresolved conflict with the Bill's other clauses. For example, the Bill makes a minimum retirement income annuity compulsory at 65. Although amendment No. 4 states that a member

"may transfer funds into a Retirement Failsafe Fund if he elects not to purchase an annuity",

it is insufficient to disapply the Bill's mandatory annuity purchase requirement. Even if the member could transfer funds into a retirement failsafe fund, it is not clear what would happen if the proposed regulations had not been made at that time. The amendments make no provision as to time scales.

I am afraid the amendments that we have are completely unworkable on technical grounds and could not be put right by regulations. As I said, the previous proposals did not resolve the difficulties and were costly. Now the aim of the hon. Members who tabled the amendments is for the Government to accept the failsafe fund in principle and to sort out the problems at a later date by way of regulations.

I do not believe that this Bill is the right way to take the issues forward and to meet the Brethren's concerns. I believe that the better course is to examine the issues as part of our ongoing consultation exercise. The consultation document "Modernising Annuities", which was published on 5 February, is intended to stimulate discussion on annuity issues. I shall certainly commit myself to studying the response of the Christian Brethren very carefully. As I said in the House on 14 February, I shall be happy to go on exploring the issues with those involved if we cannot make an immediate response to their demands.

I do not think that the Bill is the right way to take those particular concerns forward, so to say the least, I am not comfortable with the amendments that have been tabled by hon. Members opposite.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The Minister presented the proceedings in Committee the wrong way round. A clear vote was cast by a cross-party majority in favour of the principle of the failsafe fund. The votes were not in favour of the specific detailed proposals. It is therefore logical that on Report we should follow that principle: the concept is accepted, but we all

know that there are difficulties in working out precisely how the provisions would operate. Given that there have been four years of discussions with the Revenue, it is entirely logical to speak in support of our main amendment in the group. In essence, that amendment leaves the meeting of the objectives to be sorted out with the Revenue in regulations.

The Minister's remarks were disingenuous, as the issue has been around for four years. The Brethren have been in detailed discussions with the Revenue to sort out an arrangement that can provide retirement income for them without their having to go against their religious principles by purchasing an annuity. The point at issue is that an annuity is an insurance policy, which, for the Brethren, represents gambling with death, and that is against their religious principles. It is simply not good enough for the Government to go on mumbling about commitments to go on talking for another four years to solve the problem: it is time that it was solved.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I have some sympathy with the position of the Christian Brethren, but I find it difficult to understand what leads them to that conclusion. Can the hon. Gentleman enlighten me about the biblical authority on which it is based, so that I can appreciate the fundamental point to which they object?

Mr. Flight: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman was capable of a better contribution. I am not a member of the Plymouth Brethren. The point of principle is clear, and the exact biblical references are set out in their substantial literature.

Mrs. Browning: I am not a member of the Plymouth Brethren, but the reference is Romans 13.1.

Mr. Flight: I thank my hon. Friend.

As the Minister said, the proposals were not supported in Committee, and further discussions are required to work out what will satisfy all parties. The failsafe fund would have a very conservative investment approach, so, contrary to her comments, there would be no equity risk. Moreover, the amount that people put into it would have to be sufficient to avoid the possibility of their drawing too much of it prior to death, then becoming dependent on income support.

The Minister cited as a basic principle a concept that is in fact untrue, as she has accepted on other occasions. A standard guaranteed annuity in no way provides certainty of retirement income. For example, if we face a period of very high inflation resulting from oil prices rocketing because of the tragic middle east situation, a guaranteed annuity could easily become of minimal worth. It is potentially a less secure way of providing for certainty of income in old age than a failsafe fund that can widen its investments. The principle that a guaranteed annuity provides certainty is inaccurate—it provides no certainty of real income, but merely a certainty of a nominal income.

In essence, the amendments pursue the position reached by the Committee to its logical and sensible conclusion—to leave the Revenue to work out a legal framework for arrangements that meet the Brethren's religious conscience. It is more than time that the issue was settled. It is not good enough simply to go on saying, "We'll go on talking; we'd like to do something about it." That is disingenuous.

There was a marked lack of conviction in the Minister's comments about annuities that are not directly relevant. We shall no doubt debate those in due course.

12.15 pm

Mrs. Browning: Obviously, I support my hon. Friend, as I, too, put my name to this group of amendments.

On several occasions the Minister referred to the group of amendments as having been tabled by "hon. Members opposite". She and other hon. Members should be aware that the amendments were also tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), whose knowledge and experience of pension matters probably exceeds that of any other Back Bencher on either side of the House. When the relevant amendments were voted on in Committee—where the Government clearly had a majority—only four Labour Members voted, so my amendments received a degree of cross-party support.

Ruth Kelly: I should make it clear that the members of a Committee on a private Member's Bill are chosen by the hon. Member who is promoting it, so of course the Government did not have a majority.

Mrs. Browning: When the vote was taken, the majority in favour of the amendments arose as a result of the abstention of Labour Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is younger that me, so he probably has a more finely-tuned memory.

Mr. Curry: My life expectancy is, I believe, going up with every year that I continue to survive.

To clarify the position, the promoter of a private Member's Bill is obliged to select a Committee membership that respects the balance of forces in the Chamber. When I selected my Bill Committee, I could not select all its Labour Members from those who participated on Second Reading, because not enough had done so, so I was obliged to trawl more widely. I even chose a Parliamentary Private Secretary, which was an example of unaccustomed generosity.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. That proves my point.

I want to press my case with the Minister. As the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) said, in redrafting the Bill prior to Report my right hon. and hon. Friends and I said that we were willing to allow the Government to make some progress. The Government are consulting on the subject and I am aware of the Plymouth Brethren's most generous contribution to the Government's paper as an attempt to offer ways forward.

I repeat a point that was made in Committee. The United Kingdom is not unique in this respect. The Brethren have a presence in other countries such as America and Australia, whose legislatures have had similar problems, especially in relation to revenue services, but they have found ways forward. Thanks to the last Conservative Government, the UK pioneered the way in private pensions. Given that other countries have found a way round the difficulty and enabled all parts of their communities, including minorities, to participate in

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providing for their retirement, it is extraordinary that the Government are unable to find a practical and pragmatic way forward to accommodate the needs of this minority in line with the checks and balances required by the Inland Revenue.

The amendment is helpful as it would allow the matter to be decided later in the regulatory process. However, discussions have taken place and there are clear examples from abroad that the Government could call upon to ascertain how other countries have proceeded. It should not be beyond the wit of man to make some pretty urgent progress on such an important issue.

I hope that the Government will start seeking opportunities to find solutions, rather than considering old arguments which suggest that nothing can be done. I hope also that the Minister will take in good faith the motivation underlying the amendments. The supporters of the amendments are trying to make progress. We are looking for more from the Minister than her assurance that there will be more talks. Clearly, there will need to be more talks, but we would like those talks to result in positive action.

Dr. Cable: I support the way in which the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) spoke to the amendment. We understand that the Government have serious problems with the Bill. There are many serious arguments that they can bring to bear. The Minister advanced many of the arguments adequately on Second Reading and in Committee. However, the way in which the Government have handled the issue is unworthy of them. I am referring to the history of the way in which they have dealt with the religious minority that we are considering, and not only to the amendments.

It is not merely a matter of there being cross-party consensus. Those who are trying to achieve change are acting in an entirely disinterested way. A point not yet made today but which was made in Committee is that the Brethren do not vote. None of us has any self-interest in pursuing this line of action. We are acting to preserve the interests of a small minority that rightly or wrongly feels strongly about the issue before us.

We are talking about conscientious objection. I have a rather colourful and varied spiritual CV. In an earlier part of my life I was a Quaker. Most of my fellow Quakers at that time had a conscientious objection to war. This country has long accepted that they should opt out of such obligations without national defence collapsing.

The Inland Revenue seems unable to accept that a small minority can find a way out of the annuities regulations without the revenue base of the country collapsing. That shows a complete lack of imagination and flexibility. I thought that the Minister would say, "We see problems with the failsafe mechanism, but I accept that the process has taken far too long. I will work with the Inland Revenue to find an expeditious solution to the problem." That is what we want the hon. Lady to say.

I do not accept the amendment in all its details, but I hope that the Minister will be a little more positive and constructive than she has been so far.

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for her gallantry. It was slightly excessive gallantry, as I am older than her. I would not wish the House to be misled on that demographic phenomenon, especially as it affects my life expectancy. The advantage of being older than my hon. Friend is that I have an enhanced life expectancy. The exponential consequences are wonderfully biblical.

There is no point in pretending that the amendments proposed by my hon. Friends and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) are not at odds with the principle of the Bill. We might as well be clear about that. I have rested the Bill upon the continued obligation to buy an annuity to satisfy the Government's need that people should remain out of welfare and that provision made with the benefit of tax concessions should be devoted to the purposes for which the concession was made in the first instance. In that sense, what is being proposed clearly runs counter to one of the underlying principles in the Bill. I sought to present a Bill that does not confront the Government's preoccupations, but which will work with the grain of them.

I recognise the sense of frustration that after such a long time there is still not an outcome. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) tabled the amendments without regarding them as being impeccable in every way. I have yet to encounter a private Member's Bill that did not contain technical flaws; that is the nature of the beast. However, at some stage we must precipitate a more active response from the Government. I am sure that the purpose of the amendments is to bring about such a response.

The Minister accepts that there is a genuine attempt to address a problem. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, the Christian Brethren are a part of his electorate, but they are not part of his electors. We are all in that situation. The Minister said that she understands the situation and that she would like to find a way through it. We accept that good will has been expressed on both sides of the House. There is not a tricky mechanism in the Bill to try to achieve a certain purpose. The Bill is specific in its functions. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs said to the Government, "Find a way of doing this."

We have all sought some landing lights from the Government. The Minister's speech was aspirational. What she aspired to was welcome. We all want to find an answer. If she were able to give us something a little more concrete in terms of timetabling and the means by which engagement will take place—some sort of structure by which she hopes to find a way through—I am sure that we would all be greatly reassured. The purpose of the amendments is not to drive a coach and horses through the Bill, but to address a problem that has dragged on for a very long time. In a mature democracy such as ours, it should be possible to find a solution.

Mr. Leigh: There is very little new to say. I was one of the people who put my name to the amendments. I have had numerous discussions with the Plymouth Brethren, who have come to see me in my surgery on many issues. They are difficult people to deal with because they have an absolutely rigid conscientious belief in what the Bible says and base their whole life on it.

By definition, no one in the Chamber is a member of that particular religion. Apparently, only about 12,000 people around the country are, so it would be easy to dismiss them as unimportant people who have a very rigid narrow lifestyle, but although I do not share their beliefs I firmly believe that the House of Commons is precisely the place where the standard should be taken up for tiny minorities. If we do not do it now and do not achieve progress this morning, we are failing in our duty.

Mr. Dismore: I know that the hon. Gentleman is a man of great faith. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned the biblical reference Romans 13.1, which I have looked up. I have some difficulty in understanding the basis of the Plymouth Brethren's objection. Romans 13.1, the Kings James version, says:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could explain how the Plymouth Brethren use that particular biblical reference to reach their objection. I know he is a man who understands these issues very well. If I am to understand the basis of this debate, I would like to understand that. In the debate on a previous Bill, we spent some time examining the basis of the argument. I would like to understand the basis of this one.

Mr. Leigh: Although this Chamber is very well placed to identify a minority group and to try to ensure a mechanism by which that minority group can live properly in society, it is not well equipped to start to look into the detailed religious beliefs of minorities, whether the Plymouth Brethren or any other, and to say why they have come to their views. The fact is that they have come to those views and they believe that, if people take out an annuity or an assurance policy they are gambling with life. They believe that it is prohibited in the Bible.

None of us in the Chamber shares that view. All of us are happy with taking out insurance policies, annuities and all the rest of it. That is not the issue. The issue is that there is this minority. The Minister's speech was disappointing in that respect. She is entitled to say that the amendment is defective and that she is opposed to a retirement failsafe fund. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to landing lights. It is not a question of not being able to see the landing lights. We have no conception after this short debate of where the Minister is going. Despite numerous interventions—she was questioned again and again—she has not shed the slightest bit of light on how she intends to deal with these people.

I would have thought—I hope that the Minister will have a chance to sum up in this debate—that it was possible for her to say, "We have these people whom we are not allowed to mention who are advising us, some of the cleverest people in the land. We have this tiny minority of 12,000 people." As I understand it, she is saying that, if she were to accommodate that minority, it would create a loophole for wealthy people who are not Plymouth Brethren. That is an understandable point of view.

Would it not be more honest, then, for the Minister to say, "This is such a technically difficult subject, this is such a small minority that I am never going to be able to resolve the issue. If I make an exception to help that particular minority, a much wider group of wealthy taxpayers will pour through the loophole"? That would be a more honest point of view. The Plymouth Brethren would have to accept that. They would have to accept that they will never be able to have an annuity and will have to find some other mechanism. The Minister said that there were other mechanisms, but she was not prepared to articulate them.

12.30 pm

This debate is depressing because, frankly, it is disingenuous. The Minister could say either that she would never be able to accommodate the concerns—we could understand that—or that she had been discussing the matter with her officials for four years and there was a way of dealing with it that she was prepared to share with the House without giving a commitment today, which no one would expect. We would like a brief elucidation of how she thinks the problem can be resolved. If it cannot be resolved, let us be honest and admit it here in winding up the debate today.

Mr. Gardiner: I have some sympathy with the remarks of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). The amendment should be called the proselytising or evangelical amendment.

Members have talked about how there are only a mere 12,000 Plymouth Brethren in the entire United Kingdom. I suspect that were the amendment to be passed, that 12,000 might become closer to 12 million. The amendment's supporters are seeking to put through a package without specifying what is in it, but which would achieve certain objectives that would have extremely damaging consequences for the Treasury, as they well know.

Mr. Flight: Do I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly as saying that there are at least 12 million people who are opposed to the Government's policy in this area?

Mr. Gardiner: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, that is not what I am saying. If 12 million people were to be given by the Government what amounts to an enormous loophole through the taxation system, they might well avail themselves of it. I could not support that and I trust that the hon. Gentleman would not either.

I understand the considerable concern about annuities that has prompted the Bill. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) for the way in which he has piloted the Bill through the House and conducted Second Reading, and the skilful way in which he dealt with the Committee. The decline in the equities market and the falling rate that annuities now achieve have caused concern about security in retirement. Obviously, that is something that the Government must address and are addressing through consultation.

It is in all of our interests that people's savings for retirement are secured into the future, but nothing could prompt me to go quite as far as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) in claiming that annuities were not, in principle, a secure way of doing

[Mr. Gardiner]

that. He gave a scenario in which oil prices escalated and inflation became rampant, so that even guaranteed annuities were not able to achieve the expected security that they might otherwise provide in old age.

Mr. Flight: It is clear that the indexed annuities proposed in the Bill do that. It is widely known and understood that guaranteed annuities, which are not indexed, cannot provide any secure real income.

Mr. Gardiner: I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's remarks that annuities do not provide the most secure way of providing for one's retirement income way into the future. He and his party have always maintained that—they maintained it when in government—and I should be wholly surprised if they tried to imply otherwise at this stage. The example that he uses—rampant inflation and escalating oil prices—fails to take into account the effect of the equities market on funds that would be in precisely the investment vehicle that he proposes. Of course, there would be similar consequential and deleterious effects. It is disingenuous of him to claim that one could discover a problem with annuities in this context, but not with his proposed investment vehicle. To be honest, I expect better of him, knowing how well he understands these issues.

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke extremely cogently about mortality drag, but several sedentary interventions implied otherwise. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said that the older one becomes, the older one is likely to become, but anybody who understands the business of actuaries and actuarial tables will realise exactly what the Minister was referring to. Over time, mortalities that would occur at an earlier rate fall away, so life expectancy increases—up to a certain point. As with all such matters, there are limiting parameters. Of course, the idea that one can go on to 130 once one attains the great age of 100 is complete nonsense. Such cheapskate responses by Opposition Members to the Minister's arguments are wholly inappropriate.

As the Minister explained, the costs arising from the problem of mortality drag are substantial, and I seek from the Opposition a response to the point that I tried to make in an intervention. Precisely how would they deal with the global effect of a rise in the age at which people seek to take out annuities? I will happily give way to any Opposition Member, including the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon, who proposed the Bill. Would he care to explain that point to the House, because it is important and the Opposition have yet to resolve it? I see that I have no takers, which obviously means that they have no response to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) encouraged us to look more carefully at the biblical reference in Romans 13.1, given to us by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), which is the basis for the argument. I shall quote from the slightly more up-to-date version that I have obtained—the revised standard version—rather than the King James version.

Mrs. Browning: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gardiner: I will—as soon as I have read the passage to which the hon. Lady referred:

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."

I know that certain pages of *Private Eye* may carry such a view, but I find it hard to understand how the hon. Lady makes the leap from the passage

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities"

to the position that no one who believes that passage should take out insurance. In this country, the governing authorities—this Parliament—stipulate that those who drive a car or employ people must take out insurance. Therefore, in what way does that passage, of all passages, suggest that people should not submit themselves to the governing authorities?

Mrs. Browning: The answer is simple. As a Member of Parliament, I respect the views, whether religious or other, that people hold on a point of conscience based on what they believe, although I neither share nor challenge them. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not show that respect. If I may say so, I hope that his remarks are not part of a filibuster. Let me give him a Shakespeare quote:

"The devil can cite scripture for his purpose."

It sounds to me as though the hon. Gentleman is doing just that.

Mr. Gardiner: Let me point out that it was not I who began quoting the scriptures; it was the hon. Lady herself. She gave the reference and it is that which I ask her to explain.

Mrs. Browning *rose—*

Mr. Gardiner: I shall give way again in due course, but, before my forked tail grows any longer, I should have a chance to finish my remarks.

I have absolutely no case to make against the estimable beliefs sincerely held by any group in this country. I am not challenging such beliefs; I am challenging whether the hon. Lady can possibly be correct in citing that particular passage as the basis for such belief.

Mrs. Browning: I am happy to help the hon. Gentleman. The Plymouth Brethren's response to the Government's consultation document says:

"The fellowship had its origins before 1830. We support Government as instituted by God (Romans 13.1)".

That is what I quoted to him, and I accept that it is the belief of a group of people. I do not challenge it and I do not question it; I respect it. It is about time that he showed some respect.

The hon. Member for Hendon spoke earlier about the need to change the marriage laws in respect of the Jewish community. I am not Jewish and I do not share their faith, but I respect it. I believe that it is the duty of the House to take account of the needs of the Jewish faith. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) is not able to do the same for the Plymouth Brethren.

Mr. Gardiner: Once again, I must rebut what the hon. Lady says. My lack of respect applies not to the beliefs of the Plymouth Brethren, but to her remarks. I do not respect them because they are wrong. *[Interruption.]* If she will just listen before bouncing out of her seat again, I shall make my point.

The Plymouth Brethren, in the preamble to their remarks, refer to their general and widespread respect for government and cite Romans 13.1 as evidence of biblical backing for that respect. However, the hon. Lady quoted that biblical passage not when asked why the Plymouth Brethren have a general respect for the authorities ordained by God, but in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon about why they believe that they should not take out insurance policies.

12.45 pm

The point I am making to the hon. Lady—if she will only listen, rather than bouncing up yet again—is that that passage does not substantiate the belief of the Plymouth Brethren about insurance policies. If she told us what biblical foundation the Brethren have for that belief, it would be a more proper response to what was said by the hon. Member for Hendon. The fact is that she was mistaken in her biblical citation.

Mrs. Browning: I hesitate to continue this filibuster, and I am not an official advocate for the Brethren, but I think I can share my understanding of why they do not consider life insurance, and products or policies associated with it, acceptable. They render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's, and therefore they keep the law of the land. If the law of the land says that a motor vehicle must be insured, for obvious reasons, they keep that law, according to my understanding. The taking out of a life policy or an annuity, however, is not a compulsory law of the land, except as indicated in the current pensions legislation. The Brethren therefore opt not to avail themselves of that opportunity. The aim is to allow them to provide for their retirement without having to avail themselves of it.

Failing to take out an annuity is not a criminal offence. There is a clear differentiation between abiding by the rules of mammon, or of Government, and not taking advantage of that opportunity. As I have said, I am not an official advocate of the Brethren, but I understand them to believe that matters of life and death are matters not for man but for God. I respect those beliefs, because I think the Brethren hold them sincerely. That is what the House needs to understand.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for coming to the point, but she has not yet done what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon asked her to do. She has not given us the biblical basis.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gardiner: I should be delighted to do so.

Mr. Leigh: This illustrates why it is wrong to engage in this kind of debate, but we may as well get it right. I have checked with the Plymouth Brethren, and they say that the biblical reference on which they base their belief is I Corinthians chapter 6, verses 19-20. They regard any form of life annuity as a life insurance policy, which they have consistently refused. They quote the Bible, which states

"Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price."

That is the basis of their beliefs, and we should respect it.

Mr. Gardiner: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, from whom we have finally secured the proper response to the question posed by the hon. Member for Hendon. I hope the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton accepts that the quotation she gave earlier did not provide that response, and that we have now plugged the gap.

The debate has perhaps focused too much on matters of theology and too little on other matters—

Mr. Dismore: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gardiner: With trepidation, I give way to the theological gentleman behind me.

Mr. Dismore: I certainly do not claim to be a theological gentleman, but I think that this part of the debate is very important. If we are to provide a remedy for the Plymouth Brethren, we must understand the basis of their objection. We must work out their theological position if we are to find an answer. I thank the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) for giving us the correct reference: I should like to look it up for myself, but I suspect there will not be time for me to do so during this short debate.

My hon. Friend is right to explore the issue further with the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), and I am surprised that she objected so much. Only by understanding the basis of the objection can we work together to find a solution.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and also to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) for identifying the source of all this.

The reason for my concern about the amendment is plain. It introduces a vehicle to achieve a particular purpose without specifying in any way—leaving it open to subsequent regulation—how that should be effected. It says, "We want you to do something in this area that will broadly achieve this effect, but, for the life of us, we can't work out how you could possibly do it." That may be a good example of the benefits of opposition—one can simply say things without having to work out the nuts and bolts of how you get from A, one's starting point, to B, the end result that one wants. It seems to betoken great irresponsibility on the part of the Opposition if they seek to put that onus on Government without specifying in any way how it might come about.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has made it clear that the Opposition amendment is not only technically at fault. I have no doubt that if the amendment were substantive the Government could avail themselves of draftsmen who could remedy those deficiencies, but it is not a substantive amendment. It is an amendment that has a hole at its heart. It is a Henry VIII clause that would leave the Government to fill in the regulations at a later date. For that reason, I cannot accept it.

Mr. Dismore: I also have a few comments on this group of amendments. I am sorry that Opposition Members took objection to my question, which was simply an attempt to try to understand the basis of the Christian Brethren's objection. Only if we examine the basis of the objection in detail and its origin can we start to think about providing a remedy. If I may draw a contrast between their reaction and the approach adopted in relation to the previous Bill, we researched in great detail the background to why there was a problem with Jewish law and what could be done to deal practically with that problem. That was what we achieved in the previous Bill which, I am pleased to say, passed through the House earlier. The difficulty here is that until we get to the bottom of the problem from the Christian Brethren's point of view, it is difficult to start trying to find a measure that can specifically plug that gap.

One can approach this problem in two different ways. One can pursue a dialogue, as my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary suggested, to try to find a way to meet the requirements and tenets of the faith, yet at the same time satisfy the Inland Revenue, which has its own tenets that—I am afraid to say—are sometimes more obscure than those of the Plymouth Brethren. In the end, however, we must try to satisfy their requirements. For example, one can have a specific conscientious objection clause for the Plymouth Brethren, as the previous Bill had a specific reference to the Jewish faith. Alternatively, one can try to devise a general rule that will sort out the particular problem but will not lead to wider abuses.

To continue the classical themes of the previous debate, I am worried that if we are not careful we could end up creating a Trojan horse. We can introduce an amendment to provide for the 12,000 or so members of the Plymouth Brethren, for whom I have great sympathy and whose problem I would want to address, but how do we create a remedy that does not at the same time create a loophole—a Trojan horse—that will allow many other people for whom the reform is not intended to take advantage of it? That is the dichotomy facing my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary and the Treasury in trying to accommodate the Plymouth Brethren.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) opened his remarks by saying that there was the potential to create a great proselytising army on behalf of the Plymouth Brethren, and there is force in that argument. I am afraid that, sometimes, rich people adopt all sorts of strange practices to try to avoid their obligations to the Inland Revenue. We know about the loophole of living overseas, and a miraculous conversion to the Plymouth Brethren may not be out of the question for some people if they saw that they might gain financial benefit from it, thus abusing the very real faith and tenet of the Christian Brethren.

We cannot get round this problem simply by having a conscientious objection clause in the way that the Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill contained a specific application for the Jewish community. The alternative is to try to develop a rule of general applicability that would solve the problem of the Plymouth Brethren without leading to all the other ills that my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned in introducing the debate.

I am not an expert in annuities, although I know a little more about the subject now than I did before Second Reading, but I understand why it is so difficult to resolve this problem. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who is no longer in his place, talked about conscientious objection. If we were to allow conscientious objection to paying taxes, several million people might subscribe to it and the whole country would grind to a halt.

Although we must develop a rule of general applicability for the reasons that I have outlined, it is difficult to see how to go about it. I am not surprised that discussions have been taking place for the past four years, trying to find a solution that satisfies everybody. I sympathise with the position of my hon. Friend the Minister in trying to satisfy the Plymouth Brethren in this respect. The problem dates back to before 1830. My hon. Friend was quoting from a later version of the Bible, whereas I was quoting from the St. James version, which is the one on which the Plymouth Brethren base their objection to insurance. In the previous debate on the Divorce (Religious Marriages) Bill, we solved a problem that had lasted for 2,000 years. We did so relatively easily in the end but only after considerable debate, which had continued for several years before the Family Law Act 1996 was passed. Sometimes it takes an awfully long time to find a solution to these difficult and knotty problems of faith.

I am grateful that the Minister has indicated her willingness to maintain the dialogue with the Plymouth Brethren, but to try to foist a solution on them, as the amendments seek to do, is the wrong way to achieve that objective.

Ruth Kelly: I do not intend today to have a full debate on the underlying rationale behind the Christian Brethren's objection to the use of annuity products. I understand that their objection has been made in a genuine way to the Treasury and the Inland Revenue.

The amendments proposed by Members—I recognise the contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—have been made in good faith and I accept the motivation behind them. This debate is totally without self-interest because the Christian Brethren do not vote, but it is only right that the House should take an interest in the protection of minorities. They should be able to exercise their conscience in as full a way as the Government and society can provide for.

However, I do not accept that the route provided by this private Member's Bill can enable the Government to meet our objectives in providing secure, long-term savings in retirement and to deal with the difficulties faced by the Christian Brethren in relation to those issues. I set out clearly in my opening remarks some of the technical difficulties and explained why I do not believe that the matter can be dealt with by regulation—for example, there is no provision to amend section 633 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 in that regard.

I also have more serious concerns. As the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said, the Bill would not just create a loophole for the few but would undermine the whole purpose of the Bill. That point was reinforced by my hon. Friends. I do not see how the provisions can be

set in the context of a private Member's Bill based on the compulsory annuity purchase by the majority of the population at age 65. I cannot see how the two are compatible.

1 pm

Mr. Flight: I thank the Minister for giving way. As she must be clear, the key purpose of the amendments is to secure from the Government a commitment that they will address the needs of the Plymouth Brethren, not that they will consider doing it or continue talking for ages.

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I hope that hon. Members realise that I also enter these negotiations in good faith and, as far as possible, I am committed to finding a solution to the issues faced by the Christian Brethren. However, it is important to set the provisions in context.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who is no longer in his place, drew a parallel between the Christian Brethren and the conscientious objectors who did not want to fight during the war. Such parallels are not illuminating in this context. We have to try to find a way to enable Christian Brethren to save for a secure income in retirement in a way that does not conflict with their religious beliefs. That is what I intend to try to facilitate.

Officials at the Inland Revenue are already involved in detailed and constructive dialogue with the Christian Brethren. I have published a consultation document and the Christian Brethren have provided a response. *[Interruption.]* I note the return of the hon. Member for Twickenham. Inland Revenue officials are now exploring with sincere and genuine people a way in which they could provide a secure income in retirement outside the current pensions framework. We have been exploring particularly how they might use the ISA framework.

At the moment, the Christian Brethren can contribute to cash ISAs for themselves or their employees. The problem is that employees might be tempted to withdraw some of the money from the ISA before they reach retirement age and to use it for other purposes. The difficulty is that that is down to individual choice. I understand that the Brethren, as employers, would prefer there to be some lock-in and the dialogue is continuing. However, it is difficult to provide a commitment to a lock-in for one group of individuals that would not apply to the majority of the population. It is not clear that we could provide a specific lock-in, and clearly a general lock-in would frustrate the general thrust of the Government's savings policy. ISAs are designed to be a flexible savings vehicle which allows immediate withdrawal and transfer between providers. However, negotiations are continuing.

I believe that the Christian Brethren understand that the Inland Revenue is looking at this in a constructive manner. Progress is being made in meeting some of their concerns and we may be able to find a way forward that addresses their needs and the Government's concerns. Of course I am committed to continuing the dialogue until both parties are satisfied with the outcome. I congratulate the hon. Members who tabled the amendments as it is right and proper that we discuss these issues in the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 7, Noes 59.

Division No. 205] **[1.4 pm**

AYES

Curry, Rt Hon David
Hill, Keith
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Kelly, Ruth
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Pearson, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Dismore and
Mr. Andrew Miller.

NOES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Grayling, Chris
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mercer, Patrick
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Selous, Andrew
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly negatived.

1.15 pm

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 16, leave out—

'Subject to subsection (7) below'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 9.

Ruth Kelly: The change made by the Bill does not recognise the differing life expectancies of different groups that insurers take into account in setting annuity rates. The measure would remove the right of insurers to underwrite personal pension annuities on the basis of sex, or to allow that to be taken into account as a risk factor. It would force personal pension annuity providers to use composite annuity rates averaging male and female factors.

It is argued that women get a raw deal because the annuity rates that they receive are lower than men's, but that is because of women's longer average life span. At the top rates that are currently available, a 65-year-old man who purchases an annuity for £100,000 might receive £706 a month. The comparable figure for a female

[Ruth Kelly]

purchaser would be £648 a month. However, let us consider what they would receive for the years after their respective life expectancies. The male's total payments for the 17 years over his expected life span would be £144,101, whereas for the 20 years over the female's life expectancy, she would receive £155,618.

Clearly, interest and inflation rates play a large part in assessing the value of the respective amounts, but those simple figures illustrate that the value of a woman's annuity is at least no less than that of a man. Other aspects being equal, an annuity payable to a woman may be smaller than that payable to a man, but it will on average be paid over a longer period.

It is not difficult to understand that unisex annuities would generally favour women and disadvantage men. On average, a man will not live as long as a woman. His annuity will therefore be paid for a shorter period than a woman's, and for the same outlay. That is simply illustrated. If a unisex annuity paid £675 a month for an outlay of £100,000, the male would receive £137,700 for the years after his expected life span whereas the female would receive £162,000. The Bill would prevent a man from entering into a personal pension annuity contract and buying with his money a pension that reflected his life expectancy.

Another effect is that, when setting a composite rate, any provider would be at risk of the male/female take-up not matching the assumed mix, and could therefore build in a margin that would lower annuity rates generally. The proposed change would also introduce inconsistency between types of pension arrangement. If the annuity was bought to secure benefits from an occupational pension scheme or a retirement annuity contract, rates could still take account of the annuitant's sex.

For those reasons, the Government cannot support the measure and I recommend the amendment to hon. Members.

Mr. Curry: We are now embarking on a subject that is central to the Bill. We must address the disparity between the treatment of men and women. I have listened to the Minister's comments, and her arguments are well put but intellectually tenuous. She admitted that a similar investment made by someone of either gender would result in a different outcome in terms of the income paid annually. Because women live longer, that would accumulate, so the total amount paid would be greater.

We could take this point to a more logical conclusion, of course, and open the gap between the rates much further. Then you, Madam Deputy Speaker, who I hope will live to a ripe old age, would say about your private pension, "It was a pretty miserable income year on year but, by gum, it didn't half add up at the end of my life, so I did very well out of it." What matters is people's expectation of the amount they have to live on which supplements their other pensions. The annual income is what counts in these calculations, not just the length of time over which it is paid.

I have introduced the idea of a unisex annuity because I think that it must be addressed. I accept that it has some penalties and could depress the rate available for men. Because most people buy flat-rate annuities, because most people who buy such annuities are men and because men have a shorter life expectancy than women, women get a raw deal. More and more women are acquiring their own pensions and they are surprised at how low some yields are.

Equally, the life expectancy gap is closing. There has been much explanation this morning of what life expectancy is, including the seemingly perverse phenomenon that the longer one lives, the longer one is going to live. However, that gap is closing between the two sexes and, as a member of the male sex, I am rather relieved. So increasing numbers of women will see themselves as being penalised.

The Minister will say that our proposal has all sorts of nefarious consequences. I think that if there is a will to address this issue, and if we say that we must overcome the disadvantage for women, the industry will find a way of delivering. It is a matter of equity.

This is the first Government to appoint a Minister for Women. It is a daft thing to do—I have always opposed such a notion. So it is curious that they are resolutely reaffirming their ability to continue discriminating against women. Yet here am I, from the side of the House that is supposed to be frightfully traditional about these matters, saying that we must break this cycle of disadvantage. We must at some stage grasp the nettle. That is why this proposal is in the Bill; I am very happy to defend it and to oppose the Government's attempts to remove it.

Mr. Gardiner: I hate to go back into history any further than we have already done, considering that we have talked about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD under the Emperor Vespasian and the letters of St. Paul. However, I wish to refer to the Marine Insurance Act 1906 which, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is aware, is the consolidation Act upon which all insurance policies have to be written. It is one of the features of insurance that distinguishes it from activities such as gaming and gambling; they are based on risk, not certainty, and on the pooling of risk.

I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is inviting the House to breach one of those fundamentals. I know that he does not lack understanding about the functioning of actuaries, but he is seeking to gloss over why actuaries act in the way they do. Of course, it is the job of an actuary to predict the life expectancy of particular classes of people who want to make provision through annuity for their retirement. As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary ably pointed out, on average, women live longer than men, and that is a fact of which the actuaries must take account.

Mr. Flight: Will the hon. Gentleman step back and deal with a conceptual issue? I cannot see why there should be any insurance regulation or law stating that people must pool risk on a gender-divided basis. Such provision was a custom in the past because of differences between the legal positions of men and women going back to the beginning of the century. However, whether one likes that or not, is there any argument for requiring in insurance regulation or law that the pooling of risk be divided between the sexes?

Mr. Gardiner: Let me give the hon. Gentleman some clear examples of distinctions that the insurance industry rightly and properly makes between classes of people for

insurance purposes. Actuaries must take account of all sorts of distinctions. If a known factor that affects mortality exists in respect of somebody who is applying for a policy, it would be against the law for that person not to notify the provider. Indeed, annuities are one of the rare aspects of insurance on which one can say, "I am more likely to die," and receive a corresponding benefit as a result. It seems perverse, but curtailed life annuities with a known finite term rightly bring increased immediate short-term benefits for the years of life that remain to the policyholder.

As actuaries must work on the information that they have and project into the future the income base that is available to them to achieve a certain outgoing over the period projected for the class of person they are considering, it is absolutely right that they should take account of age profile discrepancies.

Mr. Flight: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that certain ethnic minorities in our country have different life expectancies from those of indigenous people. Is he arguing that there is some obligation for those providing annuities to work out for particular ethnic minorities packages that are different from those for white Caucasians? The same point of principle is involved.

Mr. Gardiner: I am trying to make this simple point: actuaries work out expected revenue against expected expenditure. On that basis, it is proper that they should take account of the profile of the class of the customer in question in order to deliver the maximum benefit to that customer. I find it staggering that an hon. Member who is so well known in the House for his views on the freedom of the market and on ensuring that commercial activity is unfettered and unconstrained should be trying to impose restraints. A benefit is being provided to customers by allowing a differentiation that will accrue over time to the person who takes out the annuity.

1.30 pm

Mr. Curry: I am slightly puzzled about why there are so many challenges to such rules, which appear to discriminate against women, including challenges that end up in the European Court. As we are speaking actuarially, what odds would the hon. Gentleman give that in 10 years' time we will still be able to differentiate according to gender in the rates that are set for annuities?

Mr. Gardiner: As the right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say, I come from an insurance background, not a gambling one, so I shall not accept his wager.

Returning to ancient Greece, Conservative Members are proposing a Procrustean way of achieving equality. Procrustes was the—hopefully mythical—character who used to lay people down on his bed to see how they measured up to it. If their feet went off the end, he chopped them off; if they did not quite reach it, he attached a couple of ropes and dragged them out until they measured up exactly. The right hon. Gentleman said that there is currently inequality between men and women, but that is not so—actuaries are there precisely to resolve such inequalities. Amalgamating women and men would mean stretching out the women and chopping the legs off the men to achieve a kind of unitary Procrustean equality.

Mr. Curry: I hate to challenge the hon. Gentleman's mythology, but surely the present rules do precisely that. The way in which they operate short-changes women—in a sense, a constant shaving of ladies' feet.

Mr. Gardiner: I did not buy the company, as Mr. Ronson would say, and I do not buy the right hon. Gentleman's argument. There is short-changing over a short period, but exact equality over the whole period. The actuary's job is to ensure that somebody who has a lifespan of, say, 12 years, gets £100 a year, whereas somebody with a lifespan of 10 years gets £120 a year, so that each person ends up getting the same benefits. That is the current situation in law, which the right hon. Gentleman wants to change.

Conservative Members want to ensure that instead of those with shorter life expectancies getting more each year, but the same overall, those with longer life expectancies—who at present get slightly less each year, but the same overall—should be amalgamated down to a kind of middle way. I cannot believe it—here I am, a good new Labour politician opposing the middle way. Nevertheless, on this occasion I must do so, because that is what Conservative Members seek to impose through their misguided proposal.

Mr. Dismore: Having first declared an interest as a man—at least, I was last time I looked—I remind Conservative Members that there are certain biological differences between the sexes, one being that women live longer than men. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) eloquently described the effect that that has on the arithmetic of calculating annuities. I remind the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) of the point that I made on Second Reading, because he has still not come up with an answer to it. I said:

> "What about the sex discrimination legislation and the double exemption? Is it the role of private sector provision to level up between Peter and Pauline . . . or is that the responsibility of the state? There is nothing wrong with the state's involvement in pooling risk between the sexes. I take the point that when each sex reaches the age of 65 the differences between life expectancy are somewhat lower. However, I question whether it is right for the private sector to adopt this position, bearing in mind how annuities are currently calculated for pooling risk."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 848.]

That is the essence of the argument. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon is at risk of creating inequality between the sexes for the reasons eloquently set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North.

It seems paradoxical that Labour Members should advocate a position that, on the face of it, is contrary to our deeply held belief in equality for everyone. To achieve equality for everyone, we must recognise the fact that people are not equal in certain biological respects, such as age, and that can be done through the existing system of annuities. I passionately believe in equality, and the state clearly has a role to play in that, but should we regulate private sector rights?

The Select Committee on Work and Pensions has been discussing the State Pension Credit Bill, and we have produced a report on that subject which was published a

[Mr. Dismore]

couple of hours ago. We have made some important points about the need to ensure that women are properly catered for under the pension credit scheme, especially bearing in mind the fact that pension credit will probably favour women. We have also considered take-up. Those are important points for the state to take into account. On national insurance and old age pensions, it is vital and right that the state should have that equalising mechanism. However, is it appropriate for us to impose the state's will on the private sector?

Mr. Gardiner: If the amendment were passed, it would mean that, although men and women for the same annuity payment would receive the same return each year, women, who on average live longer, would on average gain substantially more than men. That is why the effect of the amendment would be to provide not equality but inequality.

Mr. Dismore: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but the amendment goes beyond that. To achieve that objective, we have to rob Peter to pay Pauline, because the money must come from somewhere. Nothing in the amendment creates a bigger pot of money to allocate. It equalises things between men and women. The only way to do that—as the woman has to get more for her contribution—is to take the money away from the man's annuity.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman asked whether it is right for the state to impose its will on the private sector. That is a welcome statement from him. As the Government keep boasting about minimum income and minimum wage, I am glad that he has had a Pauline conversion. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether that is from Corinthians as well.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 has been amended by the Government. A series of measures show that they believe that they have a specific role to intervene in this area.

Mr. Dismore: At the risk of being sent off down the highways and byways of equal opportunities, I should say that the right hon. Gentleman points up the distinction between the right role of the state—in trying to regulate the balance between the sexes—and the wrong role. If a woman is doing work of equal value to that of a man, it is appropriate that she should get the same rate of pay. That is the position we are considering now. It is right that if a woman buys an annuity she should have the product of that annuity. It is right that if a man buys an annuity he should also have the product of that annuity. To achieve the same amount year on year, the woman would have to pay more.

The right hon. Gentleman is not trying to achieve equality through equal work for equal value, or in this case equal pension for equal contribution. He is taking money away from the man to meet the aspirations of the woman for her annuity.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman stated that one of the consequences of what we are proposing would be more demand, as it were, for a pot that was unchanged. The hon. Gentleman should read the Bill in its entirety. As people would not have to commit the whole of their pension funds to an annuity, that part that would not be necessary to maintain them above the level of income could be used for other purposes. There would not be the same volume of demand chasing the same pot.

Mr. Dismore: In the end, there is no more money available in the overall pot. We can fiddle round the edges as much as we like and we can talk about taking an annuity to a later date. As I said on Second Reading, I have great sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's overall objective of achieving annuity reform. At the risk of making a Second Reading point, the Bill does not provide a mechanism for doing that. As I mentioned to the right hon. Gentleman on Second Reading, I hope that the Select Committee on Work and Pensions will conduct an overall inquiry into private sector pension provision later in the year. I hope that the problem of sorting out annuities will form part of that inquiry.

I return to my basic bull point. Money is being taken away from one gender to compensate the other. The right hon. Gentleman referred earlier to Europe. The counter-argument is that in this context Europe—there was an earlier discussion about the convention on human rights—favours the view that is being advocated by Labour Members rather than the one advanced by Conservative Members. Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998, especially in relation to part II of the first protocol of article 1, which deals with the protection of property? It is straightforward:

> "Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law. The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties."

Through the amendment, the right hon. Gentleman is not using the state, through its own mechanisms, to achieve his objective through taxation, national insurance and the benefit system. He would effectively deprive men who have made contributions towards their annuity pots of their possessions. That is because their possessions include their stake in their pension fund. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is falling foul of human rights legislation.

Mr. Gardiner: I follow carefully and agree fundamentally with what my hon. Friend is saying. Does he agree that it is important that the movers of the amendment recognise that while they might talk about the class of people for actuaries to consider, and take a different class, they are proposing to introduce regulations that force actuaries to class all people together rather than, as at present, to determine for themselves, as providers of insurance, how they will classify their customers, unfettered by legislation?

Stringent regulation is being proposed of an industry that at present is able to offer diversity of service to its customers. If there were an insurance company that wished to pursue the proposals put forward by Conservative Members, and thought that it was commercially viable to do so, it would be free in the market to adopt that policy. However, there is not a

company that wishes to take that course. As good free marketeers, I am sure that Conservative Members will agree that that is why their proposals are wrong.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. There is good reason why a company would not adopt that approach, and that is that it would go out of business extremely quickly. It would not be meeting the needs of its customers, whether men or women. My hon. Friend makes some important points, to which I shall return, concerning retrospectivity and the disincentive to save.

I return to the point that I was making in the context of the Human Rights Act.

Mr. Flight: There is an important principle in relation to the human rights argument. That is why I asked earlier what rules or laws were involved. Everyone understands that women live longer than men and why the situation is as it is. If white men lived longer than black men and white women lived longer than black women, we would not permit the insurance industry to offer different rates on the grounds of people's colour or skin. If we believe that men and women are equal, is there not a similar logic that we should not apply prejudice on the ground of sex, one way or the other, among all human beings?

1.45 pm

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful for that intervention. Again, the hon. Gentleman is mixing up the roles of the state and the private sector. The state cannot, must not and should not discriminate between gender or race along the lines that the hon. Gentleman mentions. Indeed, the state does not do so. We have been working very hard as a Government to improve sex and race discrimination legislation in a variety of sectors, including its applicability to government itself, to ensure that there is no discrimination, but I come back to the basic point that has been advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North. A pension contract is an individual contract based on an individual annuity assessment between the individual pensioner and the pension-providing company, the life insurance company.

I took out my pension scheme with, I regret to say, Equitable Life—and thereby hangs a tale—many years ago when I was in my late 20s. Even though I was hale and hearty, I was required to undergo a medical examination so that it could determine, presumably through its annuity projections, how long I was going to live. I had to fill in a detailed questionnaire about my family history, what my grandparents died of, my parents' family history and my brother's medical history. The company wanted to calculate my life expectancy to ensure that I pay the right amount of money in my contributions and receive what I would like to receive at the other end. The same goes for when it calculates the annuity itself.

No doubt when I come to cash in what is no doubt a very diminished fund with Equitable Life, I will again have to undergo all the rigmarole to work out how much it will pay out. If I do not have to do so, so much the better. Nevertheless that is an individual contract between me and Equitable Life. That is why we all had to have the ballot on the Equitable Life solution.

Mr. Gardiner: Does my hon. Friend not agree that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) is wrong? The fact is that under legislation any insurance company is allowed to break down by ethnicity or by any other feature which it considers appropriate its class for annuitisation. For his own personal interest, he may care to note that ethnic minorities have differing life expectancies, and it works to their advantage on the whole because they get more each year on their annuity as a result. The point is that the hon. Gentleman is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The intervention is going on for a rather long time.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was going to come to that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North makes the point in his usual eloquent way. If the contract is an individual—

Mr. Curry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dismore: Let me deal with the previous intervention and then I will be happy to let the right hon. Gentleman intervene.

If the contract is an individual contract, it is inevitable that the benefits that flow from it must attach to the individual concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North is right: insurance companies do make those distinctions. Several years ago, there was a big argument about whether insurance companies should know whether someone had HIV and the impact that that would have on the assessment of life expectancy and annuities. These things are a fact of life. Some people live longer than others. If I were to take out a particular insurance policy, being somewhat overweight and under-exercised—I think far too many of us in the House are—then compared with someone of the same age who is in the SAS, although that is a hazardous profession, I would probably have to pay more.

That is a fact of life in the provision of pensions in the private sector. We are all different; we all have to face different risks. We all have different life expectancies. Each individual pension product is tailored to our individual requirements, whether we be men or women.

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman were to die young, would he agree with his hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North that that was an advantage to him because, in his brief span of life when he was receiving his private pension, he got more?

Mr. Dismore: I am not sure how to follow that intervention, but it does not detract from my basic bull point—from which I have been drawn away by the various interventions I have taken—concerning the Human Rights Act.

Even though Equitable Life seems to be doing its best to take my pension fund away from me, the requirement under human rights legislation is that no one should be deprived of their possessions except in the public interest. That requirement cannot be met by the proposals of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. I agree that we should adopt that approach in relation to matters that are entirely under the control of the state, such as national insurance contributions, taxation, benefits and the equalisation of wages to make sure that everyone gets a fair crack of the whip at work. However, that is not the case with pension provision.

[Mr. Dismore]

I wish to refer to retrospectivity, on which the right hon. Gentleman's proposals are silent. I have been with Equitable Life for 20 years, and others have been in pension funds for longer. Everybody would have entered into these arrangements on the basis of the projections as they then were. Are we now to say that all those people who entered into contracts on that basis will find that those numbers have to be unscrambled and rescrambled to meet the requirements of the proposed provision? Or is the provision intended only to apply to new insurance contracts that take effect 40, 50 or 60 years in the future?

My concern is that the right hon. Gentleman has perhaps not thought through the implications of that measure. The proposal will have major implications for people's lifestyle projections. Most people approaching their mid-forties will start to think about the age at which they can afford to retire and what their annuity will be. They will have been making their contributions through their lives on that basis.

If the right hon. Gentleman is going to say that a person's insurance provider now has to recalculate the figures and share the money out to equalise between the sexes, that person may find that the projections on which he has been living his life, in terms of his future provision, are drastically wrong, while a women in the same position might find herself rather better off. The proposals do not deal with retrospectivity in sorting out decisions that were taken decades ago in some cases.

Mrs. Browning: Is not that exactly the situation people with pensions at the moment find themselves in now, following the imposition of advance corporation tax by the Chancellor to the tune of £5 billion a year on pension funds? People who took out a pension with a specific premium and a projection of what they might receive are now not going to receive that amount purely because of the actions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Dismore: I will not get drawn down that byway, but I say to the hon. Lady that the effect is the same for men and women. That takes me back to my original point about the role of the state as opposed to the role of the private sector. So far as I can see—I will happily take an intervention on this—the proposals do not deal with retrospectivity.

I wish to refer to disincentives to save. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions has been doing a detailed study of the pension credit. We have heard a lot of interesting arguments from the experts who have given evidence, and from the Minister, regarding incentives and disincentives to save. Professor Dilnott gave us a detailed analysis of why some bits of the pension credit were an incentive and others might be a disincentive. It got extremely complicated and I became lost in the figures; however, he did not convince me on that issue.

I can be sure that if we say to a man that he can put a pound into his pension fund but will get back only 80p of it when he retires, with the other 20p going to the pension of a woman he may not even have met to make sure that she has the same pension—which she will have for a lot longer than him—that will be a real disincentive to save; a far worse disincentive than anything raised by the Conservatives in terms of the pension credit.

Mr. Gardiner: This is an extremely important element of my hon. Friend's remarks. Is he aware of a report prepared for the Association of British Insurers by Oliver, Wyman and Company, entitled "The future regulation of UK savings and investment—targeting the savings gap"? It points out that a pension provision savings gap of £27 billion is building up, and that it cannot be curtailed simply through financial education and tax incentives. The most important element to which it draws attention is the need to increase effective advice to savers by providing exactly the information that my hon. Friend alludes to. A differential rate for men and women per pound invested in savings would have entirely the opposite effect, and would probably increase the £27 billion gap still further.

Mr. Flight *rose—*

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North cannot take an intervention, but I will be happy to do so in a moment. My hon. Friend makes an important point, which reinforces the basic policy issue that I am trying to address. It is in all our interests that people save for their future, and that is the entire thrust of Government policy. A prime objective of the pension credit is to reward people who have saved. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is aware of the arguments advanced by his own party in relation to stakeholder pensions and—perhaps more importantly—to the state second pension: that they contain in-built disincentives because of an equalisation factor between rich and poor. For him to argue that his proposal will not prove a disincentive is therefore like the pot calling the kettle black.

Mr. Flight: Is there not a contradiction between the hon. Gentleman's comment about wanting people to save more for retirement, and the previous comment about the £27 billion gap? The Minister said that one of her main objections to the Bill is that, by encouraging people to save more for retirement, it will lead them to incur tax costs.

Mr. Dismore: That is not the Government's policy objective—at least, I hope it is not. The objective of our discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is to hammer home the need for people to provide for their future. If one consequence of their making such provision is that some of it will be taken away—a breach of human rights legislation—they simply will not do it. That would be a disincentive, and they would find ways around the problem by, for example, putting the money into other products if necessary. For all I know, a lot more people might even join the Plymouth Brethren, to whom reference was made in our earlier discussion.

The fact remains that the right hon. Gentleman's proposal would create a serious disincentive to men providing for their future. In the end, the breadwinner—even in this day and age, it is generally the man of the family—must make such provision. If there is a disincentive to save, he simply will not do it. A terrible credit gap exists, and it is already extremely difficult to

convince people that they should not live on credit, and should put money aside for their retirement. It is very difficult to persuade them that they should be putting away far more, yet the right hon. Gentleman's proposal would achieve entirely the opposite objective.

Frankly, I have heard nothing from the Opposition that answers those key points. If we accept the proposal, we will deprive people of their existing property rights. The Opposition have also failed to deal with the two extremely important points concerning retrospectivity and the disincentive to save. For those reasons, much as I agree with the principle of abolishing sex discrimination, I cannot support the proposal. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will deal with those points in his reply, but I doubt whether he can.

2 pm

Ruth Kelly: Let me respond to what has been an incredibly interesting and informative debate on the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the proposals to require insurance companies to offer unisex annuity rates. The first major question discussed today was the fundamental one: are women being short changed? My hon. Friends explored that point, which involves an interesting equality issue. Women receive a lower annuity rate year in, year out, but for longer than men, although over their life span they also receive, on average, cumulative amounts that are equal to or in excess of those received by men. We could debate that point for a long time, as there is no clear cut conclusion to it.

I note the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that there is no satisfactory outcome, because if we imposed unisex annuity rates we would have to take from men to give to women. There is no other money that may be used to resolve those questions or to sweeten the pill for men. That is not an easy one, and in my view it is not clear that there is an equality issue to resolve at all.

Gender is a recognised factor in the setting of risk premiums by insurance companies in many walks of life, and women are not queueing up to argue about receiving better car insurance rates, for example, because women as a group are less likely to commit motoring offences. As far as I am aware, that has not been contested in other areas.

Gender is but one factor that insurance companies take into account when setting annuity rates and determining risk premiums. They also consider the general health of the individual, whether the individual has a disability and, controversially, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon pointed out, the lifestyle of the person requesting an annuity.

As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) remarked for the Opposition, insurance companies may also take into account whether someone is of a certain ethnic minority. Insurance companies have been specifically designed and set up to cater for certain ethnic minority groups, as they are able to offer higher rate annuity products to those people, recognising the fact that they have shorter life expectancy.

The fact remains that insurance companies, as far as they possibly can, set rates on the basis of what they consider to be individual risk premiums. When they cannot set individual risk premiums, they look across broad classes, use proxy and set risk premiums on that basis.

The ability of insurance companies to determine risk and to attach it as closely as possible to the individual determines their competitive advantage in an extremely competitive market. That is how insurance companies and the insurance market work, and to wander into such terrain without well thought out and coherent proposals would be foolhardy. It would also have ramifications and implications across the insurance industry.

It is important to consider the impact that imposing unisex annuity rates would have on individual insurance companies. If insurance companies were forced to offer unisex rates, and only unisex rates, they could face an unpalatable choice. For reasons that I explained earlier, they might have to set cautiously low annuity rates, so everyone would lose out. The reason behind that is that companies could not be sure that take-up of their annuity products between males and females would match the risk that they assumed at the outset. In the end, everybody would lose out—not just men, but women would not gain as much as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) envisages. Alternatively, insurance companies could face risks to the solvency of their businesses. In that event too, everyone would risk losing out.

Why is it desirable to force insurance companies to discount just one factor, when they can and do take account of many other factors? I am thinking of whether people smoke, the nature of their occupation, where they live, and any other factors that may be considered relevant to the setting of annuity rates. I do not think that we will solve the equality problem today by imposing unisex annuity rates on companies, or that we will solve some of the problems mentioned by the hon. Member for Hendon relating to incentives to save by that means. I certainly do not think that such action will create a more favourable environment for insurance companies.

Mr. Dismore: I mentioned the Human Rights Act earlier. Has the Attorney-General told the Government whether the amendments are in breach of it?

Ruth Kelly: Of course it is important for any amendments to be compatible with the Act. The points that my hon. Friend has made are very relevant, and it is at least debatable whether the amendments are compatible with the Act.

For all the reasons I have given, I do not think that imposing unisex rates is a good idea. Many Members may agree with me, I therefore urge the House to accept the Government's proposals.

Mr. Curry: I do not accept the amendments, for a very simple reason: we must start somewhere in our attempt to deal with these inequalities. I repeat the question I posed earlier to the hon. Members for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who have performed a wonderful Morecambe and Wise act today. Do they really think that, 10 years from now, we shall be able to sustain a system into which discrimination has been built? The idea that men are suffering in terms of human rights and that we should move in the opposite direction strikes me as wonderfully inventive in the context of a Friday matinee performance, but I feel that it lacks a great deal of intellectual and legal substance.

Mr. Dismore: My point about the Human Rights Act was a serious one. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us whether he took legal advice before speaking today, and established whether the effective withdrawal of men's pension rights would be compatible with the Act.

Mr. Curry: The process of government is a process of intervening in the way in which people live their lives and, in many ways, intervening in the market, as this Government know more than anything else. All legislation is capable of being tested on human rights grounds. I believe that if we stack up my beliefs and those of the hon. Gentleman, it will be seen that by and large the trend is going my way.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Would the Sergeant at Arms please investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby?

The House having divided: Ayes 15, Noes 56.

Division No. 206] **[2.8 pm**

AYES

Barron, Kevin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Cohen, Harry
Dowd, Jim
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Gardiner, Barry
Hill, Keith
Iddon, Dr Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Kelly, Ruth
Linton, Martin
McNulty, Tony
Pearson, Ian
Ward, Ms Claire
White, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Miller and
Mr. Andrew Dismore.

NOES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Grayling, Chris
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mercer, Patrick
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rosindell, Andrew
Selous, Andrew
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You have had to ask the Serjeant at Arms why Government Members were lingering unnecessarily in the Aye Lobby to prolong events. Were you aware that a figure no less than the Government Deputy Chief Whip was party to this and was indeed one of the last to leave the Aye Lobby reluctantly? Is there anything you can do to ensure that someone as senior as the Government Deputy Chief Whip sets a better example to hon. Members than to abuse the voting procedures—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must reply to the point of order and inform the right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that all hon. Members should go through the Lobby in good order and time.

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 1, line 16, leave out "must" and insert "may".

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 8, 10 to 12, 20 and 24.

Ruth Kelly: We now come to the heart of the matter. The Bill makes it compulsory for a personal pension scheme to provide a minimum retirement annuity. This annuity has to meet a minimal level set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has to increase in line with the retail prices index although it will be capped at 5 per cent. and it has to be bought no later than age 65. This combination amounts to a maximum reduction in flexibility for the vast majority of pension scheme members.

The Bill would remove people's current choice and instead force them to buy an index-linked annuity for each personal pension arrangement that they hold. That may not be what they want and it certainly may not be in their best interests. The opportunity, if various small personal pension arrangements are held, of taking different annuity types at different times, to spread risk, would be removed. Using their open market option for annuity purchase, people have the freedom to decide which type of annuity best suits their needs. The proposals in the Bill would take away that choice.

The Bill would also require the annuity to be bought by age 65, so that most people would have no option to draw all their pension benefits from that age, whether retired or not—again, limiting choice. That would introduce inconsistency and unfairness, as the requirement to annuitise by 65 applies only to personal pensions and not to retirement annuity contracts or defined contribution money purchase occupational pension schemes, which are not affected.

The age 65 rule also brings in a much larger issue. If people are saving in a personal pension scheme, they would not be able to contribute to it past 65, and would have to take an annuity from that age. Those who have not made provision earlier in their life or are still active and working would be allowed to continue in employment but not to save any of their earnings in pension schemes for their future retirement, unless they have a retirement annuity contract or are in an occupational pension scheme.

Mr. Gardiner: Is my hon. Friend surprised, as I am, that the proposals in this part of the Bill so directly conflict with the flexibility that Conservative Members were seeking to introduce in the first group of amendments?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point, which is at the heart of our objections to the Bill, which, while purporting to increase flexibility does exactly the opposite.

Mr. Curry: How can a Bill that removes the requirement to annuitise the totality of the pension funds and restores choice be said to reduce flexibility?

Ruth Kelly: I admire the way in which the right hon. Gentleman has piloted the Bill, but I fear that he has misunderstood the heart of the Government's objections to it. The vast majority of pensioners would not be given the additional flexibility that he advocates. Their flexibility would be reduced because they would be forced to buy an annuity with their entire income by the age of 65. The average fund from which people buy annuities is currently £23,000.

Mr. Curry: The argument about the size of the pot is becoming extremely futile. Many people have more than one pot, with money derived from SERPS or from occupational pension schemes, so the number of pots and the total that they add up to are what is at issue.

Ruth Kelly: I agree that the figure of £23,000 does not really capture the average size of people's total pension savings, but it gives an indication that the pension savings of the vast majority of people are nowhere near the level at which the Bill would introduce greater flexibility. People would have their choice restricted and be forced to buy an index-linked annuity from the age of 65. That is why the amendment would make the minimum retirement income annuity an option for those who want it.

Mr. Gardiner: In support of my hon. Friend's remarks about the level of income and the number of people affected, I refer her to the report "Targeting the Savings Gap", by Oliver Wyman and Co. It shows that the income figure goes from 85 per cent. for the first decile, down to 33 per cent. for the 10th decile.

Ruth Kelly: I am certainly aware of those figures.

Amendment No. 10 merely tidies up the wording, so I will not dwell on it.

Index-linked annuities will guarantee that the purchasing power of the pension will not be eroded by inflation, but as with all guarantees—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 10 May.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

MOTOR VEHICLES (PROHIBITION ON USE OF HAND-HELD MOBILE TELEPHONES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Could you inform me and the House whether there is any mechanism by which the official record can show that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), the Government Whip, who objected to that Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I am sure that those comments have been noted.

RIGHT TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 10 May.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND REMEDIES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 10 May.

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS (YOUNG PERSONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

ENDANGERED SPECIES (ILLEGAL TRADE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

MUSEUMS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

PATIENTS WITHOUT LEGAL CAPACITY (SAFEGUARDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 10 May.

BROADCASTING ACT 1990 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 21 June.

FOOD LABELLING BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [2 November].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 21 June.

Public Service Regulators

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.32 pm

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I begin by commiserating with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry having to be present on a Friday afternoon and for drawing the short straw and so having to reply to this debate.

When I requested this debate a few weeks ago, I caused consternation in the Table Office and across various Departments mainly because the subject does not fit neatly within the remit of only one Department—in fact, it relates to a myriad. In order to secure the debate, I had to change its title. My first point, therefore, is that regulators have grown ad hoc. Their powers, terms of reference, relationship to the Government and accountability are all slightly different, and over recent years they have mushroomed. What we have today has developed from an ad hoc, incremental approach. Each new regulatory system has been a different variation on reinventing the wheel. I shall argue that, although we have enjoyed some benefits from such a system, now is the right time to review it and to try to introduce some coherence. We have a wealth of experience on which to draw—some good, some bad.

I suppose that I had better define at the outset what I mean by "regulators". A narrow definition would cover only the former public utilities of gas, water, electricity and telecoms, but the regulatory function goes far wider than that. Organisations such as the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the lottery and rail regulators all have regulatory functions. In the health service, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and half a dozen other bodies carry out some aspect of regulation. I shall consider bodies such as the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission shortly.

Debates about regulation tend to polarise opinion around whether we have too much regulation. I do not believe that we have time today to stray into that territory except to emphasise that the work of the better regulation taskforce is to be commended. However, it has only begun to scratch the surface. Regulation will not go away, and the debate should be about its style, content and application, for example, whether it is full blooded, light touch, co-regulation, self-regulation, or the application of reserve powers, which will be more common in future.

Let us concentrate for a moment on the narrow definition. There has been tremendous change since the first regulators were established with British Telecom. They were set up to tackle incumbent monopoly, but today's economic landscape is totally different, and EU directives will make economic regulators examine issues such as market dominance. There are also arrangements for individual regulators in different countries to work together. In future, those regulators, working together, will have an impact on our lives outside normal Government and Council of Ministers decision making. We need to consider that.

Overall, the economy is doing well and that is likely to continue. However, there are several blockages in the micro-economy that have an impact on the quality of life; regulators make decisions that affect ordinary lives. Let

us consider the current controversy about Ofgem's proposals for pre-payment meters. The relaxation of regulatory controls anticipates a functioning, competitive market rather than responding to its emergence. Ofgem's primary role seems to be developing competition as a goal in itself rather than a means of protecting vulnerable groups.

The free market approach has been the Whitehall orthodoxy for some time. We do it automatically without thinking and assume that it is good rather than ascertaining the circumstances in which it is appropriate and those in which we should adopt a different approach. The renewables industry's current problems and its representations to the Chancellor to try to protect some of the combined heat and power companies in next week's Budget is a good example of that.

When we hit a problem, we find that we have devolved decision making to the independent regulator, but the responsibility does not leave the Government, who continue to pick up the flak without having the tools to deal with problems effectively. That applies in the case of the Rail Regulator, the Financial Services Authority in respect of Equitable Life, which was mentioned earlier today, and the lottery licensee, to give only three examples. The only remedy is primary legislation, and the Minister knows only too well that that is difficult to obtain.

I should like the Government to examine the assumption that an independent regulator is de facto a good idea. I accept the need for independence, and I do not argue for a return to day-to-day political interference. If people are to regain trust in governance, they must have faith in the information that they have been given. There must be strict rules and transparency. However, there are drawbacks and I want the Government to consider how we deal with them. If the appointments process is the only sanction, problems arise such as those that the Select Committee on Public Administration is currently considering.

The Government have rightly moved away from individual regulators to a more collegiate approach. The FSA and Ofcom are clear examples of that. For too long, we have had individual regulators, and Oftel under Don Cruickshank is a different beast from that body under Dave Edmonds. Ofgem under Callum McCarthy was different from Offer under Professor Fairchild or Ofgas under Clare Spottiswoode. I am not commenting on quality, but Ofgas was not prepared to examine environmental considerations under Clare Spottiswoode—that was her decision—whereas Offer under Professor Fairchild was prepared to do so. If we compare Ofsted with the prison inspectorate, it is apparent that the characters of the individual regulators led to the consequences that ensued. A board leads to less maverick interpretations and a more independent point of view.

Regulators in Europe operate in a clearer, more transparent framework. We have a tendency not to learn from other countries, and to think that because we started it we know best. However, central bank independence and the way we have run the economy show that we have learned lessons and benefited from them. The Government are to be commended for learning those lessons and applying them here.

Because there is an assumption that independent regulators are a good thing, the automatic answer is to have a regulator, but that assumption is not necessarily correct and I ask the Minister to accept that there is a need to challenge it.

There is a need for regulators to provide proper information, but the problem is that some of the information provided by the companies is commercial in confidence. The result is that regulators become very close to the companies. They become captured by the provider culture rather than looking at the matter from an end-user perspective. In fact, companies have actually poached staff from the regulators' office. The regulators are then much more dependent on the companies that they are supposed to be regulating. That is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

The National Audit Office issued its "Pipes and Wires" report this week on how the utilities regulators have worked. They have been very good at achieving lower prices and improving efficiency, but that is the only measure of success. The report talks about what happens when the regulator gets it wrong. Ofwat was criticised in April 2000. The report says:

> "Estimating an excessive return entails customers paying unnecessary costs while estimating too low a return may discourage investors from providing funds to regulated companies, thus potentially making it difficult for companies to meet their obligations".

The RPI minus X formula that regulators have used has worked quite well in the initial stages following a monopoly, but, as many companies have found, when they concentrate solely on efficiency savings, they hit the law of diminishing returns. The danger is that we are at the point where we may be hitting the law of diminishing returns for this particular price control mechanism. The issue of long-term investment is highlighted by the debate over broadband and the contrast between Germany and the United Kingdom. That is one of the reasons why we are in danger of missing the boat.

The creation of the Office of Public Services Reform is a major step forward. It has a role to play in reviewing the interaction between the regulators and the Government.

One of the ways in which the Government have sought to counter this provider-centric approach, under the Utilities Act 2000, was to make customers Ofgem's primary focus. Ofwat and Oftel still have customer focus as a secondary objective, and that remains a concern. For a number of the other public service regulators, customer focus is not even on the agenda.

While regulators focus on the economic side, they are making value judgments. Under the Utilities Act, the Government gave themselves a reserve power to require cross-subsidy if they concluded that the benefits of competition were not being shared by all consumers. As the Energywatch campaign on pre-payment meters shows, low-income customers are not getting the benefits of the existing regime and, as the Minister for Industry and Energy has pointed out, would lose out under the removal of price controls. Can the Under-Secretary tell us the circumstances in which she would use those reserve powers? It seems to me that the present circumstances represent the kind of fallback situation for which the Utilities Act was designed.

[Brian White]

If the independence of regulators means that the Government's only powers are to talk to the regulator or the nuclear option of replacement, what is there to ensure that regulators help to achieve the Government's objectives, or at least do not frustrate them? That is a real problem. I tabled a number of amendments during the proceedings on the Utilities Act to help the renewables system. At the time, the Government said that they would provide guidance on environmental and social objectives to the regulators. That guidance has not been forthcoming. I am a believer in the cock-up theory of life, rather than the conspiracy theory, so I am sure that there is a very good reason for that. However, if the Government were to issue the guidance now—I would be interested to know when they are likely to do so—how would it affect the way of working that Ofgem has already set in stone? If it does not properly take effect, there will be very little point in issuing it, but proper guidance will have implications for other regulators and their relationship with the Government.

I have concentrated on independence because I do not believe that we have thought through the issues. I believe that a regulator is not only about regulation but about the monitoring and provision of information, and should be a catalyst to change. It is also an adviser to the Government and should undertake its work in the context of modernising government and achieving better regulation initiatives.

It has often been proposed that, because we have a number of regulators, they should be merged into one, but I do not think that that is necessarily the best way forward. One problem is that our small companies, niche players and market entrants often do not get a look in, as the regulators tend to talk to the larger companies that have specialist staff for that purpose. We also get into a game in which the competitors automatically complain and the dominant players automatically appeal against any decision. In today's economy, speed of decision making is vital. In respect of new technologies, it is even more important. I am concerned that the RPI minus X formula needs to be reviewed if we are to move our regulators forward.

I firmly believe that regulators need to move to a much more coherent and transparent framework. They need to be providers of impartial and understandable information, and to have a complete range of sanctions that are more coherent than the individual sanctions that some of them currently use. They need to be seen to reduce costs, or at least not to add to regulatory burdens. We need also to redefine the relationship between Government and regulator, and the relationship with service users and the industry. In other words, we should consider the nature of decision making. We need a mixture of roles to ensure that staff are not tied to the provider culture that I mentioned earlier and are sufficient to tackle the end-user focuses.

There are plenty of examples of good practice, including the work of the Environment Agency and the Audit Commission, but we have also had problems with regulation. Too often, we have designed complicated routines that seek to cover the whole area, rather than tried to identify risk and apply a light touch. Everybody says that we need light-touch regulation, but we very rarely achieve it. We need quicker decision making with shorter appeal mechanisms and regulators that have good knowledge and a clear focus on the key issues, and are not involved in turf wars.

In conclusion, there has been an assumption that the creation of independent regulators is a good thing in its own right. It is now time for us to switch from that producer mentality to a focus on the end user. The question is not how we tackle company X, but what is done for the citizen. Times have changed and regulators need to move on. What was right in the past is not necessarily right now. The Michael Lyons/Ian Byatt study for the Treasury is a very useful step forward, as is the NAO report. With the imminent publication of the Communications Bill, now is the right time for the Government to step back and consider the whole regulatory environment, what has worked in the past and the challenges for the future. I do not expect an immediate reply from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, but I hope she will accept that there is an issue that the Government need to consider.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) on securing this debate and on managing to find a title that met the needs of the House. He raised a number of issues covering a wide range of bodies. I may disappoint him to some extent, as I shall obviously need to focus on some of those bodies. As a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry, it has struck me that I might focus on the regulatory bodies that relate to my Department and especially the utility regulators, which are at the heart of his concerns. He will appreciate that I cannot cover the wide-ranging brief with which he dealt.

I take my hon. Friend's point that different regulators are set up in different ways, but there is a reason for that. It is understandable, given that different sectors have different characteristics and policy objectives. Neither I nor the Government believe in a one-size-fits-all model.

One of my hon. Friend's principal questions was whether the current regulatory structure is correct—in particular, is it right to have independent regulators at arm's length from the Government, and is it right to give them so much freedom and discretion? Those are important issues, but they are not new, as my hon. Friend would agree. They were considered as part of the work that was done in preparation for the Utilities Act 2000, which he knows well from having served on the Committee that considered the Bill.

The Government launched a review of utility regulation on coming to power in 1997. That was a major exercise involving substantial analysis and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders. It dealt with the role of the regulators and endorsed the existing framework, as did the Government's Green Paper, "A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation", which explicitly considered the role of regulators. It stated:

> "The regulatory regimes for the utility sectors, established at the time of privatisation were built on the principle that economic regulation must be conducted on an arms-length basis by independent regulators. We endorse this. Within the framework set by Ministers it is vital that regulators should be given the independence and discretion necessary to make economic decisions, for example on price reviews."

On Wednesday this week, the Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill provided more evidence that the Government are taking the right steps to put regulators on a fully independent basis in relation to competition regulation.

A structure with independent regulators at arm's length from the Government helps to reduce regulatory risk and to provide a stable climate for investment. That is vitally important, because these sectors are characterised by extensive physical networks and are highly capital-intensive. Let me illustrate that with some figures from the National Audit Office's report "Pipes and Wires", which was published this week—my hon. Friend has already referred to it. That report sees the regulatory framework as a great success story. It says that the electricity transmission and distribution assets in England and Wales are valued at £16.5 billion and that the combined value of the 23 water and sewerage companies in England and Wales is £30 billion. A significant proportion of the ongoing costs of running such businesses is based on the financing costs for the assets. The greater the certainty about the regulatory system, the less expensive the financing costs. The end result is that regulatory certainty feeds through into lower bills to customers.

The regulatory system for these industries has already delivered significant benefits to customers in the form of price reductions as well as improved services. Regulatory independence is a vital part of the system.

Brian White: The regulatory system protects and works well for existing companies, but new market entrants and very small players lose out. Have the Government considered that, as well as the totality of the regulatory regime, which is right in principle?

Miss Johnson: It is difficult to generalise across such a wide area, but all the issues are kept under review. The way in which the system is working is constantly monitored in any given sector, but, as I said, they are all different and have different characteristics. Different issues may arise even in capital-intensive areas such as the main utilities. As for new entrants coming into the markets, the competition authorities must also help to ensure that that is always possible.

As well as paying the financing costs of previous investments, companies must be able to access capital in order to make new investments. There has been significant investment in the industries since they were privatised. For example, according to the National Audit Office, more than £31 billion has gone into the gas and electricity industries, more than £50 billion into water, and similar amounts into telecommunications. These figures compare very favourably to the investment in the decades before privatisation. Further investment is still required as we go forward. The regulatory certainty provided by having independent regulators gives investors the confidence to provide money for vital investment in these industries.

Giving regulators independence is not about giving them carte blanche to do things however they please. The fundamental principle is that Government set out an overall regulatory framework through legislation. This sets out the overall parameters by which regulators are to operate, constraining their discretion. Regulators must carry out their responsibilities according to a set of objectives or statutory duties. Having set this overall framework, Ministers can then rightly take a step back, removing politicians from day-to-day decision making, thus giving business greater confidence.

None the less, Government remain responsible for the framework as a whole and will still take an active interest in whether the system is operating properly. Frameworks evolve over time, following the appropriate consultation and parliamentary process. They are not set in stone for ever. As my hon. Friend has said, we have moved on from the model of a one-person regulator to regulatory boards. This helps give greater predictability to decision making and reduces the risk of significant policy shifts when the head of an organisation changes.

I shall take up some of the specific points that my hon. Friend raised. He referred to social and environmental guidance. I am pleased that he believes that the delay in issuing guidance is for justifiable reason. The Department has consulted on drafts of the guidance and is now considering the matter afresh in the light of the energy review report that was published on 14 February by the performance and innovation unit, which has implications for the guidance.

We have made it clear that that is not the method for implementing social and environmental policies, which would have significant financial implications. Where such implications are at stake, the Government need to take forward such policies by introducing appropriate legislation. Examples of this would be the vulnerable groups regulation in the water industry, the requirement to provide free postal services for the blind or partially sighted, or the renewables obligation in electricity.

My hon. Friend is clearly interested in renewables, so I shall say more about the subject in response to his remarks. As an example, the renewables obligation is the Government's single most important measure to develop the increased uptake of renewables electricity. We have set a target of 10 per cent. renewables electricity by 2010, and from 1 April licensed electricity suppliers are required to provide an increasing proportion of their supplies from renewable sources.

Ofgem is administering this arrangement for us. It is accrediting generating stations to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria of obligation, issuing renewables obligation certificates, or ROCs, for renewable electricity actually supplied and assessing and monitoring suppliers' compliance with the obligation.

Ofgem will also recycle to electricity suppliers the buy-out payments that can be made by suppliers, in proportion to the number of ROCs that each supplier has presented compared to the number presented overall. Ofgem has also played a key role in working with the Department on the drafting of the necessary legislation to introduce the renewables obligation. That illustrates that a regulator can be involved in taking forward Government environmental policies, playing an invaluable role in helping the UK reduce its greenhouse gas emissions through the greater use of renewable energy.

My hon. Friend referred to RPI-X, and that is shorthand. The system of price regulation that regulators use now has been developed significantly from the formulas that were used at the outset of privatisation. I am sure that my hon. Friend would recognise that fact. The NAO is much aware that some observers claim that

[Miss Johnson]

RPI-X is no longer appropriate. However, its report notes how regulators are already working to address risks in the system, and they suggest further improvements. The National Audit Office is certainly not advocating abandoning the system, which has served us well so far and delivered significant investment as well as price cuts.

I turn to another point that my hon. Friend raised, which is the question of cross-subsidy powers in the Utilities Act 2000. For me to access the powers to require suppliers to adjust charges where particular groups of consumers are treated less favourably than others under sections 68 and 98 of the Act, there must be evidence of disadvantage. Ofgem's position is that pre-payment meter customers will not be penalised by increased prices as a result of the removal of price caps.

There is no evidence that the position of pre-payment customers in relation to standard credit customers and that of standard credit customers in relation to direct debit customers has worsened. Indeed, I am pleased to say that during 2001 it marginally improved. If pre-payment meter customers are not disadvantaged within the meaning of the cross-subsidy regulations, I would have no basis for accessing those provisions. Like Ofgem, we monitor developments in the market, but I stress that the cross-subsidy provisions are very much reserve powers.

It is interesting that my hon. Friend thinks that we need to address the problems caused by the independence of regulators. Certainly not everyone shares that view. Last year, the better regulation taskforce published a report on economic regulation which looked at that issue. The taskforce found that some stakeholders felt that Government needed to do more to underpin the independence of the regulators. My hon. Friend raises his points for understandable reasons. The Government have objectives in these industries, and it is important to look at how best to achieve them.

I pick up my hon. Friend's point about assessing risk and ensuring that regulation has as light a touch as possible. I confirm that it is the Government's view that risk is a relevant issue in all areas where regulation is proposed. It is certainly the Government's view that regulators need to ensure that the touch that they apply in order to achieve competition and level playing fields is as light as possible—indeed, that is implemented by regulators.

When I was a Treasury Minister, the Financial Services Authority was set up with exactly those parameters at the heart of the way it works. It has been operating under those since it became a fully fledged body at the end of last year.

I firmly believe in the need for independent regulators to give us a predictable and stable framework. That is not to say that regulation should not be mindful of the wider context in which regulatory decisions take place. The Ofgem social action plan and environmental action plan are examples of initiatives taken by the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority to consult on and establish its own work plan in areas that reflect the contemporary needs of society. That complements the guidance that will be given by Government on their social and environmental objectives.

However, Parliament has given only very specific powers to the sectoral regulators, and specific objectives to tackle a defined area of work. The sectoral regulators are neither equipped nor intended to develop and implement policy on their own behalf on issues, however important, which touch on the regulated utility sectors.

There is a clear need for Government, as well as the sectoral regulators, closely to monitor developments in the markets. There are important initiatives on which it is right that Government should work closely with the sectoral regulators and with the industries to bring changes to the utility market frameworks. As we have shown, it is right that Government should take the opportunity to address the need for change in legislation where that is necessary but the role of Government in markets should be guided by the need for transparency and a self-denying ordnance to avoid short-term reaction to what may be symptoms of longer-term problems with the market framework.

I believe that the utilities review—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Redundancies

1. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What plans he has to help employees of companies affected by large-scale redundancies to find new work. [45011]

11. **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What plans he has to help people affected by large-scale redundancies to find new work. [45021]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): We have developed the rapid response service to support people affected by significant redundancies and help them make the transition to sustainable new jobs. This enhanced service allows a flexible response based on local need. I am pleased to announce that, on 1 April, the rapid response service became fully operational, supported by a further £6 million investment over two years.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He might recall the major threat of a factory closure in my constituency just under a year ago. Indeed, his Department helped considerably in creating a renaissance for the factory's prospects. However, many people still faced redundancy and a lot of those who came to my surgery thought that the Government should work closer with the citizens advice bureaux and local agencies that have local knowledge to help them through that difficult period when they have just been made redundant and are looking for new work. Can the Minister comment on working in conjunction with local agencies to help people to find their way back into work?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes a fair point and I am grateful for what he says about the work of officials in difficult redundancy rounds. Although it may not seem like it at the time, it is the case that those who are in work mostly go on to get further work. However, it is right that the Department is able to help. It is also right that we co-ordinate our work with other agencies. Indeed, part of the extra £6 million is intended to do exactly what my hon. Friend requests.

David Cairns: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the threat of job losses at the Coalport and Faslane bases on the Clyde. Although I believe that such job losses are neither inevitable nor necessary, will he confirm that if they materialise, his Department will work at once with the Scotland Office, the Scottish Executive, the management and unions to form a lower Clyde jobs taskforce along similar lines to the successful upper Clyde taskforce that followed recent redundancies and threats of redundancies in the upper Clyde last year?

Mr. Brown: First, let me sympathise with my hon. Friend. Representing a shipbuilding constituency myself, I know how difficult the threat of major redundancy rounds can be to communities that rely on a single large employer. I pledge that the Department will work with others to do what we can to help in the event of a redundancy round, although I understand that work is being done within the industry on the viability of the business, so we are not in that situation yet. The Department is in touch with others who have an interest in the event of a major redundancy round, including the agencies of the Scottish Parliament and of local government. If the help is needed, it will be there.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Scottish National party shares the anxieties about the potential job losses at Faslane and Coalport. The Minister referred to significant redundancies. Presumably he accepts that redundancies on a numerically smaller scale may none the less have a greater marginal impact on small communities. Does he also accept that the real issue concerning jobs in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom will not be solved until the Government start to address the underlying structural problems that face business in the UK, including their high-pound policy and the infliction of the highest fuel taxes in the industrialised world?

Mr. Brown: May I say gently to the hon. Lady that more people are in employment in our country than ever before? If it is the policy of the Scottish National party to oppose defence expenditure, how does she hope to preserve defence jobs?

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend share my deep regret at the recent closure of Scotland's only deep coal mine and the loss of 500 jobs? Will he join me in welcoming the rapid partnership that developed between the Employment Service, Scottish Enterprise Fife, Fife council, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Scottish Executive, the mining unions and many others to give those men every possible assistance in training and job opportunities? Does he agree that those miners have many skills and special qualities and that their needs should continue to be prioritised by the Government and the partnership in the weeks ahead?

Mr. Brown: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), I understand how difficult these major redundancy rounds are. Shipbuilding and coal mining communities rely on a single, focused employment base, and when that is jeopardised the situation for the local community becomes very difficult. I can confirm that the Department's officials are working very closely with agencies of the Scottish Parliament and with Fife council to do everything that we can to help people who are displaced into other employment opportunities. We know that the

opportunities are there, and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the experience and skill base in the industry.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I associate myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on Scottish mining jobs. Will the Minister take into account the fact that most large-scale redundancies come out of the blue, and the Government have to react to them?

May I also tell my right hon. Friend that when colleges go into a review—this is not his Department, but he should listen carefully—it means that the Government may indirectly cause large-scale redundancies? There is one such college in my constituency, North Derbyshire tertiary college, and I hope that it is imprinted on the mind of every Minister. Instead of closing it down and causing large-scale redundancies, the Government should save it.

Mr. Brown: I always listen particularly carefully when a matter being put to me is not my responsibility, in case I inadvertently give a commitment that I should not. The fairest thing that I can say to my hon. Friend is that I will draw his remarks to the attention of the appropriate Minister. He has made his point, and he is right to say what he does about redundancy rounds, whether they occur in education or in traditional heavy industry.

New Deal

4. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore): What assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on youth unemployment. [45014]

6. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on his proposals to reform the new deal for the young unemployed. [45016]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Since 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by 43 per cent. and long-term youth unemployment has been reduced by more than three-quarters. The new deal for young people has played an important part in that, helping more than 350,000 young people off benefit and into jobs, and improving the work prospects of many more.

We are building on the success of the new deal and are well advanced in making the improvements to the programme which we announced in last year's Green Paper, "Towards Full Employment". In the last three months, we have launched "progress2work" pathfinders, which provide help for unemployed drug misusers, and announced tailored pathway pilots to give personal advisers more flexibility to combine new deal options to suit the needs of the individual client. This month we are introducing StepUp pilots, which will provide transitional employment opportunities, and outreach initiatives to provide more effective support for people from ethnic minority communities.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. The new deal programme and associated Government measures are undoubtedly turning round the despoliation of many years of Tory rule in Wales. However, will he expand on the new deal's effect on the local and national economy because, surely, great savings are made if youngsters are in work?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, and I welcome him to Question Time—we hope to see him here again.

Every study on the new deal has confirmed that it adds substantially to the national economy. One way of looking at it is to consider that for every £5 that the Government spend, we get £3 back, either in social security expenditure that is no longer undertaken or in tax revenues.

Mr. Brady: Why do Wildcat and other schemes in the United States achieve far higher success rates than the new deal for young people at a fraction of its £8,000 per job cost?

Mr. Brown: The Conservative game has already been given away by the party's health spokesman. First, the Conservatives pretend that the Government's programmes are not working and that they can never work, and then they say that the provision should not be made at all or that it should be funded by insurance or by people's own resources. They then try to wrap that up—this is apparently the most difficult part—into a message that they can sell to the electorate. The electorate will say, "Under the Conservatives there were a third of a million young people out of work, and under Labour the figure is below 4,000."

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): The new deal has been a tremendous success in tackling youth unemployment, and we should strongly congratulate the Government on that. In my constituency, many young people who previously languished on the dole are now in work. Many of the young people who are still unemployed have associated problems, such as physical disabilities, learning difficulties, drug abuse problems or, indeed, literacy and numeracy problems. In any development of the new deal, will my right hon. Friend ensure that advisers are supported with a package of measures to help such young people back into work?

Mr. Brown: We have two new pilot schemes. One is to look at greater flexibility, and the other of course is the StepUp pilot. They are designed to help those who have been through the new deal but not found work so far. This is a radical programme, and there are 20 pilots. The Government are, effectively, purchasing the job for the individual for a year. We are absolutely determined that nobody is left out or bypassed by the schemes. Everyone who can work should have the right to work, and the Government should help them do so.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The Minister is not exactly being reckless in predicting that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) will be in the House in future, but is he not being a little cavalier with the facts? Was not the National Audit Office right when it said that, to evaluate the new deal, it is necessary to take into account those who would have found jobs anyway? When that is done, did the NAO not find that the reduction in youth unemployment brought about by the new deal is not 350,000, as the Minister has just claimed, but 35,000.

and that the cost per job under the new deal is far greater than the Government have maintained? In fact, is the new deal not one more example of this Government taking and spending a great deal of taxpayers' money and not making much difference in return?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman rather confirms the accuracy of the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). We can see what the Conservatives are about. The hon. Gentleman selectively quoted the National Audit Office report. Neither that report nor any other has said that the new deal is not value for money. There will always be an element of dead weight cost in these schemes. One might just as well argue that teaching children to read has a dead weight cost because some of them would learn to read anyway. That is a ridiculous argument. We are talking not about a job-creation project but employment schemes. They are serving our country, and in particular disadvantaged people. They are serving them well and are value for money too.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): The Minister knows that Burnley will have one of the StepUp programme pilots. What steps will be taken in that significant programme, which will be important to those who have not been able to gain employment, to publicise, particularly in the local and regional press, exactly what is being done?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question and for the close interest that he has taken in the pilot scheme. It will—I hope—have an important impact on his constituency. It is the Government's intention to publicise the programme. Indeed, we intend formally to launch the pilots in the next few weeks. I will make sure that proper publicity is given locally, and I shall draw his remarks to the attention of those who are managing the scheme locally. It is a very significant new scheme. For the first time, the Government are saying that we guarantee a job for a year to someone who has found the labour market intractable so far. I think that that should be welcomed.

Mr. Brady: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I give notice that I wish to raise the matter on the Adjournment following the Minister's woeful failure to answer on the fact that schemes elsewhere in the world perform better?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has given notice.

Pension Funds

7. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If he will make a statement on trends in the value and expected yield of pension funds since 1997. [45017]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): The investment return achieved by pension funds between 1997 and 2001 has seen real returns of 6.8 per cent. The real rate of interest available from savings accounts over this period was 2.8 per cent. So, put simply, by investing in pension funds, people have had more than double the amount of return that they would have received from a conventional savings account.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Secretary of State for that Alice-in-Wonderland answer. On the eve of the Chancellor's sixth Budget statement, should we not remember what he did in his first Budget, which was to mount a £5 billion a year raid on pension funds? Is it not as a result of that that firm after firm is abandoning final salary pension schemes, with the effect that a stealth tax whose effect was meant to dawn in people's realisation many years hence is becoming obvious now? It is obvious that people's pensions will be worth a fraction of what they would have been worth without the Labour Government raiding their pension funds.

Mr. Darling: First, the hon. Gentleman may not like my reply, but it was a reply to the question that he put. I can see why he might have shifted his ground in the light of my answer.

As for his other remarks, the hon. Gentleman will recall that when, more than four years ago, we made changes to the corporate tax regime, we cut corporation tax as well. This country has the lowest ever rate of corporation tax, which has been of great help to companies' profitability and therefore to their shareholders, the vast majority of whom are pension funds.

The hon. Gentleman knows well that the reasons for the trend to close down defined benefit pension funds are twofold. First, in the past couple of years, the value of the stock market has fallen dramatically, for reasons that we know. Secondly, as the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), said only today, people are living longer. In response to those changes, we will later this year publish proposals that we believe will help companies and individuals to save more for retirement. However, the overall changes that the Chancellor made four years ago have greatly enhanced the profitability of companies in this country and are therefore right for pension funds, which benefit from that increased profitability.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Despite my right hon. Friend placing responsibility as he has, is it not a matter of much concern that many employees are to be cheated of a decent pension as a result of employers closing down their final salary pension schemes? Why should employees—unlike Members of Parliament and others—be faced with inferior pension arrangements such as money purchase schemes, which will deprive them of a decent standard of living in retirement? I hope that the Government will take action.

Mr. Darling: As I have said on several occasions, later this year we will publish proposals that will, I believe, help both individuals and companies to contribute to pensions. It is worth bearing it in mind that in the past few years sales of pensions have increased by some 50 per cent.

Lest the hon. Member for Havant forgets to mention it, let me point out that the latest figures on stakeholder pensions, which were designed to bridge some of the savings gap, show that 750,000 pensions have been sold. According to the Association of British Insurers,

97 per cent. were bought by or on behalf of individuals of working age. The idea that they were all being sold to grandchildren turns out, like so many other things the hon. Gentleman says, to be nonsense.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The Secretary of State will be aware that, on average, employers contribute far more to final salary pension schemes for their employees than to money purchase schemes. He referred to proposals that he will bring forth later in the year. Is the goal of those proposals merely to slow the rate of decline of employer contributions to schemes, or does he think that they will cause those contributions to increase from their current level?

Mr. Darling: The objective must be to make sure that people save more for their retirement. The big problem facing us and Governments throughout the world is that, because people are living longer, we need to persuade them to save more for their retirement.

The hon. Gentleman is right to a certain extent. The problem with the closure of final salary schemes is not necessarily that money purchase schemes are worse than final salary schemes; in fact, money purchase schemes can sometimes be better for people who move from job to job. The real problem is when the contribution made is reduced. As I said a few moments ago, the proposals that we will publish later this year are designed to make sure that more money goes into building up people's retirement pensions. That must be the central objective of Government policy.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Has the Secretary of State read the unanimous report of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, of which the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) is a member, which welcomed the spending and principles underlying the State Pension Credit Bill and thought that the Bill would achieve its goals? What will my right hon. Friend do to ensure that the pension credit is taken up by as many pensioners as possible, which is central to making it work?

Mr. Darling: I read the Select Committee's report and am delighted that the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) has joined his predecessor in welcoming the pension credit as a much needed and overdue reform. We shall wait to see just how public he makes that support over the next few weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) is right to draw attention to the fact that the pension credit will benefit more than half of pensioner households. It is important that we make sure that people get their entitlement. As people learn that the average gain will be about £400 per household, and as our proposed improvements to the system make sure that people get their entitlement, more and more money will go to the people who most need it. I strongly believe that the pension credit which, for the first time, rewards people's thrift and their efforts, is long overdue. We are determined to ensure that it works efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The Secretary of State cannot be allowed to duck the Government's responsibility. Is he aware that there is a direct link between the Chancellor's changes to advance corporation tax and the closure of final salary schemes? Is it not a fact that millions of people in their 30s and 40s will no longer be able to look forward to an independent retirement as the Government force more people on to means-tested benefits? Will the Secretary of State apologise to them, or is it the Government's strategy to force more people on to means-tested benefits?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman, not for the first time, is talking a load of nonsense. There never was a time, unfortunately, when everybody looked forward to retirement on a high pension through a funded pension system. We have introduced reforms to the pension system to make sure that the state system does more to help people on low incomes. By introducing stakeholder pensions, we are providing pension options that were never available in the past for some 5 million people. With regard to final salary schemes, as I have told the House on a number of occasions, not least a few moments ago, the Government will introduce proposals to help both individuals and companies save for retirement.

I must make another point about the corporation tax changes to which the hon. Gentleman referred. If he was right about the ACT changes, one would expect all the closures to have taken place when the changes were made four years ago. What is driving the present spate of closures is, first, the stock market's dramatic fall in value and, secondly, the fact that the people running the schemes are beginning to realise that individuals are living longer, for which they have to budget. Thirdly, a lot of companies have been taking contribution holidays from their pension funds; those holidays are coming to an end, so they are closing some final salary schemes down. Some companies are not doing so; they are to be commended on taking a stand on their employees' interests. However, as I said, the Government will introduce proposals that will help individuals and companies to maintain and build their pensions for retirement.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Can the Secretary of State confirm that between 1988 and 1992 5 million people left occupational pension schemes following the disastrous reforms of the Social Security Act 1986? As a result, £11 billion of compensation had to be paid, which has had a serious effect on the balance sheet of life assurance companies?

Mr. Darling: Opposition Members tend to forget that what happened during the 1980s, one of the worst examples of the mis-selling of pensions, would have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people losing, in some cases, just about everything if they had not got the compensation for which we fought hard. When we look at pensions and put in place a pension system, it is important to ensure that people who ought to be in the state system are looked after and remain there. People who have privately funded pension provision should also be adequately protected. The Conservative party should remember that its policies in the 1980s had near-disastrous effects, not just for individuals, but for the pensions industry, for which it sometimes claims to speak.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): May I thank the Secretary of State for the Department's letter to me about pensions headed, "Important information from the

Department for Work and Pensions"? However, it is difficult to have confidence in its advice on pensions, when it was addressed to

"Mr David Willetts, Member of Parliament, Labour Party, Regent Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire."

Perhaps it is not surprising that a Department that cannot correctly address a letter does not know how many assets we have in our pension funds or how much money we put into the funds as our contributions.

During the previous Work and Pensions questions, the Secretary of State defended his hapless Department and its useless figures. Will he confirm that in a letter to me he has admitted that he does not know how much we are saving or how much our pensions are worth? When will he have an answer to those questions?

Mr. Darling: First, it is a tribute to the Post Office that it managed to find the hon. Gentleman despite the way in which his letter was addressed. The Post Office—or Royal Mail, Consignia or whatever it is called now—will be pleased to know about that.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman well knows that the statistics are prepared by the Office for National Statistics. The chief statistician has issued what I suppose for the ONS amounts to almost an apology for the fact that it has withdrawn a series of statistics. Apparently it will produce the statistics again. The Government do not produce the statistics, so I cannot accept responsibility for what Mr. Len Cook is up to.

Mr. Willetts: It was the Secretary of State who quoted those statistics all the time when he was trying to argue that there was not a problem when it was obvious to everybody else that there was one.

Let us try another simple, straightforward and factual question. What does the right hon. Gentleman estimate the impact on the value of pensions funds to be of the increase in the taxation of income from dividends in the 1997 Budget? The Department is responsible for pensions and it must have an estimate. What is it?

Mr. Darling: The value of pension funds depends to a large extent on the value of the stock exchange. As I explained to Conservative Members a few moments ago, the reason that some pension funds face a problem is that the value of the stock market has fallen for reasons that we are aware of over the past two to three years.

When we consider pensions, as the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who first raised this line of questioning ought to know, we need to take a long-term view of stock market values. We cannot do what the hon. Member for Havant did in the *Financial Times* today, and take a snapshot of one year. That is certainly the way to mislead people.

Mr. Willetts: So the Secretary of State does not know how much our pension funds are worth or how much we are contributing to our pension funds. He will not even give an estimate of the impact of a tax change that his Government introduced. No wonder the Government deny that there is a crisis in our funded pensions when they are taxing them more, regulating them more and spreading means-testing to penalise saving. Millions of people will have a poorer retirement as a result of the Government's policies.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in a number of respects. First, in relation to taxation, I shall take individual savings accounts, for example, which were roundly denounced by the Conservative party. It is worth bearing it in mind that that tax advantage savings vehicle has meant that 12 million people now have £60 billion of savings. That sum is far more than that invested in PEPs and TESSAs, which the Conservative Government introduced. More important, many of those saving in ISAs, for example, are on low incomes. They are precisely the people whom we should encourage.

As for general taxation, the hon. Gentleman well knows that we reduced corporation tax, which the Conservatives could not do during all the years that they were in power. That has helped shareholders, and especially pension funds. The greatest single factor that will help pensions and pensioners is that, unlike the Conservative Government, we are running a strong and stable economy that will do more than many of the measures to which the hon. Gentleman refers to ensure that people can build up good pensions and retire with a good standard of living through a combination of both what the state does and what individuals do through their own effort. Above all, that effort will be rewarded through the pension credit, which the hon. Gentleman opposes.

Benefit Fraud

8. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What progress has been made in meeting his Department's targets on tackling benefit fraud. [45018]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We are making good progress in tackling benefit fraud, and we expect that progress to continue. Results show that by March 2001 we had reduced the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 18 per cent.—nearly double our first milestone of 10 per cent. That was a year ahead of schedule. By 2004, we are committed to reducing fraud and error by 25 per cent., and to halving it by 2006.

Bob Russell: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. All fraud is to be deplored, but does he agree that it is important that the message goes out that genuine applicants should not be put off by whatever propaganda the Government are using, rightly, to attack fraud? Will he join me in supporting the Government message, and make it loud and clear that the majority of asylum seekers and refugees, when they are given an opportunity to work, are net contributors to the public purse and do not take from it?

Malcolm Wicks: I certainly agree that when, for reasons that we all understand, people are properly granted asylum, they become economically active and are an asset in all sorts of ways to our community and our economy.

On the first point, it is vital that we present the message that people must claim the benefits to which they are entitled. Government have a role to play in that, as do

local authorities. It is also vital that every pound that we spend on social security is spent properly and honestly. That is why publicising entitlement and waging the war against the fraudster go hand in hand and are largely dependent upon one another.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I am sure my hon. Friend would agree that in spite of the successes in countering benefit fraud, it continues to be a major drain on the country's resources. Does he agree that one of the problems is the lack of co-operation between the various Government Departments in exchanging information that would ensure more convictions and less fraud?

Malcolm Wicks: We all agree that the more we can crack down on fraud, the more money we will have for social priorities such as care of the elderly, education and health. There is now a great deal of co-operation between Government Departments. That was a major problem in the past, but under, for example, the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 we can not only share data with other Government Departments but require data from banks and even utilities. It is vital that the fraudster cannot play off one Government agency against another, which is why we have taken the powers to collect the data to attack the fraudster.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Between October 1999 and December 2001, there were 50,000 investigations of working families tax credit fraud, but only 28 prosecutions. Will the Minister undertake to look into the matter more carefully and demonstrate a new resolve to deal with fraud in relation to the working families tax credit next year?

Malcolm Wicks: Working families tax credit is, properly, the responsibility of the Treasury. I will draw the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of its officials. We have responsibility for, among other things, the Benefits Agency. Between 1997 and 2000–01, the total number of prosecutions, cautions and penalties increased from 11,700 to almost 27,000. That demonstrates that we are tough on the fraudster and detecting fraud out of the system, and tough on the causes of fraud.

Pensions

9. **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of pension provision in the UK. [45019]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): As I said a short while ago, people need to save more for their retirement. Our approach is based on a partnership between state and private provision, as both are essential. Since 1998 we have reformed the structure of pensions in this country to build and strengthen existing partnerships between the state, the pensions industry, individuals and employers.

Gareth Thomas: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he accept that there is real concern that people are not making adequate provision for their retirement? Does he also accept that the Government have a crucial role in educating the public and encouraging them at an early stage to make adequate provision for retirement, given the fact that there is a decline in occupational pensions and that people are living longer in retirement?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. People need to be aware of the fact that as we can all reasonably expect to live longer we have to make provision to finance us at whatever standard of living we think we want in retirement. The introduction of annual pension statements will help to concentrate minds, but more needs to be done with pensions and other financial products. As I said on previous occasions, when we reach the stage when pension products and the way in which they are sold are heavily regulated, we may unintentionally impede access to the very products that we want people to buy. A number of measures are necessary—first, to make people aware of the need to save and, secondly, to make it easier for them to acquire the means to save.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Following the Government's heavy defeats on Friday on the Pensions Annuities (Amendment) Bill, will they now accept the Bill and give people the chance to have a decent income in retirement?

Mr. Darling: No, because the purpose of the Bill is to benefit a minority of people in this country who are better off and on higher incomes. I have made it clear time and again that although the Government are willing to consider ways in which the annuity market might be improved—indeed, we are consulting on them—we will not introduce a system that blatantly benefits a tiny minority at the top of the income scale at the expense of everybody else. That approach might be all right for the Conservatives, but it does not commend itself to us.

Jobcentres

10. **Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): What plans he has to make jobcentres more responsive to the needs of those who are out of work. [45020]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): At the start of this month, we launched Jobcentre Plus, bringing help on jobs and benefits together under one roof with a very clear work focus. That will ensure that personal advisers are more responsive and can inform claimants of the full range of support available and the options open to help them move from welfare into work.

Ross Cranston: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for all the work that he and his Department have done to reduce unemployment in Dudley, which has fallen by about 25 per cent. since 1997. One of the problems in old manufacturing areas such as Dudley is unemployment among older men. Will he explain what the new institutional changes will do to address it?

Mr. Darling: My hon. and learned Friend raises a very important problem. At our previous Question Time, hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed support for increasing the effort that we put into helping men over 50 to get into work. It is worth reflecting on the fact that a third of people over 50 but under retirement age are out of work, and that half of them depend on benefits for most

of their income. That is clearly unsustainable in the long run, so one of the principal objectives of Jobcentre Plus and the rest of the Department is to ensure that we do more to help men over 50 to stay in work or get back into it if they lose their jobs. The rapid response service, to which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work referred, will help in that regard. All the evidence suggests that if somebody can be helped as soon as they lose their job, it is better in the long term.

Other measures such as the new deal and StepUp, which my right hon. Friend also mentioned, are designed to ensure that people who find it more difficult to get back into work get all the help to which they are entitled. Getting the over-50s into work is an essential part of our welfare to work policy and has a very strong bearing on pension policy, as the two are inextricably linked.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Secretary of State is right to point out that the creation of Jobcentre Plus a fortnight ago is a welcome step forward, as it introduces the concept of personal advisers who offer advice and back-up when people are trying to get off benefit and into work. Does he accept that analysis of the ONE project, the precursor to Jobcentre Plus, indicated that the personal advisers' case load was such that they did not have enough time to give advice and spent most of their time processing benefit claims? Will he assure the House that when Jobcentre Plus is properly launched—I accept that it will take some time—there will be a proper balance between the efficient processing of benefits and the provision of adequate time to get people off benefits and into work?

Mr. Darling: A number of problems with the ONE project became obvious in the first year or so of its operation; the hon. Gentleman highlights one of them. The advantage of setting up a single agency that brings together benefit processing and job search is that, once and for all, we can get rid of the artificial distinction between people who sign on for work and those who sign on for benefits. That is especially important for some older people who are simply written off on disability benefits.

Under the new system, when somebody goes into a Jobcentre Plus office, their benefit entitlement will be assessed by somebody whose sole job is to undertake that task. At the same time, they will be interviewed with a view to getting them back into work. The object should be to sort out their benefit as quickly as possible and then to talk to them about job search. That approach was tried out over the past couple of years, not only in the ONE project but in some of the mainstream jobcentre offices, especially on the Clyde coast. I know that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with the situation there. The approach is beginning to produce results. It is early days yet, but there is no doubt that bringing together benefits and job search is beginning to have results by not only putting people into work but ensuring that we pay the right benefit to the right person at the right rate—something that was conspicuously lacking in previous years.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): My concern is with younger unemployed people. How will the new Jobcentre Plus arrangements connect with the Connexions service to create a better gateway to work for young unemployed people?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. I was talking about older people because whereas in the past youth unemployment was by far the biggest priority that the Government had to tackle, we now need to put the same vigour and enthusiasm into tackling unemployment among older people.

We must ensure that we help young people who had difficulties at school, have fallen through the system and are not receiving the right level of help. That can be achieved through the Connexions service, and, when they are a bit older, the Jobcentre Plus network. All the evidence shows that the sooner young people can be placed in work, earning money and appreciating all the doors that that opens, the less risk there is of their falling back into unemployment or the other difficulties that they often unfortunately face.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Secretary of State realise that there is a problem of access, especially in a deeply rural constituency such as the Vale of York, where not a single jobcentre is to be found? Does he accept that there is a gulf between his Department's aspirations and its delivery on the ground?

Mr. Darling: We try our best to position jobcentre offices around the country. As I understand it, it is not Conservative party policy to spend millions of pounds more on setting up jobcentres—indeed, it is quite the opposite.

Miss McIntosh: I am asking you.

Mr. Darling: It is very good of the hon. Lady to do so. It may be some time before her party is again in a position to have a hand in these matters. She cannot say that we should spend less on the administration of my Department and that she wants more jobcentre offices. As we roll out the Jobcentre Plus network and make decisions about where the single offices are situated, we will make sure that there is an even spread and that transport communications are such that people can get access. If the hon. Lady supports me in ensuring that the Department is adequately resourced to do all that, I welcome her as a recruit to the cause.

Minimum Income Guarantee

12. **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): How many pensioners in the Kettering constituency benefit from the minimum income guarantee. [45022]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): As at November 2001, 3,100 pensioners in the Kettering constituency benefited from the minimum income guarantee. Those pensioners are at least £15 a week better off in real terms than in 1997. More than 2 million pensioners nationally benefit from the MIG. Additionally, this winter more than 19,600 older people in my hon. Friend's constituency received a winter fuel payment, benefiting each eligible household by £200.

Phil Sawford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and welcome the real help that the poorest

pensioners in my constituency receive. However, the minimum income guarantee is a means-tested benefit, and most pensioners would prefer a significant increase in the basic state pension. Will my right hon. Friend find time to speak to the Chancellor about that before the Budget statement on Wednesday?

Mr. McCartney: The Government have substantially increased the basic income of all pensioners. Initially, our greatest priority was to help the 2 million pensioners who did not benefit from minimum increases, whatever the rate, because for various reasons they were excluded from the basic state pension. We make no apology for being the first ever Government to find out who those 2 million people were and to ensure that they benefit from the minimum income guarantee. We have moved on to the second phase with the introduction of the pension credit; the passage of the State Pension Credit Bill resumes tomorrow. I should have hoped that the Liberals and the Conservatives would have a last-minute change of heart and support the Government in this, not oppose giving extra cash to millions of pensioners.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): After those exchanges, I am not sure whether I should offer comfort to the Minister or to the hon. Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford). Unless the Kettering constituency is highly untypical—I rather doubt it, because it is next to mine and contains some of my former constituents—it, like mine, has 1,000 pensioners who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee but are not taking it up. Is not that wholly unsatisfactory? Will not the position get worse through the additional complexities of the pension credit scheme? Will the Minister consider whether it will be possible to reach out to pensioners who are entitled to the guarantee credit or the savings credit through a pension service that is to be located far away in another county?

Mr. McCartney: If it was not for this Government, the pensioners in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford) and that of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) would remain abandoned and not receive an extra £15 a week on average. In some instances, the poorest pensioners in the hon. Gentleman's constituency receive an extra £20 a week. When we discuss the State Pension Credit Bill tomorrow, he will have a dilemma, which he may as well face now: will he oppose a measure that will put an extra £2 billion in the pockets of many pensioners, especially women and people who would never benefit under the Tories' previous pension proposals? He should give a straight answer: will he frustrate the opportunity for those people to receive the £2 billion?

Carers

13. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What his Department is doing to improve work opportunities for carers. [45023]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Last April, we increased the earnings limit for invalid care allowance so that carers who combine some work with their caring responsibilities can keep more of their earnings. That was the first increase since 1993. The earnings limit for ICA will now be increased regularly in line with changes to the lower earnings limit.

Carers are also benefiting from the introduction of our new Jobcentre Plus service. A personal adviser will help carers making new or repeat claims for benefit to look for employment or training that suits their circumstances, and provide support that is tailored to their needs.

Mr. Kidney: I am grateful for those details. I shall host a conference in Stafford on Friday about care for the elderly. I anticipate that many carers will say that it should be a reasonable aspiration to balance caring responsibilities with work.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments on advisers and for saying that money for caring responsibilities will not be affected by earnings. However, there must be other support systems for those who are cared for, including out-of-school places for disabled children and daycare centres for elderly relatives. I appreciate that that extends beyond the Department for Work and Pensions, but will she bear it in mind that those matters need to be tackled as well as the steps that she has already outlined?

Maria Eagle: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. We want to encourage carers who wish to combine caring with some sort of work, and some 30,000 recipients of ICA already do so. We hope that the arrangements that we are making with Jobcentre Plus will enable carers who wish to do that to receive the appropriate assistance and help.

On my hon. Friend's cross-government point, we must ensure as far as possible that we have joined-up services that mean something to people when they try to take up opportunities. There is no point in training people or assisting them to get to work if they cannot obtain the necessary support from social services to enable them to do that. I remind my hon. Friend that there are allowable expenses in ICA that enable those who wish to care to make alternative arrangements and pay for them without such payment being taken into account when their eligibility for ICA is considered. We do what we can about the benefits system, but my hon. Friend is right that we need to do more.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Minister look into a loophole that can affect carers who give up work to look after a member of the family who develops an illness or disability? If the disability assessment takes many weeks, carers can find themselves without both the income that they previously enjoyed and a benefit income. Local benefits offices are often not effective in helping those people to bridge the financial gap. Will the Minister consider that and encourage them to take a more enlightened view in such cases?

Maria Eagle: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. Clearly, there are eligibility criteria for ICA, and the person who is cared for must be in receipt of specific benefits to fulfil them. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not suggest that we should take steps that would prevent us from ensuring that those who claim benefit are eligible. We need to protect against fraud and error. We must ensure that those who become entitled to benefits

receive them as soon as possible. Our reorganisation of the Benefits Agency into a working age agency and the pension service should enable us to do that.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does my hon. Friend accept that a large number of carers—such as Mrs. Greenwell of Bournmoor in my constituency—are of retirement age? Will she comment on the fact that Mrs. Greenwell and others lose their carers allowance when they reach retirement age? Thousands of people are caring for their loved ones without the additional help that they previously received, at a great saving to the Government.

Maria Eagle: I am aware of the problem that my hon. Friend raises. ICA cannot currently be paid at the same time as another income maintenance benefit. This is known as the overlapping benefit rule, and it has been a central part of the welfare state ever since it was established. I cannot promise to get rid of that rule, but my hon. Friend and his constituent may be interested to learn that a regulatory reform measure is making its stately way through the House that will—subject to the House's approval—extend the possibility of paying ICA to those over 65. This will particularly benefit women who do not have full national insurance contributions, and who do not, therefore, get a full retirement pension. The measure will not, however, abolish the overlapping benefit rule. I cannot give my hon. Friend any comfort on that.

Housing Benefit Fraud

15. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What progress has been made in tackling housing benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [45026]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): Improving the overall performance of housing benefit administration is key to tackling housing benefit fraud, and many Members know that not all local authorities perform that task well at present. We have introduced new performance indicators to make an improvement possible.

The benefit fraud inspectorate does very valuable work on fraud, and the great majority of local authorities—some 77 per cent.—have now signed up to our verification framework, which provides a rigorous check on people's claims. In these different ways, we think that we are winning the war against housing benefit fraud, and we estimate savings so far of some £100 million.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, and I acknowledge the work that has been done on this matter so far. Will he, however, undertake to discuss further with local authorities how we can ensure that people claiming housing benefit are actually living in the accommodation in which they claim to be living? I—and, I suspect, many other hon. Members—know of properties that are giro drops: addresses at which people register while living elsewhere. Those people are not only committing benefit fraud but depriving others of much-needed local authority accommodation. Will my hon. Friend look into this matter and see what can be done to improve the situation?

Malcolm Wicks: Among other things, the fact that we will not have girocheques redirected is one part of our armoury that I should draw to the attention of the House. It is also important that local authorities should make house visits, not only in suspected cases but more randomly to verify that people are living in the house that they claim to be living in.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Is not the real test of the effectiveness of the Government's policies for dealing with housing benefit and social security fraud to be found in two simple facts? The first is that the level of fraud has significantly increased in the last four years; the second is that the number of prosecutions in 2001 was significantly less than in 1997. Is not all this exemplified by the fact that in one recent financial year, more than half of all local authorities did not bring even one prosecution for housing benefit or council tax fraud?

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Is it true?

Malcolm Wicks: I will answer the question in a formal way, rather than responding to heckling from the Opposition Front Bench. In terms of levels of housing benefit fraud in recent years, we simply do not know. It was this Government—not the last one—who initiated the first proper, ongoing research into this matter, and that will enable us to report to the House on levels of housing benefit fraud. I regret to say that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) is simply wrong about prosecutions following local authority investigations. My reply to the heckler is, therefore, that he is wrong, too—not, I think, for the first time. In 1997–98, there were 700 prosecutions following local authority investigations; in 2000–01, there were 1,100. That figure has increased under the Labour Government.

Pension Service

18. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the new pension service in meeting the needs of pensioners. [45029]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): It is very early days yet, but we are committed to making a real difference to the lives of pensioners. The pension service, which was formally launched on 1 April 2002, replaced Benefits Agency services for pensioners and will provide a better service that is tailored to pensioners' needs.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful for that short reply from the Minister. Does he agree that one welcome aim of the pension service is its stated intention to simplify the pension system, but does he share my concern that simply shortening the forms and reducing the number of questions will not achieve that aim? Does he not accept that changing the forms will simply constitute window dressing if he is not prepared to change the means-testing system itself?

Mr. McCartney: I had another two pages to my answer, which I shall send to the hon. Gentleman.

The pension service is the first attempt by any Government in history to establish a dedicated single unit that operates throughout the country, providing services not just for today's pensioners but for those approaching pensionable age. It is an advocacy service that not only provides day-to-day services and pensions and other advice, but seeks out pensioners in the community and works with them to increase their income and access to services. It is also working with older people to design a service to meet their needs.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, quite properly, the Government delayed by one day the Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill—by any measure, a very substantial Bill—precisely to allow the tabling of a reasoned amendment. Since then, in preparation for tomorrow's Committee proceedings, we in the official Opposition have worked on the assumption that the Bill's clauses will be dealt with in the normal sequence, and we had no reason to believe otherwise. To our shock, Mr. Speaker, and no doubt to yours, we found out on Friday that the Government have arbitrarily, and without consultation, changed tomorrow's order of consideration in Committee in such a way that no one could reasonably prepare the tabling of amendments to certain later clauses, consideration of which has now been brought forward.

That affects not only the position of the official Opposition, but of legitimate outside interests, which have been similarly caught unawares by this apparently underhand move by the Government. Is there anything that you can do, Mr. Speaker, to protect the House and Members, particularly those who participate in Standing Committee, so that we can ensure that this sort of thing does not happen; otherwise, we will be left in the invidious position whereby no one will be able properly and legitimately to prepare amendments for Committee. I look to you for guidance and protection, because this is yet another typical example of the Government's cavalier attitude to the House and its Committees.

Mr. Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the order of business, he will see that the Enterprise Bill Programming Sub-Committee meets at 7 o'clock this evening. That is an opportunity for the official Opposition—and, indeed, the Liberal Democrats—to raise this matter, so my strong advice is that a good attendance is required.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your help, guidance and clarification on business later today. Will you confirm and clarify my understanding that, at 7 o'clock—when we begin consideration of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill—the 10 o'clock motion, which cannot be debated, will be put? Is there any vehicle by which hon. Members who have consistently resisted that grubby little measure—born of a clandestine and wholly illegitimate grouping of the City of London corporation and Ministers—might ensure that it is rightly the subject of a free vote? Certain hon. Members are under the illusion that it is Government business, and that they might somehow gain preferment, but they will not.

There is also a serious parliamentary point at issue. This is a private Bill and according to the traditions of the House, which you jealously safeguard, the vote, by definition, is a free vote, but the plot is that it is not. The nod and wink from those on the Treasury Bench is that Members should be present to provide parliamentary time through the night to see this squalid little measure through.

I hope that, at 7 o'clock, we can have the opportunity, first, to prove that all that I have described is the case and to highlight that and, secondly, to persuade colleagues, particularly Labour Members who year after year in opposition derided the City of London, but are now—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has put his case.

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill (Programme)

3.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 10th July 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

Subsequent stages

2. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

I expect the official Opposition to oppose the motion, as they do all programme motions, as a matter of principle. Due to the circumstances of the Bill, it is incumbent on me to give the House a brief explanation of why the Government think the motion appropriate. First, the business has been given this allocation of time because the Lords amendments will deliver changes called for by the Northern Ireland parties and the Opposition. Secondly, by my calculation, the whole debate in the other place—Second Reading, Committee and Third Reading—took two hours and 59 minutes, which is short of the time that we have given the House to consider the amendments this afternoon.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I apologise for intervening, but will my hon. Friend, immediately or during the debate, clarify a point relating to the Bill and the matters that are the subject of the first group of amendments? I understand and have no difficulty with the fact that the Bill rightly requires greater evidence of who people are, their qualifications and where they reside than is the case for the rest of the United Kingdom, but there is a difference between that and having different criteria for who can vote.

I want clarification. The amendments would require people to indicate where else they might be registered in the United Kingdom for electoral purposes, which is perfectly understandable and correct. That will not in any way alter the law, which I understand spans the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whereby people such as the Minister and colleagues from Northern Ireland may be registered to vote in London borough elections. No doubt they are tempted to vote Labour on 2 May. How will the Bill affect those with dual residence and dual rights to vote in municipal elections—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are debating the programme motion. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will ask his question when we debate the Bill itself.

Mr. Browne: As you rightly point out, Mr. Speaker, the issue that my hon. Friend raises is germane to the amendments—indeed, it occupied our time in Committee more than once—and I am sure that it will be debated at length. If he catches your eye, he will be able to contribute on that relevant issue.

I speak only to the programme motion, and I was making my second and last point. The whole debate in the other place accounted for less time than the Government are allowing for the consideration of these amendments in this House.

3.40 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The Government do some extraordinary things, and they sometimes make colossal fools of themselves. I am afraid that they are making colossal fools of themselves by moving this timetable motion on these Lords amendments. If someone is to be made a fool of, it is important that it is the Government who make fools of themselves and do not succeed in making a fool of Parliament, because it is the Government's fault and not Parliament's. I want to dwell for a couple of minutes on the background to the motion.

There are two reasons why it is extraordinary to introduce a programme motion on these amendments. First, there is no longer any controversy over the subjects dealt with in the Lords amendments between the Government and the Opposition, or between the Government and any hon. Member. As everyone knows, the Government belatedly, but nevertheless effectively, accepted the views put to them by every other party in the House—the official Opposition, the Liberal Democrats, and every Northern Ireland party including the Social Democratic and Labour party. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). In my experience in the House, on 99 occasions out of 100 the SDLP vote with the Labour party, in government or in opposition. That is an extraordinary state of affairs. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wants to tell us that it is 98.2 per cent. of the time, I am perfectly prepared to give way to him and have the facts corrected.

It is most extraordinary to introduce a programme motion in those circumstances. The House will recall that it was in the Irish context that the system of programme motions was introduced in the 1880s, when the honourable predecessors of the hon. Member for South Down, the Irish parliamentary party under Parnell's brilliant leadership, succeeded in extracting important concessions from the Governments of the day, both Liberal and Conservative, by the use of aggressive filibustering. As Parliament virtually came to a halt at that time, for the first occasion in its then 600-year history some element of timetabling was introduced into its procedures.

From that time forth, including when most of us arrived in the House, until the new Labour Government appeared in 1997, the programme motion was regarded as exceptional, undesirable and something that we would accept only reluctantly to meet the danger of an abuse by people filibustering and holding up business unreasonably. Anyone who came to the House with a programme motion had to make an exceptional case. The onus was always on the Government to make an exceptional case, and to make it clear that the circumstances were such as to justify what by consensus of the whole House—that was true in my first two Parliaments—was regarded as an inherently obnoxious and undesirable procedure.

Part of the Government's devastating and obnoxious constitutional legacy will have been to introduce what has always been regarded in the House as an undesirable constraint on the freedom of Parliament and on its ability to do its essential job, which is to take its own time according to its own judgment to debate and consider the legislative proposals of the Government of the day. That tradition has been crudely set aside by the Government, who have benefited from their vast majority. They believe that they can do anything and get away with it.

For a long time, programme motions were seen as an exceptional measure, but they have now become a regular procedure. The Government's use of such a motion this afternoon shows that there is no rhyme or reason to it. There may be one explanation, which I shall put to the Minister and he can tell me whether it is correct. I have searched my mind to discover what possible function a programme motion could have, given that the whole House is in agreement, as the Government have reluctantly accepted the substance of the Lords amendments.

Lady Hermon (North Down): May I draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the fact that, although I think that we agree that the Lords amendments about national insurance numbers are most welcome, they have thrown up inconsistencies with the rest of the Bill? There is also a question mark over whether those amendments are compatible with our EU obligations, on which we might debate for a considerable period today.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Lady may have the basis of a speech, which she will deliver to the House when we get on to the substance of the Bill. This timetable motion, however, is being introduced when it is known in advance that there is no substantive disagreement between the Government and the other parties in the House. I understand that that goes for the hon. Lady's party as well, and that she has no intention whatever of voting against the Lords amendments; indeed, she has indicated from a sedentary position that my assumption is correct. In those circumstances, it is extraordinary to introduce a timetable motion. It makes no sense at all, because, far from confronting the threat or the slightest hint of a filibuster, the Government know that they are going to have a very easy afternoon.

The only possible explanation that I can imagine for wanting to curtail debate in Parliament in such circumstances is that the Government are embarrassed that they have had to admit that their judgment is flawed and that they must finally concede that the judgment of the other parties in the House was correct. They feel humiliated by that—for a very arrogant Government, it is a humiliating situation—so they are anxious to restrict to a minimum the time available for Members of Parliament to comment on that and to rub salt in the Government's wounds. After thinking through any rational purpose for trying artificially to constrain and constrict parliamentary discussion of this matter this afternoon, that is the only hypothesis that I could form.

It one sets aside the hypothesis of mere perversity or a mindless ideological belief that timetables should always be imposed on Parliament in principle, there is perhaps a desire on the part of the new Labour Government, with their vast majority, to show everybody that they are the master, and that the legislature can be kicked in whichever part of its anatomy the Government choose, at any time, and that it is a good idea to remind it of its subservience. Therefore, the Government will impose a timetable whether or not it makes sense. However, if one excludes explanations that do not have any logical or functional rationale attached to them, the only one that I can think of that makes logical sense is that the Government did not want us to have the opportunity to dwell on what is a turnaround—I shall not say U-turn, as that may seem gratuitously offensive—and an acceptance that the judgment of others was, on this occasion, superior to theirs.

It is ironic that the Government should attempt to limit Parliament's time, even though their operating principle, throughout the range of our legislative activities, is to constrain Parliament artificially in this way. In this case, however, it is clear that, if a time discipline should be imposed on anyone, it should be imposed on the Government. I remind the Under-Secretary that it is four years and a month since the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs made its recommendations in relation to electoral fraud, which, more or less, have been encapsulated in the Lords amendments. If anybody, therefore, needs to have a timetable motion imposed on them, the Government do. Were you to give us leave to table an exceptional motion this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we should impose a timetable motion on the Government to make sure that they deal with Select Committee reports in a more business-like and timely fashion in future than they have done on this occasion. We might therefore speed up the Government's bureaucratic procedures, focus their minds, and impose on them some of the constraints that they are trying to impose on the legislature. They are abusing the vast majority that the new Labour party has—temporarily, I hope—in the House. Timetabling is the last thing that the Government should be talking about in Parliament. The dialogue should be going in the other direction.

I do not want to end my remarks without acknowledging positively—the Minister knows that I always try to see the best in everything, including the best in even the new Labour Government—that the Government's change of heart is very welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) was assiduous in Committee and I heard him arguing eloquently. Every other party represented on the Committee also made the arguments that are now represented in the Lord's amendments before us. The Government would not listen in Committee, because they were in their arrogant mood and thought, "We have a vast majority and we don't care what you think. We'll do what we like. Get lost." That sums up the attitude of the Government, and not just in the Northern Ireland Office but right across the board.

I am glad to say that wiser counsels have now prevailed. After the issue has been discussed at great length in this House and in the other place, the Government have come forward with extremely important proposals. Electoral fraud has been a major problem in Northern Ireland for a long time and it is wrong to suggest that only the Unionist parties suffer from it. The SDLP has suffered just as much, if not more, from electoral fraud. All the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland suffer. By definition, they have scruples and are genuinely committed to the democratic process. They are not prepared to go in for cheating or for electoral fraud.

[Mr. Davies]

Therefore, they can easily suffer in an environment and a culture in which extremist parties do not have the same inhibitions.

We have discussed the problem and particularly the use of national insurance numbers. Like all brilliant ideas, their use seems obvious in retrospect, but it has been agonising trying to persuade the Government that national insurance numbers should be used in Northern Ireland. The Government have now accepted one of our ideas—and not quite for the first time. I draw attention to the fact that, before Easter, the Government made a small gesture in amending provisions of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill in relation to the display of the royal coat of arms on the outside of courthouses. I acknowledge and appreciate that gesture.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he is straying into consideration of another Bill. We are debating the programme motion.

Mr. Davies: You are absolutely right to remind me of that, Mr. Speaker. I was glad to be able to touch on the other concession that the Government have made, but I recognise that it is not strictly germane to the timetable motion.

Although the Government have taken a long time and although they—and not the legislature—should have been subject to a timetable or guillotine motion, it is clear from the Lords amendments that the opposition of my hon. Friends and the Northern Ireland parties—the SDLP and the two Unionist parties—has proven to be correct. Indeed, we have received support—we much appreciate it—from the Liberal Democrats, so there has been complete unanimity. We have been right, and the Government have been wrong. I do not want to be churlish because, on an occasion that is all too rare, we must acknowledge that the Government have made a magnanimous gesture.

It is a pity that this entirely gratuitous, unnecessary and unjustified timetable motion should destroy the good will that the Government might otherwise have created. It is not justified by anything that the Minister said or by anything else that anyone can conceive of.

Andrew Mackinlay: From time to time, we need to interrupt the cosy consensus between those on the two Front Benches. The real truth behind the timetable motion is the nonsense of parliamentary choreography, which means that Government Back Benchers will be here dead on the button at 7 o'clock, so that they can deal with a matter that was the subject of a point of order earlier. That is the real truth. The hon. Gentleman knows it; the Minister knows it; and, more important, so do the Whips.

When people read our proceedings and the hon. Gentleman's remarks, they probably think that they are very interesting. The truth is that proceedings have been choreographed so that we arrive at the next business at 7 o'clock, when the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill will be discussed. That is the reason for this charade. The hon. Gentleman and the Minister know that.

Mr. Davies: I agree profoundly with the hon. Gentleman this afternoon, and I have done so for many years; we have stood on the same side of the barrier on the importance of Parliament and the danger of over-mighty and arrogant Governments taking Parliament for granted or abusing their majority to change the procedures of the House so as to make the legislature less effective. When that happens, they do a very bad day's work not merely for democracy and open government, but for good and effective legislation.

The hon. Gentleman and I sing from the same hymn sheet on that subject—we have done so in the past and we will do so again—but it is pretty extraordinary that he should characterise my remarks on the Government, which the Minister did not think particularly friendly, as exemplifying a consensus between myself and the Government on this matter. I am conscious that I am speaking from the Front Bench and that colleagues on the Front Bench will listen to this part of my remarks with particular attention, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no truth whatever in the suggestion that the official Opposition wanted a timetable motion on the Lords amendments or that we have colluded on this or any other occasion to impose on Parliament such a timetable motion.

I do not pretend to have a better understanding of parliamentary procedure than the hon. Gentleman—he is a well known and distinguished parliamentarian—but, frankly, I do not believe that even his technical, practical explanation holds water. In no way is it helpful to keep hon. Members here until 7 o'clock, supposing that it had occurred to anyone on either side of the House who thought it desirable to keep hon. Members here until 7 o'clock that introducing a timetable motion would help to do so. I can think of other things that might help in that way, but not a timetable motion on the Lords amendments to the Bill. For once, the hon. Gentleman has been carried away into a conspiracy theory and proceeded to build castles literally in the air—there is not a grain of sand on which that allegation can possibly be built. I hope that he will accept that assurance.

No doubt, my party and I will be accused of many things, but no one who looks at the constitutional record of the two latest Parliaments can ever maintain for one second the allegation that we have been complacent in this abuse of our parliamentary procedure, which is exemplified by this Government in introducing timetable motions even when they are self-evidently utterly unnecessary in the exigencies of getting Government business through the House.

3.57 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I rise not to filibuster, as may have been the intent of the Conservative spokesman; in fact, the record will show that filibustering is not an attribute of my party. The links between the Irish parliamentary party and my own party are very tenuous indeed—perhaps nationality is the only common element. However, I have expressed great frustration in the House on the timetabling of Bills, especially in relation to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 and the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, which we found extremely frustrating.

As the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) has said, it is anticipated that all parties in the House will agree with the Lords amendments, probably without Division. That is the only substantive

issue and we were to debate it for four hours, which would have been adequate, especially when compared with the fact that 212 clauses and amendments to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill were debated in four hours not so long ago. The hon. Gentleman gave a good illustration of a mini-filibuster to protract this debate, which I do not intend to do; we have already used up half an hour of the time that he deemed so precious.

3.59 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Judging by the comments of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), it seems that we have consensus on the measure. Although I do not want to put words into the hon. Gentleman's mouth, it seems obvious that he does not believe that we need to debate the Bill until 7 pm. As I understand it, that is why he feels affronted: he feels that there is no need for a provision to curtail the debate at 7 pm because it will be finished before then.

I have often felt uncomfortable about programme motions because they have curtailed debate, although on one occasion I supported a programme motion that was opposed by the Conservatives and I was wrong to do so. As I said in private and on the record, the Ministers in charge of the Bill on that occasion took so long to respond to the points made that we ran out of time, and that has made me wary of supporting programme motions.

Nevertheless, when we consider those two facts—that we oppose programme motions when they curtail debate and that everyone seems to accept that we shall be finished long before 7 pm—it seems reasonable to accept the programme motion. I understand that there may be a point of principle for the Conservatives, but being a principle it is not open to debate.

The question about choreography is interesting. I am sure that Ministers would not be so disrespectful to Members as to waste our time and that of others—including Officers—by stringing out a debate that has no need to continue until 7 pm just for the convenience of the Government. We shall see what happens—history will be the judge.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): If there were some cosy consensus between the Front Benches, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) would, on past form, be exactly the man to raise it. However, I do not believe that there is such a consensus. When we debated the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill—I choose my words carefully, Mr. Speaker, so as to remain in order—there was a great deal of argument and rowing about its programming. The Opposition made robust points at that time so, from our perspective, there is a pattern and it is entirely right that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) should reiterate those concerns.

Lembit Öpik: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that insight. I, too, am sceptical that there is consensus between the Conservatives and the Government deliberately to string the debate out until 7 pm. I take the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford at his word so I address my comments to the Minister: we do not really need to debate until 7 pm two groups of amendments with which every one agrees, but we shall have to see what happens.

I am, however, aware that the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) will want to raise issues about the amendments but I suspect that even she will not need three hours in which to do so—time will tell. I accept that there are inconsistencies and shall be interested to hear her arguments on them. The amendments were controversial only when the Government opposed them. As the Government now agree with them, most of that controversy has gone.

I respectfully point out that the motion could have been avoided had the Government been more flexible on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. The only result of the Government's pointless intransigence in the face of cross-party support—from the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Conservatives, the Democratic Unionists, the Ulster Unionists and the Liberal Democrats—is the embarrassing fact that there are ministerial speeches on the record pointing out that the very proposals that the Government have now accepted are a bad idea.

Such contradictions could be avoided if Ministers genuinely showed flexibility when such proposals are made. I do not condemn the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—I have much respect for him and we are, after all, about to discuss the amendments—but it is a waste of parliamentary time to be considering Lords amendments that were previously tabled by Members in this place and could thus have been included in the Bill before it was debated by the Lords.

If I may humbly suggest improvements to the Minister, perhaps in future he might be willing genuinely to embrace the mantra of flexibility and of being a listening Government. If he had done so, instead of debating a programme motion at this stage of the Bill's passage, we would not actually be debating the matter at all.

4.5 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I realise that the choreography of the Liberal Democrats makes it impossible for me to convince them to change their view. However, I want to explain that for many of us the timetable motion is a matter of the most severe principle because the ability to trust Parliament is threatened by the Government's insistence that we have such motions at every drop of the hat.

There is no reason to have a timetable motion today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said, we must ask why it is necessary to have one at all. With all due respect, however, he missed the fundamental reason for it: unless the Government introduce a timetable motion when it is not necessary, it makes it harder for them to introduce one when it is necessary—for the Government's purposes rather than those of Parliament. To get out of the embarrassing situation in which timetable motions are proposed in order to stifle debate, the Government need to make them a regular necessity. If they always happen, the Government do not have to answer that deeply disturbing question about the use of such motions as a mechanism for preventing embarrassing subjects from being raised.

You, Mr. Speaker, have been extremely forthright in allowing debate when the Government have not been forthcoming about providing the time. For example, tomorrow we are to debate something that the

[Mr. John Gummer]

Government would have preferred not to discuss. That is part of the problem that we face. The Speaker is in the special position of defending Back Benchers and, indeed, Labour Members when the purposes of Parliament are subverted by a Government who are much more interested in getting their way than in providing the proper forum for democracy.

Although I often disagree with the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), it is much more common for me to agree in principle and spirit on the nature of Parliament. The Minister is a man of principle. He has tried hard to help those who have difficulties with the Bill so that we have legislation that is acceptable to both sides of the House. However, he does himself no good by going along with the fundamental plot devised by Government Whips. The plot has not been choreographed by the two sides: it is entirely a minuet by Government Whips.

The line is simple: unless we dance this same dance when it is unnecessary, people will ask why we dance it at all when it is necessary. The answer is that we do that in normal circumstances because the purpose of the timetable motion is to avoid difficult questions and awkward speeches, not just by the Opposition but increasingly by Labour Members.

It is crucial for us to oppose this timetable motion above all others. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) should realise that this is an issue par excellence on which the Liberal Democrats, given their history, can express their concerns. It is precisely because the motion does not matter that this is the time to say that the principle is wrong, and it is wrong because it is designed by the Executive to control Parliament in an unacceptable way.

I have the same difficulty as the hon. Member for Thurrock. If our constituents were to peruse the report of the debate, they would wonder what the blazes we are talking about. Why do we have to discuss for 45 minutes something that should not be discussed? Without this debate, we could raise the relevant issues and conclude our public business by 6 o'clock. The motion has nothing to do with today's business. It is to do with a mechanism increasingly used by a Blairite Government who seek to control us lest we say something out of line.

Few members of the governing party are present—if I exclude Front-Bench Members and the PPS, there are three Members on the other side of the House who are recognised for their individuality, and no one else. If more Labour Members were here, I would remind them that the motion is designed not to keep us under control, but to control them. That is true not only on this occasion, but on others too. The motion is designed to ensure that there are not too many Members talking about the idea that we should bomb Saddam Hussein or whether invading Palestine is a useful way of dealing with terrorism. The motion is not to do with the issues to be discussed today.

Lembit Öpik: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point of principle. I shall consult my Front-Bench colleagues; should a vote be called, we may be influenced by his argument.

Mr. Gummer: I am much flattered by the hon. Gentleman. I shall therefore bring my remarks to a close, because my purpose, it seems, has been to some degree achieved.

I would like to remind the House that at moments like this, when there are not many Members and very few of the Government's supporters in the Chamber, we need to be most careful and precise about our procedures. I hope that the House will recognise that there is a daily, weekly and monthly need to stand up for the rights of the House, if we are not to fail to defend our constituents on the issues that really matter. My experience of the House over many years is that if one does not stand up on the issues that apparently do not matter, when it comes to those that do, one is in no position to fight. The hon. Gentleman ought to be on our side, given his history, rather than opposing us.

4.12 pm

Mr. Browne: With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall respond to the debate. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) saw through the flimsiness of the argument of his Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), when he said that he had used the wrong argument. Unfortunately, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, in a very articulate and informed way, also got the wrong end of the stick.

The position of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) on timetabling continues to confuse me. I have been present when he has talked about recorded debates. I have also been present when he has manfully argued for the discipline of timetabling and treated us to some of his experience in business, telling us how important the discipline of timetables has been in that experience. I know that there are hon. Members present who have heard those arguments. The hon. Gentleman castigates me explicitly and by implication for listening and responding to argument. However, that is exactly what he does with his protean utterances on timetabling.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, because he and I have both occasionally had the support of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and his Liberal Democrat colleagues on Northern Ireland issues. Will the Minister inform the House whether he has more confidence in his arguments when he has the support of the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman invites me to come down on one side or the other. As I have a long-term relationship with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, that might place me in an uncomfortable position. I try to recognise when the hon. Gentleman is right and on those occasions I am pleased to have his support. When I think that he is wrong I am pleased to engage in debate with him.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford says that we do not need a timetabling motion because there is no issue of controversy. However, the House has not had an opportunity to consider the provisions that were passed in the other place and are before the House today in the sort of detail that will allow the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), for example, as well as, I am sure, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Front Bench, to ask the detailed questions that they are entitled to ask in relation to those provisions.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that there is a timetable motion because I, the Minister who has been responsible for the Bill, seek to curtail debate that will

expose the fact that there has been a change of Government policy. He will see from my contribution to the debate, when we come to the substance of it, that I take that issue head on. There has been a change of policy, and I recognise and accept that. I say to him and others that there is no point in debate in this House if one cannot persuade Ministers at some stage to change policy. As I have been prepared to change policy, hon. Members are entitled to point that out to me—and I am sure that it will be pointed out. However, if he does not think that three or four hours is enough time in which to do so, I despair of his ability to make such a point. There are only so many ways in which he can say "U-turn", even if he does not want to use that phrase.

In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) suggested that some form of choreography between the Front-Bench teams has led to the timetable motion, on which he was assured by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford. If my hon. Friend's reaction was anything to go by, he accepted the hon. Gentleman's assurance that there was no such choreography. So that conspiracy theory was blown out of the water; there was nobody for the Government to conspire with. There can be no conspiracy—unless people are whispering to themselves—although that does not of course stop a Conservative Front Bencher suggesting that that is exactly what the Government are doing.

In having to be consistent with the position that the Conservative Front-Bench team is attempting to take, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal suggested that there is a conspiracy on only one Front Bench, and that that has led to the timetable motion. That is no explanation for the motion either. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman may say that that is a good argument. It was not a convincing argument, but it was a good one.

The reality is that the timetable motion is a practical attempt to set aside a sufficient amount of time in the House to debate provisions which, albeit accepted in principle by all parties, require some scrutiny and debate. I am sure that questions will be raised that need to be answered.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose—*

Mr. Browne: Perhaps one such question is arising now.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman seems to be in a state of some confusion. He is saying that, notwithstanding the broad agreement in principle on the Lords amendments, providing opportunities to discuss some of the detail might be necessary. That is a weird basis on which to argue for curtailing discussion. He is concerned that Parliament needs more time to consider the matters, so the last thing the Government should be doing is artificially limiting that time.

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am suggesting that the motion is a practical attempt to set a reasonable period of time in which to discuss matters—informed by debate not only on Second Reading but in Committee and during remaining stages, and in the other place.

Although I restricted my opening remarks to a few sentences, I pointed out that the whole debate in the other place took less time than we are proposing to allow in this House to debate the provisions before us. Given the agreement in principle on them, there ought to be sufficient time to consider the issues. I suggest that the timetable motion allows sufficient time to do so.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford has disavowed the generous interpretation of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, who was not arguing that debate was being curtailed unnecessarily. It appeared to me that he said that there would not be enough time. Time will tell whether that is so.

Lembit Öpik: With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), I was not convinced by his arguments. I was interested in the deeper principle outlined by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). In that sense, there is a concern that the habit of always having a programme motion when it does not count makes it harder for us to defend the need for more time when such a motion does count.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful for that observation. I understood the hon. Gentleman's position to be that he was agreeable to programming in principle. He has said that on several occasions, but now it appears that he agrees with programming generally, but not in principle—whatever the difference between generally and in principle may be. Is it that he is generally agreeable in principle to programming? I am not sure.

Until now, my understanding was that the hon. Gentleman, who speaks regularly for the Liberal Democrats when I am at the Dispatch Box, was agreeable in principle to programming. We have to try to convert the principle to which he is agreeable into some form of practical expression. The motion before us is designed to do that in a way that provides sufficient time to debate the provisions that are before the House today. That is the argument, and it is on that basis that I support the motion and ask the House to do so as well.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 162.

Division No. 207] **[4.20 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*

Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip

Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 10th July 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

Subsequent stages

2. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Orders of the Day

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

REGISTRATION: PROVISION OF SIGNATURE AND DATE OF BIRTH

Lords amendment: No. 1.

4.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 6, 9, 11 and 13 to 16.

Mr. Browne: During the Bill's passage through both Houses, all the Northern Ireland parties, the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats pressed hard for the inclusion of national insurance numbers as one of the items of personal information required, alongside the signature and date of birth of each individual, on electoral registration for the purposes of cross-checking and verifying identity.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Minister would not want to omit from the list of those seeking the inclusion of national insurance numbers the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, whose report of 11 March 1998 led to the Bill—a Committee of which, of course, the Minister was a part in calling for the inclusion of national insurance numbers.

Mr. Browne: That will teach me to pause for breath. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out the contribution that I made to the provisions before the House. He will recollect that in my opening remarks I was referring to the Bill's passage through both Houses, and he will realise why that august body, the Select Committee, was not included in the list in my opening paragraph.

Throughout the Bill's passage through this House I repeatedly explained the difficulties involved in using national insurance numbers for electoral purposes and resisted the amendments tabled by hon. Members. However, as I said on Second Reading, this is not a great issue of principle. I had at the time made a judgment based on the information available to me that the Bill as originally drafted was sufficient to tackle the problem of electoral fraud, and that it struck a workable balance between preventing fraud and not placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of honest voters.

I have sought to maintain that balance throughout the debates on all the provisions of the Bill. For hon. Members who were not members of the Committee, I say, and I am sure that I will be supported by those who were, that throughout the debates I have tried to listen to any reasonable, practical suggestions in relation to the Bill which were consistent with that balance. Those who know the history of the Bill will be aware that national insurance

[Mr. Browne]

numbers are not the only issue on which I have agreed that alternative suggestions would benefit the legislation. The proposal is not alone in that regard.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I appreciate the Minister's giving way so early in the debate, although as he appears to be in such sparkling good form I am sure that he is delighted to be intervened on. I remind him that on 5 December 2001, at column 320 of the *Official Report*, in response to a question asked by the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), who is not now present, although he was here earlier—

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I am here.

Lady Hermon: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. That will teach me to hold my breath while I look around the Chamber.

In reply to a question asked by the hon. Gentleman—I am absolutely delighted to see him in his place—the Minister said that he was opposed to proposals on national insurance numbers because he

"considered that they were disproportionate, that they made unreasonable demands on voters, and that they were opposed by the chief electoral officer."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 320.]

We know that he now supports the inclusion of national insurance numbers, but will he explain why and how the chief electoral officer has changed his view and no longer opposes their inclusion?

Mr. Browne: It would be fairer to allow the chief electoral officer to speak for himself on this issue, just as I am speaking for myself in dealing head on with those observations—

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): He has done it before.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I have quoted the chief electoral officer before, but let me explain the position. I am sure that hon. Members will point in the *Official Report* to the position that I took earlier, which is there for all to see. I took what I thought to be a reasoned position on the basis of particular problems that I identified in earlier debates; the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) quoted my remarks on some of them. I identified some issues as genuine problems that needed to be overcome, but I made it clear to hon. Members that I would listen to and consider what they had to say.

Of course, I was conscious that all the Northern Ireland political parties, including that which the hon. Member for North Down represents, as well as the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats and also the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, were as one on the issue in the previous Parliament. As I was mindful of that pressure, it would have been remiss of me—and inconsistent with the approach that I had adopted throughout the Bill's passage—if I had not put the option to a further test to see whether I could find a way in which national insurance numbers could be used for electoral purposes that would not be disproportionate or disadvantage legitimate voters. That is the test that I set myself for all the provisions.

At this stage, it is important to address a point made earlier about the time that it has taken for the current provisions to come before this House and for the legislation to be brought before Parliament.

Discussion has been going on for decades about addressing electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. Indeed, many provisions have been introduced on voting in Northern Ireland in that time. If one were to hear only this afternoon's debates on the matter, one might think that the issue had arisen only when the Labour Government came to power in 1997, but nothing could be further from the truth. For decades, successive Governments have sought to address the issue either by introducing arrangements brought before the House or through other measures that do not require legislation. The fact that one of the first things that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee did after the 1997 general election was to reconsider the issue, urged on by Members who represented Northern Ireland constituencies, is a measure of the success that previous Governments have had in interdicting such behaviour.

4.45 pm

This has been an intractable problem, but I am happy to say that when the Bill left the other place, official Opposition spokesmen and others suggested that it is the best possible attempt to address the issues that have bedevilled Northern Ireland's electoral affairs for decades. The problem has concentrated the minds of politicians in Opposition and in government for a long time, and it does not lend itself to the quick fix. The Government and Opposition parties are indebted to the Select Committee's work on electoral fraud. We are also indebted to other committees and to hon. Members who are present for the contributions that they have made to the debate. I am sure that that debate will continue.

All Governments face particular constraints in dealing with electoral matters with the widest possible consultation and the greatest possible care, and that is especially true of a Government with the sort of majority that we enjoy. We should deal with such matters only in a way that secures the greatest possible support among the parts of the electorate that they will affect. I make no apology for the fact that we took a long time in formulating these restrictions, because it was right to consider them with the greatest of care and subject them to the widest possible consultation. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) is nodding, so I take it that he agrees. The Bill has the degree of support that I am sure that it will enjoy this afternoon only because such care was taken to proceed at a pace that did not offend that principle, which informed everything that I have done as the Minister responsible.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) was nodding to applaud the dexterity of the Minister's arguments, not necessarily their validity. If the Government had not taken such an inordinately long time over the proposals, we would now have legislation that would enable an identity card scheme to be up and running in time for the Assembly elections. On the basis of the information that we have received,

it will take 18 months from the passing of the Bill for such a scheme to be put in place. As there is considerably less time than that between now and the Assembly elections, the dilatory manner in which the provisions were dealt with means that that opportunity has been missed.

Mr. Browne: I normally enjoy the hon. Gentleman's interventions because they take the debate forward, but they do so only if he is properly informed. I do not know where he got 18 months from; perhaps he made it up while he was on his feet. I have a timetable—

Mr. Swire: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Browne: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself. I shall first deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Reigate. The estimate to which he referred may have been applicable at one time, but I am satisfied that there is now a timetable for the introduction of identity cards that can meet the deadline that the Government have set themselves—assuming that that change has the acceptance of the Northern Ireland electorate as expressed in consultation with the parties, among others.

Mr. Swire: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I just want to point out that the figure of 18 months came from the House of Commons Library research paper on the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, which clearly states in reference to the introduction of identity cards:

"It was envisaged that the issuing programme would take up to eighteen months to complete."

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I might have an opportunity at some stage, when I am not on my feet addressing the House, to have a look at that paper and to check that the full context of that quotation refers to 18 months from the date that the hon. Member for Reigate said was the starting date, rather than from another date. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept my assurance, as the Minister responsible, that I have been privy to a timetable for the introduction that can meet the date for the Assembly elections in Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman will accept that, perhaps we can move on.

It was particularly important, when seeking to make the changes to the Bill, to determine how we would deal with those individuals who do not have a national insurance number, and how the electoral office would check the authenticity of the national insurance numbers that it received for registration purposes. Allowing for the use of national insurance numbers in the electoral process—as the amendments do—I have placed a high priority on identifying a solution that avoids the placing of a heavy burden on the electorate or on the Department for Work and Pensions, and that avoids difficult data protection issues.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the Minister giving way. Although he is unable to explain why the opposition of the chief electoral officer has now been removed, will he confirm, as the inclusion of national insurance numbers—which we welcome—will place a huge administrative burden on the electoral office, that there is no opposition within that office to the use of these numbers?

Mr. Browne: I can speak on the basis of my contacts with the chief electoral officer, who represents the office in its dealings with me as the Minister, and I can assure the hon. Lady that *he supports this change*. I did not specifically ask him why that should be his position, but I am sure that his position will be the same as mine, in that I identified difficulties, which I am seeking to address in this speech, of which he was aware, and which I now believe can be overcome. The overcoming of those difficulties was not easy, but now that we have done so, I am sure that the chief electoral officer—and his staff, who support him faithfully as always—will do everything in his power to deliver and operate the policy in this legislation.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): May I ask the Minister to rack his brains? He has just said that the chief electoral officer told him that he was now happy with the proposals. I assume that he would have said something like, "I am now content because . . . ". Will the Minister think back and try to remember what the chief electoral officer's reasons were for saying that he was now happy with the measure?

Mr. Browne: I will say to the hon. Gentleman what I said to the hon. Member for North Down, who asked me the same question. For many of the reasons that I put before the Standing Committee, the chief electoral officer—whose advice I value on these matters, as he is the person who has practically to operate the measures—was of the same view as I was when the Bill was previously before the House. Having listened to the arguments put forward by hon. Members, however, and having recognised the breadth of support for the introduction of national insurance numbers as an identity check, I undertook to go away and look again at whether that policy could be delivered in a practical way that did not offend the principles that I had set out. I am now satisfied, for reasons that I am seeking to articulate in this speech, that it can be introduced in a fashion—that set out in the amendments passed in the other place—which does not offend those principles.

I am not in a position, following my conversations with the chief electoral officer, to give the hon. Gentleman what he seeks. I can say, however, that during that dynamic process, I am sure that the chief electoral officer—who was party to what was going on in the sense that he was aware of what I was seeking to do, and who was in close contact and discussion with my officials—would have been satisfied for the same reasons that I am satisfied that this can be done without causing the offence that I seek to avoid.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What happens if there is a dispute about a national insurance number? I fully support the thrust of the amendments, but I want to be satisfied that, where a dispute arises about ownership of a national insurance number, the applicant for inclusion on the franchise can fast track, or can satisfy the chief electoral officer. Perhaps the Minister saw Saturday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, which ran an article on Andrew Palmer, a constituent of mine whose national

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insurance number is also being used by somebody in one of Her Majesty's prisons. If I catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps I might elaborate on the matter, but it is clear that the national insurance number system is not foolproof, as witnessed by the irritating problems experienced by my constituent. If he lived in Northern Ireland and wanted to vote, he might experience problems in relation to his identity.

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend makes a timely intervention. Through the experience of one his constituents, he identifies a problem with national insurance numbers that I, too, identified, and which caused me to have second thoughts and to oppose at the outset their use as identifiers in electoral law. However, I am now satisfied—this debate will show whether my appreciation is correct—that all parties in the House understand that the system can be made to work, that it can accommodate possible flaws in the national insurance number system, and that checks can be used to ensure that people are not disadvantaged and denied their vote. That is why the provisions before the House are so detailed and complex; indeed, they are considerably more complex than any amendment that I resisted in Committee, or than any proposal put forward on Second Reading or during the Bill's remaining stages.

The complexity of the provisions—particularly that relating to the chief electoral officer's power to check with the Department for Work and Pensions that, in a given circumstance, the national insurance numb[illegible]used is the one that ought to be attributed to the person [illegible]question—is designed for the very circumstances that my [illegible]. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinl[illegible] identifies, among others. His constituent's experien[illegible]—I cannot comment on it because it is not part of my ministerial responsibility, but I understand that the matter is in hand—is another good example of why it is important to proceed with some caution. When we think that we have found a simple solution to a problem, such simplicity often brings its own difficulties.

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister keeps telling us—I am pleased to hear it—that the proposals now have the support of all parties in the House, but does that include the party that has not taken up its seats, the members of which, disgracefully, have been let into this building by his Government? Has he had any discussions with them and does he know their views? They are among the most serious perpetrators of the fraud in question.

Mr. Browne: If the chief electoral officer can speak for himself, Sinn Fein Members elected to represent their constituents can certainly speak for themselves, although they choose not to in this House. *[Interruption.]* Their position on the Bill's proposals is no secret. To my knowledge, they have made no specific comments on the provisions relating to national insurance numbers—they may have made such comments to officials—but they did not support the legislation's general thrust when it was put out for consultation. As I have had no specific response from them on that issue, I am unable to help the hon. Gentleman further.

However, I shall check. If a response does not reach me, which would surprise me, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with that information. I would not hold my breath for support for the provisions from that particular source.

5 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Pursuant to the point regarding a disagreement between the registration officer and the person applying for a vote, be it physical or postal, may I draw the Minister's attention to amendment No. 4? It provides that someone's name be removed from the register if

"the registration officer determines that he is not satisfied with the information relating to that person which was included in that form pursuant to that requirement."

That suggests that there will be disputes on certain occasions, which is only to be expected in practical terms. If a dispute results in the registration officer refusing to grant registration, will there be a forum for an appeal or an electoral court, which would enable the applicant for registration to pursue his case and perhaps reach a conclusion?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. As I stand before him, I do not have the specific answer, although my instincts suggest that a provision in other legislation allows a person who has been denied to register an appeal. Relying on my professional experience—as a solicitor, not as a politician—I suspect that in Scotland the application is made to the sheriff court, but I am not sure. I hope to be able to give him the answer to that question before the debate is out, although I think that what he seeks is in other legislation, if not in the Bill.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister and I understand his position, but will he confirm that the electoral court tradition, which comes into play when a new register is established, will continue and that such a court will be the forum in which disputes are ironed out or concluded?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall write to him on the detail of the provisions, but I assure him that if someone is denied registration for any reason, not just those relevant to the Bill, they will be able to appeal to the courts, rather than an electoral court, to be included. There is a right to apply to the court, and obviously the judge would exercise the function in relation to electoral law. I assure my hon. Friend that people will not be denied the right to register without the right of appeal.

Had we not addressed the issues identified as problems in relation to including national insurance numbers, the provisions would have had a number of unhelpful and inappropriate consequences. For example, it would not be possible for the small number of people who do not have a national insurance number for national insurance or benefit purposes to be allocated one so that they may register to vote. That had to be accommodated.

When I met the Information Commissioner, she made it clear that the employment of the national insurance number in the electoral registration process in Northern Ireland must be put on a clear statutory basis in order for it not to breach the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. That is another potential consequence of using national insurance numbers, about which I was concerned.

She also pointed to the need to keep the use of national insurance numbers in that new context under review. The Government intend to do that.

Mr. Swire: What is the Department's estimate of the number of people in Northern Ireland without a national insurance number?

Mr. Browne: I do not have any such estimate, but, given the way in which the Bill is drafted, it is not necessary for my Department to make an estimate. In years to come, once these provisions are in force, there will be a database of those who are of voting age, but at the moment there is no such database that one can refer to for the information that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Surely one of the fundamental ways to make this legislation work will be to know how many national insurance numbers there are now, so that if any attempt is made to use the new system fraudulently we will get a sense of whether something is amiss.

Mr. Browne: When the hon. Gentleman considers how the system will work in detail, he will appreciate that it is designed to work in the context of other provisions in other parts of the Bill. A database will be built up over the years under the control of the chief electoral officer, which will allow him to check whether anything is amiss as the years go on. These provisions are not intended to cause everyone's national insurance number to be checked with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Those who understand the construct and the architecture of the Bill will realise that the principal purpose of checking national insurance numbers is to prevent fraud in the exercise of absent voting. The principal way in which the Bill will prevent impersonation will be by photographic identification. Although national insurance numbers will have some merit in relation to all those who register, they will be of most use as a further check on the identity of those people who want to exercise an absent vote.

It is not of great importance to the working of the system as a whole to know how many national insurance numbers there are in Northern Ireland as a proportion of those who qualify to have a national insurance number. I do not think that that would be a particularly helpful check. Attention will be concentrated on the national insurance numbers of a comparatively small number of people, and that will greatly help the chief electoral officer to check their identity. Everyone could have a national insurance number, but not everyone in Northern Ireland qualifies for an absent vote. The provisions on absent votes in Northern Ireland are different from those that apply in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister clarify an issue that has been raised in the amendments from the other place but is not self-explanatory? The new clause in amendment No. 13 would allow the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland to request from the relevant authority

"in the case of . . . an individual recorded as having a national insurance number, any name and former name, date of birth, sex and address as recorded by the relevant authority in respect of the individual in question."

Why is it relevant for the sex of a voter to be disclosed by the relevant authority?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Lady asks a question that could be asked about any aspect of these provisions. Why is it relevant to ask the date of birth of a voter? Why is it relevant to ask voters to say whether they are registered at another place? Why is it relevant to ask a voter to apply his or her signature to the forms so that it can be checked? Why is relevant to ask for a voter's national insurance number?

Lady Hermon *rose—*

Mr. Browne: I shall let the hon. Lady intervene again, but perhaps she will allow me to answer her first question, then I shall deal with her supplementary.

We are seeking to obtain information on voters that allows the chief electoral officer, on a proportionate basis, to be as sure as he can ever be that the person who chooses to exercise an absent vote is the person who is entitled to that absent vote. Part of that process is to allow the chief electoral officer the power to check with the Department for Work and Pensions that the person who seeks to use that national insurance number to register under that name at that address is the person who is entitled to use that national insurance number.

What are the distinguishing features of an individual other than being able to tie a number to their personal appearance? They are the person's address, sex and date of birth. Those are the distinguishing features that the chief electoral officer is able to check. Some names can be spelled differently, and parents are increasingly imaginative in their adoption of names for their children. Recently in my constituency a child was named after a Spanish Harlem black rap singer. I could not tell whether that name, which was imported from north America, was associated with a man or woman or with a male or female child. Many children's names can be used for males and females—Kerry, for example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) says from a sedentary position. I am sure that there will be many such names. It is helpful to establish those three or four items of identification—not in a discriminatory way—to check that the particular national insurance number is being used by the right person.

Lady Hermon: I am impatient by nature, so I apologise for trying to intervene on the Minister earlier. My point was that we are talking about the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill which, for the first time, introduces new identifiers to the electoral register—a signature and a date of birth; obviously, the name of the voter was required by previous legislation. In terms of consistency with the personal identifiers to which new clause 6 refers, it seems extraordinary that, having referred to the signature, national insurance number, date of birth and address, the sex of a person should also suddenly be required from the relevant authority.

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution. Her contributions have often been helpful, and occasionally in her interventions she has pointed out areas in which changes have needed to be made. I am grateful to her for that, and I treat her contributions seriously. Her intervention requires a response, but that

[Mr. Browne]

response is that the proposal will assist the chief electoral officer to reassure himself that the identity of the person who is using a particular national insurance number accords with the identity of the person whom he is likely to bring in for interview. If the hon. Lady is satisfied that that is the reason—and that there is no discriminatory reason—perhaps I may move on.

The Information Commissioner, for whose assistance and help I am very grateful, pointed out to me and the Government that there was a need to keep the use of national insurance numbers in this new context under review. I suggested that the Government would do that, for no other reason than that developments in electronic voting may, in future, offer an alternative solution to the problem of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland, which will allow us to reduce some of the provisions in the Bill and make them more manageable. It is in all our interests, and in the interests of the Northern Ireland electorate, that we keep pace with these developments and consider their potential in the Northern Ireland context.

I explicitly acknowledge that the first group of Lords amendments enabling national insurance numbers to be used in the electoral process in Northern Ireland reflects a change in Government policy, but I hope that hon. Members will welcome the amendments as a positive response to their concerns and requests. Hon. Members will realise from the length of the amendments that there is no quick-fix solution that will allow for the use of national insurance numbers.

5.15 pm

Amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 6 will require a person who applies to register in respect of an address in Northern Ireland to give his or her national insurance number or to make a statement that he or she does not have one. That deals with the point about numbers raised by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling).

Lady Hermon: An inconsistency has been thrown up by the Lords amendments. The Minister will recall that in Committee we had a lengthy debate about the fact that the chief electoral officer may dispense with a person's signature that will be required on the register of voters if that person is incapacitated or is unable to read. Will the Minister explain how a person who is incapacitated or is unable to read is expected to make the statement that he does not have a national insurance number?

Mr. Browne: The provisions in the registration process that take account of a person's disability will apply across the board. They are not restricted to the provision of any particular information.

In response to a point that the hon. Lady raised earlier, I am able to tell her that when people complete the electoral registration form, they will be invited to indicate their sex by using a prefix to their name. They can use Mr., Mrs., Miss or whatever, and that will also assist the chief electoral officer and the Department for Work and Pensions to establish the sex of a person who has had a national [redacted] number allocated to them. It may be possible administratively to check the veracity of a national insurance number without actually seeing the person using it.

Lady Hermon: I am grateful to the Minister for being so patient. Will he refer me specifically to the provision in the new clause that applies across the board and allows a person, on the basis of incapacity or being unable to read, to dispense with the requirement to make a statement that he or she does not have a national insurance number?

Mr. Browne: I am not suggesting to the hon. Lady that she will find such a provision in the Bill. My understanding is that people who cannot make such a statement will be able to have a statement made on their behalf. The form accommodates such a situation. The general provision will apply to anything that is asked for by the registration form. The registration process recognises that some people cannot read or write or that some people have a disability that means they cannot fill in the form themselves. Because of that recognition, the registration process contains a provision that allows information to be communicated to the chief electoral officer on behalf of such people; otherwise they would not get on to the electoral register in the first place. I am saying that the provision applies to any information that we seek to obtain, and that includes whether people have a national insurance number.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): Will the Minister elaborate on what will happen if an inordinately high number of applicants claim that they do not have a national insurance number? What provisions are there to deal with such circumstances?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman anticipates circumstances with which the Bill, as amended in the other place, already deals. The chief electoral officer has the power to check with the Department for Work and Pensions whether the information that people give is correct. Obviously if there is a disproportionate response from people suggesting that they do not have a national insurance number—we do not have a figure for those who might do that, but we do not think it will be that many—alarm bells will ring with the chief electoral officer. The necessary checks will therefore be made. If there are clusters of such claims, the chief electoral officer's attention will be drawn to the geographical areas where they occur.

Mr. Swire: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way once more on the thorny subject of national insurance numbers. Will he confirm whether more national insurance numbers are in circulation than there are people on the electoral roll in the United Kingdom? If that is the case, would not this be an ideal time to revisit—to use his own word—all those who hold national insurance numbers to find out whether they are the right people in the first place?

Mr. Browne: Thankfully, I do not have ministerial responsibility for revisiting all those who hold national insurance numbers. That would not be an appropriate use of Government money or a priority for us in the circumstances. I am unable to confirm the hon. Gentleman's assertion—I do not know whether he is

correct—but my ministerial colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions work assiduously to check such information. I do not suggest that they do so weekly, but I understand that computerised trawls are carried out weekly to check that the national insurance numbers in existence relate properly to the people to whom they appear to relate. I understand that the Department for Work and Pensions undertakes significant work on that issue and that the position is improving.

I do not seek to blame the pre-1997 Government, but the hon. Gentleman will know—he seems to know something of the background—that the Government inherited a complex system of national insurance numbers, not to mention one of some difficulty. A significant number of national insurance numbers were then in circulation that ought not to have been. He will know that this is a UK-wide database and that it has not been easy to address that challenge because of the numbers involved. I am sure he will want to pay tribute to the work that my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions are doing in that regard, but I am not sure that suggesting at the Dispatch Box that it is time to address everyone who holds a national insurance number would necessarily help. I have significant faith in my colleagues in that Department to say that they will sort out the problems that they inherited, which have built up over decades.

Lady Hermon *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) *rose—*

Mr. Browne: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment, but I first give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is the only hon. Member present who has not yet intervened.

Mr. Dodds: I am grateful to the Minister for his patience in taking so many interventions. I should like to raise the issue of the officials in the Department for Work and Pensions. I note that provision is made in the amendments to authorise the relevant authority to charge fees to the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland. Clearly, a deal of extra work will be involved. What is the extent of the extra costs that might be involved? Where will the money come from to allow the chief electoral officer to cover those extra costs?

Mr. Browne: The answer to the second question is, of course, that the money will come from the Government. It will come from the taxpayer, through the Government, to the chief electoral officer. I am sure that no hon. Member will oppose that expenditure if it improves the honesty and accuracy of the democratic process in Northern Ireland. Given that the provision is a natural consequence of proposals that all parties have urged on the Government, I am certain that no one will complain about money having to be spent in this area of public expenditure, but at this stage I am unable to give the hon. Gentleman details about how much the proposal is likely to cost.

I seek to do two things in relation to planning and logistics for implementing the Bill. One of them is to meet the deadline of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 2003. Things will have to progress in parallel because of that, so I cannot wait until all the details are known exactly. However, the details are being worked out with the Department for Work and Pensions at present. My officials will be meeting DWP officials in Leeds tomorrow to discuss the issues.

Estimates will have to be made and I undertake to get in touch with the hon. Gentleman's party—if not the hon. Gentleman himself—about the progress of the implementation of the provisions. There will be further opportunities for him to raise the issues, and I shall be happy to give him up-to-date briefings on not only the implementation of the Bill but also its costs and logistical consequences.

I was referring to amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 6, which require a person applying to register in respect of an address in Northern Ireland to give his or her national insurance number, or to make a statement that they do not have one.

I think that the point made by the hon. Member for North Down arose from the fact that the Bill includes a provision to excuse people who cannot read or write from giving a signature. That was necessary because we realise that the Bill would require people to exercise a skill that not everyone has. However, that is not related to the completion of the form. As the hon. Lady knows, most such forms are completed by householders. They can also be completed by canvass. Canvassers from the chief electoral officer go to every house in Northern Ireland, so it is in order for another person to fill in the information for someone who wants to register.

As well as requiring national insurance numbers, the amendments will require an applicant to make a statement that he or she has been resident in Northern Ireland for the requisite three-month period before the date of their application. That provision reflects existing law in Northern Ireland, which requires the collection of such information. I shall return to that point later, but I should like to make some progress lest the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) suggest that I orchestrated interventions in order to keep the debate going.

Hon. Members will no doubt recall that I wrote to inform them that we intended to give the chief electoral officer the power by regulation to ask applicants to the register whether they were registered at another address in the UK. When drafting the amendments to allow for the use of national insurance numbers, I decided to include in primary legislation a requirement to declare multiple registration on applications for registration. The amendments thus require anyone applying to the register in respect of an address in Northern Ireland to state any other address in the United Kingdom in respect of which he or she is, or has applied to be, registered. Amendment No. 14, which I will discuss in more detail later, makes it an offence to provide false information pursuant to that requirement.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am the rotter who accused the Government of orchestrating the timetable in respect of the 7 o'clock vote so I had some hesitation about intervening, but my point is important.

Although there is special provision for the compilation of the register in Northern Ireland, with the requirement that people have to have been resident for three months, will the Minister confirm that the law that applies throughout the kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will not be diluted in any way? The fact that a

[Andrew Mackinlay]

person is resident is not covered by statute—unfortunately; it is, in effect, self-defined. I hope that the Minister will not mind me using him as an example. He is a London resident, and will be voting in the London elections because he has declared himself a resident.

To some extent, that point also applies in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister confirm that the three months applies to occupancy and that people will not have to stay at the address night after night? That would be absurd and a large number of people would be disqualified.

5.30 pm

Mr. Browne: It is for the very reason that my hon. Friend is, in his own words, that rotter that I was pleased to give way to him and will give way again. No doubt he realises that our time has been properly occupied by the issues raised and my explanation of the situation. Indeed, nothing has been raised so far that did not merit discussion.

My hon. Friend wants an assurance that the Bill will not outlaw multiple registrations. The Government have consistently resisted that proposal, which attracted significant support among Opposition parties, for the reason that my hon. Friend brings to our attention. The Government do not intend to restrict those who qualify to vote in Northern Ireland in ways other than those that apply to the rest of the UK or which go beyond restrictions set out in current law, although residency in Northern Ireland is different in that it has one or two other qualifications.

My hon. Friend rightly recognises that I have exercised the opportunity to be registered as a voter in my constituency in Scotland where I live and in London. That right will also be available to Northern Ireland voters. The Bill will in no way restrict that. However, because of concern about the possible abuse of multiple registration in Northern Ireland, it will help to identify those people who have registered in more than one place. If there is evidence to suggest that that right is being abused, it can be more accurately investigated against a reduced database of people who are registered in more than one place. The requirement to provide that information is reinforced by the fact that it will be an offence to provide false information or not to provide the information requested.

Mr. Swire: Given that an increasing number of people in Northern Ireland travel to and work in the Republic, and in some cases live there for part of the time, what discussions is the Minister having with the Government of the Republic on such matters?

Mr. Browne: None. Discussions with that Government are not relevant to what we are trying to achieve. It is of no interest to me as the Minister with responsibility for electoral law in Northern Ireland whether people qualify to vote elsewhere. Indeed, some European Union residents qualify to vote in certain elections in the UK and in parliamentary elections in other parts of Europe. Citizens of the Republic will be no different. Knowing whether anyone is registered to vote there and in Northern Ireland is not relevant to what we are trying to achieve. We have our own law, which we have to ensure is observed and properly policed. That is what the Bill helps to do.

Lady Hermon: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way once again. In another place, Lord Williams of Mostyn referred to the three-month period, which has now been included in the Bill. He said:

> "The applicant will also be required to make a statement that he or she has been resident in Northern Ireland for the requisite three-month period before the date of application."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 February 2002; Vol. 631, c. 1254.]

Will the Minister confirm whether that residential requirement has now been introduced in Northern Ireland? If so, that will have implications for our European Union obligations and our human rights obligations.

Mr. Browne: I respond to that question in the certain knowledge that my answer will encourage a contribution from the hon. Lady that will illuminate the debate. This is not a new provision. It is already a requirement in order to vote in Northern Ireland and has been for some time. I am sure that before the debate has finished I will have the precise reference for the hon. Lady, although I cannot supply it off the top of my head.

In order to register to vote in Northern Ireland, a person has to have that three-month residence. That may partly address the question implied by the previous intervention. We seek not to change the law, but merely to codify it. We intend to codify it in a way and for a reason that I shall discuss in a moment—we want to make it accessible. We are not enacting a new provision.

The question whether the existing provision creates challenges and consequences in relation to compliance with European Union treaties or human rights legislation could be debated at some length. However, perhaps the hon. Lady will allow me to move on. I have been on my feet for more than an hour and it would be helpful if I were to conclude my remarks and give hon. Members the opportunity to make their contributions. At the conclusion of those contributions, I will seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and endeavour to respond to them.

By including in the Bill the requirements about residence for three months in Northern Ireland and about registration as an elector at a different address, together with the requirements about the national insurance number, signature and date of birth, all the distinctly Northern Ireland features of the registration process can be found in the same place.

Amendment No. 4 inserts a new subsection (5A) into section 10A of the Representation of the People Act 1983. It adds to the provisions contained in that section regarding the circumstances in which the chief electoral officer is to remove a person's name from the electoral register.

A person's name will be removed from the register in respect of any address if they return an application for registration in respect of that address without any of the information that they are required to provide by the Bill.

Therefore, a person's name will be removed if their application does not contain the signature of the person to whom the application relates—subject to the provision in the Bill for those who are unable to append their signature—or is without the date of birth of such person,

or their national insurance number, or a statement that they do not have one. A person's name will also be removed if they fail to make a statement that they have been resident in Northern Ireland for the requisite three-month period before the date of their application.

Paragraph (b) provides for the removal of a person's name from the register where the chief electoral officer determines that he is not satisfied with the information provided—for example, because he believes that it is false. All of that is subject to the existing appeal procedure, which allows people to have recourse to the court.

Lady Hermon *rose—*

Mr. Browne: I will give way, hopefully for the last time, to the hon. Lady.

Lady Hermon: That was said so graciously that it invites me to intervene once again. The Minister should reflect for a moment on what he has just said, which was that the applicant would have to make a statement that they have been resident for the preceding three months. Will he again confirm, because the amended Bill is not clear, that the chief electoral officer can dispense with the requirement that the voter has to make the statement in cases of incapacity or inability to read?

Mr. Browne: Yes. The three-month residence requirement has been included in legislation since at least 1949. I shall endeavour before this debate is concluded to try to find out the exact piece that introduced it. I understand that the intention behind the requirement is to prevent any distortion of a genuine poll of Northern Ireland opinion by large numbers of people from outside Northern Ireland registering in anticipation of an election.

Amendments Nos. 3 and 5 are essentially consequential.

Amendment No. 9 amends section 6(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1985, which specifies requirements where an elector applies for an absent vote at elections for an indefinite period. An application can be granted only if it states the applicant's national insurance number or that the applicant does not have one, and if the chief electoral officer is satisfied that the national insurance number or statement on the application corresponds with the number or statement which the applicant gave on application for registration, which is of course subject to the chief electoral officer's checking and may have been checked by other provisions in the Bill.

Amendment No. 11 makes a similar amendment to section 7(1) of the 1985 Act in relation to applications for an absent vote at a particular parliamentary election. So, those two provisions deal with those who have, as it were, standing absent votes, and those who seek to get an absent vote for a particular parliamentary election.

Amendment No. 13 inserts a new clause and amends schedule 2 to the Representation of the People Act 1983, which deals with provisions that may be in regulations on registration. The amendment provides for the disclosure by the authority responsible for national insurance numbers—currently the Department for Work and Pensions—to the chief electoral officer, following a request by him, of the national insurance number recorded in respect of a specified individual, or of the fact that the specified individual is not recorded as having a national insurance number.

The chief electoral officer will also be able to cross-check other information with the Department for Work and Pensions, which will be able to disclose any name or former name of an individual, his or her date of birth, sex and address. We have already debated that in some detail in the context of an intervention. Amendment No. 13 also authorises the authority to which the chief electoral officer makes his requests to charge fees to cover the expenses of complying with such requests. Again in response to an intervention, I have expanded on that.

Amendment No. 14 makes it an offence to provide false information pursuant to any requirement imposed by the amendments to legislation made by the Bill on an application for registration as an elector in Northern Ireland. It will therefore be an offence for a person to provide a false signature, date of birth or national insurance number, or false information on whether he or she has been resident in Northern Ireland for three months prior to registration, or to fail to state any other address in the UK in respect of which he or she is, or intends to be, registered.

Quite simply, that means that false information given in response to the requirements imposed by the Bill are dealt with in an offence created by the Bill. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that, in the confusing world of electoral legislation, such clarity is to be welcomed. A person found guilty of the offence of providing false information on registration shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or to both. The scale of penalties occupied us periodically in Committee. I argue that these penalties are proportionate to offences that are determined by primary legislation.

Mr. Wilshire: While listening to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the penalties that will be imposed, I find myself wondering why he does not pursue the example of driving licences. One cannot only be fined or sent to prison for driving offences, but one can have one's licence taken away. Would it not be appropriate to add to the list of penalties a disqualification from voting for a decent length of time, as the person will clearly have fraudulently tried to get himself on the register?

5.45 pm

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman gives an example of a disproportionate penalty. The whole purpose of the Bill is to ensure that people vote, but vote appropriately—that they do not steal the votes of others, or pretend to be other people, whether real or invented, to exercise a vote. Principally, the Bill is designed to prevent personation or vote stealing. Nothing in it is designed to prevent people from exercising their legitimate right to vote. Since the franchise in the UK was extended, Governments have consistently been careful to restrict the type of penalty that the hon. Gentleman presses on me—that is, disqualification from voting—to comparatively few people. I welcome the fact that those restrictions are reconsidered periodically: we seek a universal franchise.

I should have thought that a potential term of imprisonment for up to six months, or fine not exceeding level 5, which I think is some thousands of pounds—

Mr. Swire: £5,000.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that helpful information. I regard £5,000 as a proportionate

[Mr. Browne]

penalty for such offences. If he checks the Committee *Hansard*, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) will see that that is the level of penalty for offences against electoral law that was urged on me on more than one occasion by the Opposition in Committee, and during remaining stages in the House of Commons.

Amendment No. 15 amends the long title to include a reference to national insurance numbers as one of the pieces of information that must be supplied to the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland by a person seeking registration. Amendment No. 16 amends the long title to include a reference to the fact that a person will be required to supply, on application to the register, information relating to their period of residence in Northern Ireland and addresses in respect of which they are or have applied to be registered. Those amendments are necessary to ensure that the provisions are within the scope of the Bill. The three-month period of residence is not a new provision.

I hope that the House will accept the amendments as a positive response to the arguments and concerns articulated by hon. Members of both Houses. I thank all the hon. Members who have taken part in the debates at various stages of the Bill's passage. I know that they are all as keen as I am to ensure that we tackle successfully the problem of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. They are all entitled to claim some credit for the provisions that the Government have now presented to the House, as well as for other parts of the Bill that have been produced in response to their contributions. I hope that hon. Members will not challenge each other about entitlement to claim the credit for the provisions: they urged them on me as a collective, so I suggest that they take collective credit.

The Bill will tackle electoral fraud in Northern Ireland successfully by countering electoral abuse directly and at every stage of the electoral process. I do not believe that the measures to prevent electoral fraud put unnecessary obstacles in the path of genuine voters, but the Government will require the assistance of all Opposition parties to help the electorate of Northern Ireland to understand the provisions and to make them work properly, so that obstacles are not inadvertently placed in the way of genuine voters. Because they will make the exercise of democracy more true in Northern Ireland, I trust that the provisions will be acceptable to the people there.

The Bill is the result of extensive consultation and it responds to calls from within Northern Ireland itself and from parties across the political spectrum. That consultation has continued during the Bill's passage through both Houses. We have examined all the issues raised with an open mind and given careful consideration to whether suggested amendments would assist our efforts to combat fraud and improve the electoral system in Northern Ireland. Particularly on the issues of the use of national insurance numbers in the electoral process and a requirement to declare multiple registration, we have been able to deliver appropriate changes to the Bill during its passage through the Lords. I hope that where issues and concerns have been raised we have been able to offer reassurance that they are being addressed, albeit not necessarily by legislation.

Mr. Blunt: For the convenience of the House, I will not take as long as the Minister which, of course, would be impossible because he took up more than half the time for debate; we congratulate him on his marathon effort.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Get on with it.

Mr. Blunt: As a member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we have just witnessed the Minister lengthily turning full circle. The Minister has not performed a U-turn; he has spent four years describing a circle, finally arriving this evening at the position he initially took when signing off and supporting the Select Committee report of 11 March 1998. It is pertinent to examine the Minister's role in that Committee. He was sceptical when questioning Mr. Pat Bradley, the chief electoral officer. I shall give the House a flavour of the Minister's contributions to provide a perspective on where he stood in the first place.

On page nine of Mr. Bradley's evidence on 5 November 1997, the Minister said:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bradley. My questions are designed to see if you can assist us in quantifying the extent of the problem in the generality and, if you can, in relation to the different types of electoral abuse that you identify in your memorandum. Have you made any attempt to quantify the extent of this problem in the generality of your extensive experience of electoral practice in Northern Ireland?"

Passing over Mr. Bradley's response for the sake of time, suffice it to say that it did not satisfy the Minister, who said:

"With respect, Mr. Bradley, you are not answering my question. What I am interested in finding out from you is have you either yourself—since you seem to do a lot of this yourself—or your staff actually counted the instances where you have a question mark about what is going on or where there is evidence to suggest there is electoral malpractice?"

Mr. Bradley said:

"If you refer back to my report—"

The Minister interrupted:

"I will refer to your report because it is from your report that I see an absence of statistics. On page 1 of your report, paragraph 2.3, headed "Multiple registration", the second sentence says: 'There have been allegations of deliberately false multiple registrations in some constituencies as part of a planned electoral abuse campaign.' Presumably, Mr Bradley, if those allegations were made to your office you should know how many of them there were. Do you have the information to say how many such allegations were made?"

Mr. Bradley replied:

"Unfortunately, I have heard many allegations but no specific facts were given to me."

The Minister said:

"I am sorry, Mr. Bradley, I am not trying to be difficult here. I just want to know if you have the information that would allow this Committee to get at numbers. Do you actually count the number of such allegations and could you give this Committee information about the numbers of those allegations by reference to constituencies?"

Mr. Bradley was unable to satisfy the Minister.

Mr. Browne: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House the point?

Mr. Blunt: I am making a point about the Minister's attitude to the legislation and his proper scepticism about

allegations of electoral abuse in Northern Ireland when a member of the Select Committee. Having sat through the taking of evidence, he agreed a report, a central requirement of which was to tidy up the register to ensure that it was clean and that the issue of absent vote fraud was addressed. We have had to go through agonising proceedings, both in Committee and on Third Reading, and it is only now that Government amendments have been introduced in the House of Lords to put into effect what the Minister as a Back-Bench Member signed up to more than four years ago; finally, we are going to get satisfactory legislation on to the statute book. The Minister took a considerable time to put the case for the amendments; perhaps he thought it would be less painful to take up half our debate with his circumlocution than have us point out that case to him.

Lady Hermon: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman giving way. It did not go unnoticed that I delayed the Minister considerably this afternoon, but I was genuinely concerned that the Lords amendments did not tie in with the Bill or appear to be compatible with the measure which we debated both in the House and in the Committee on which the hon. Gentleman served. Does he accept that during those four years data protection legislation has been a severe impediment to the disclosure of information on, for example, national insurance numbers?

Mr. Blunt: I certainly would not criticise the hon. Lady for intervening on the Minister, who chose to accept her interventions. She is in no way responsible for the length of his speech. As for the detail of the data protection legislation, the position has not changed during the four years in which the Government have been considering the measure. The Government faced the same problem when they received the report as they do now when proposing their solution.

Mr. Swire: Does my hon. Friend agree that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was probably closer to the truth in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* last year entitled "Sinn Fein is accused of massive vote fraud". He said:

"There is no doubt Sinn Fein is involved in electoral fraud on a massive scale."

He went on to say that Sinn Fein

"have been working on it for years and Government have not been treating the issue seriously."

Mr. Blunt: I agree. That criticism has been made consistently, particularly by the Opposition, since Second Reading on 10 July last year. The one criticism that could be made of the Government is their lack of speed in introducing legislation. I hope that the Minister accepts that argument.

Mr. Browne: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that before 1997 it did not occur to the previous Government that such provisions could have helped?

Mr. Blunt: The Government are responding to a Select Committee report published on 11 March 1998; that Committee was formed under the Labour Government, in a Parliament when the Minister first served as an MP, as did I. The Government are to be commended for introducing legislation in response to a Select Committee report to deal with a particular problem in Northern Ireland. However, the Minister cannot get away with suggesting that no attempt was made to deal with electoral fraud during the previous 18 years; he knows that a significant number of pieces of legislation attempted to address different areas of electoral fraud. The battle will not be fought and won with the Bill; it may well be that further problems arise if people who wish to defraud the system can find a way round the legislation that we pass. It will then be up to us, either in this Parliament or in future Parliaments, to attempt to address that electoral fraud; the situation is not static.

I should like to draw the attention of the House to two issues in light of the Select Committee report. In introducing the Lords amendments, the Minister suggested that the use of national insurance numbers was mainly to address absent votes. I disagree; we need to go back to first principles. I agree with paragraph 23 of the Select Committee report, to which he signed up, which states:

"An accurate Register is vital. Without a trustworthy Register, there can be no secure confidence in the electoral system. At present, it is not absolutely clear how reliable the Register is. We do not share the confidence of the Interim Review Report that 'while there may be some scope for some minor adjustments in the current system for the registration of electors in Northern Ireland, in actual terms the accuracy of the Register is not seriously in question.'

On the contrary, in our view the evidence indicates that there may be a serious level of multiple registration, at least in some parts of Northern Ireland."

That is why the inclusion of national insurance numbers and multiple registration were at the centre of what the Opposition were seeking to achieve if the proposed legislation were to be satisfactory to take on electoral fraud in the most effective way. It would be churlish of us not to welcome the fact that in another place our objectives have been achieved.

6 pm

The Minister has attempted to present to the House that facing the Government was the agonising question of appraisal of the use of national insurance numbers. A nice and simple solution, as it appeared, has been discovered to have flaws that the Minister and the Government have gradually been able to address. The fact that NI numbers were not fool-proof was known by the Committee when it wrote the report in 1998. Paragraph 56 reads:

"No single piece of information is going to provide an absolute guarantee against fraud, but the harder it becomes to falsify proof of identity the more the balance of effort and gain turns away from favouring vote cheats. Useful identifiers which might be included in applications to register as a voter are the date of birth . . . and the voter's national insurance number. Neither of these pieces of information is completely secure, particularly against organised vote theft, but their use would deter opportunistic fraud."

It is—*[Interruption.]* The Minister says from a sedentary position that that is a different point. It is not. It is vital that the register is as clean and reliable as it can be. If there are two numeric identifiers—for example, date of birth and the national insurance number—to be set against the name of a registered voter, there would be a geometrically increased reliability provided by the computer checking that could be made of the register.

Mr. Browne: With respect, the hon. Gentleman is making a different point. There is no argument that using

[Mr. Browne]

different pieces of information about individuals improves the prospect of being able to identify them accurately. Equally, there is no question that the limitations imposed by the state of the national insurance database posed problems. The question is how those problems can be addressed in a way that allows that database to be used as one of the identifiers. That is the point that I was making. If the hon. Gentleman did not understand it then, perhaps he might understand it now.

Mr. Blunt: The Minister is splitting hairs. He made it clear in his introductory remarks that there appeared to be a nice and simple solution and that it seemed that there were no problems with it. He failed to say that there was awareness of the problems in 1998. National insurance numbers are not entirely fool-proof but, in conjunction with date of birth, they provide an opportunity to cross-reference and cross-check data against the elector. The Bill will give the chief electoral officer the opportunity to ensure that the register will be as robust as it reasonably can be in current circumstances.

Perhaps the Minister's claims disguise the reality. Parliament owes a debt to my noble Friend Lord Glentoran, who leads for the Conservative party in another place, and to the Minister's noble Friend, Lord Williams of Mostyn, for the way in which they considered the Bill. I believe that there was joint determination that the other Departments that hold national insurance numbers should not be allowed to throw bureaucratic hurdles in the way of the proper objective to make the register as robust as possible, and that absent vote fraud should be made as difficult as possible.

I recognise Lord Williams's efforts and the contribution that presumably the Minister will have made within the Department. He failed to succeed during earlier consideration in this place but we know that at the last gasp, perhaps with there being the opportunity of having the measure imposed upon the Government in another place, it has been possible to convince others in the government machine outside the Northern Ireland Office of the necessity of giving access to national insurance numbers so that they might be checked.

It is rather a pity that the bureau ratic battle was not won rather earlier. If that had beer achieved, it would not be necessary for this debate to take place, given the Minister's rather inelegant rotation of position. Better late than never. The Opposition thoroughly welcome the amendments.

As for multiple registration, the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) should be cautioned on accepting the Minister's undertaking that he will be in touch, and if not with him, with a member of his party. The Minister gave a similar undertaking about consultation in Committee on multiple registration. He was gracious enough to accept that the consultation was not entirely flawless when we came to Report. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is grumbling in his place. I remind the House that he promised to consult all the parties involved in multiple registration. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and I heard nothing from him about that consultation. He was gracious enough to apologise to me at an earlier stage of our proceedings—I am grateful that he is nodding in agreement.

In Committee, we discussed whether multiple registration should be included in primary legislation. I introduced new clause 8 in Committee, which would have included the provision in the Bill. There would have been a requirement for multiple registrations to be recorded. The Minister said in Committee that there were attempts to outlaw multiple registration. That was the position in the amendments set out in the name of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). However, they were not supported by the official Opposition. That might have been the implication behind the introduction of the proposed legislation that we are considering. It was in response to the assurances that we would achieve the objectives that we sought that I withdrew new clause 8 in Committee.

I was delighted that we would achieve the objective by regulation. That would have been satisfactory to an extent, but we would have much preferred the provision to appear in the Bill. However, the requirement has been introduced in another place to register multiple addresses in the Bill. That is enormously to be welcomed.

We have achieved all but limited aspects of the substantive amendments tabled in Committee. One of them was a timetable to ensure that photographic identification would be in place for the Assembly elections in 2003. I understand from the Minister when he introduced the amendments that it is still the Government's intention to have that system up and running for the elections. In Committee I wanted to place that as a duty on the Government by having it written into the Bill, to ensure that there was no element of discretion. A little more than a year away from the Assembly elections, the Minister is telling the House that it is still his intention to have the system in place. If that is achieved, it will be a source of satisfaction.

The Bill, as amended by the House of Lords, significantly advances the battle against electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. The Lords amendments are essential to make the Bill as robust as possible and have hugely added to its strength. Her Majesty's Opposition therefore welcome them and will, of course, support them.

Mr. McGrady: In view of the time, I shall be brief. We welcome the Bill's progress. Electoral fraud in Northern Ireland is an endemic problem. As I said on Second Reading, it is not just a casual or an individual event; it is a concerted, planned campaign in a paramilitary style, carried out by virtually paramilitary organisations.

I repeat that electoral fraud has changed some of the representation of the people to the House, and it could change the direction of politics in Northern Ireland as a whole. That is why the true voice of democracy is so important in Northern Ireland, more so than anywhere else, particularly in these times of change, transition and sensitivity. However long it has taken, we warmly welcome the fact that the Bill will shortly become law.

It bothers me not how the conversion took place—whether it was divine intervention, the road to Damascus, or the eloquence, persuasiveness and logic of members of the Committee that changed the Government's mind. I suspect that the Minister was an ardent adherent of his earlier comments and attitudes to the Select Committee, but was implementing orders to say that the introduction of national insurance numbers as a means of identification was far too complex. I do not think that he ever believed that. I certainly did not believe what he was saying, and I suspect that he did not believe it, either.

We welcome the compulsory registration of multiple registration, where someone is registered elsewhere. That is vital in the context of Northern Ireland. There is also the problem of multiple occupation. In the electoral register of Northern Ireland, there are instances of 10, 12 or 14 people being registered from a two-bedroom flat. That is an interesting concept in terms of human dynamics and it has an adverse impact on election results.

In my brief intervention, I asked about amendment No. 4 to section 5A, concerning the discretion of the registration officer and how the applicant for registration would be assisted if he disputed the registration officer's findings. I referred to electoral courts, but that is much too lofty an authority. What I meant was the hearings of the registration officer, which usually take place in December or January. That should be where the refused applicant is given an opportunity to rebut a decision. After all, it will sometimes be a subjective decision by the registration officer. That should be the setting for an appeal to take place, without prejudice to the person's legal right to a much more formal process in a court of law.

I was interested in the rather short answer that the Minister gave the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) about funding, logistics and personnel. I am deeply concerned about those matters, but the Minister touched on them only briefly. He may be able to elaborate in his winding-up speech, if time permits. If the new provisions are to be fully and properly implemented, it is essential that there should be a greater number of personnel, both in the registration offices and particularly in the polling stations on the day of the poll.

It is equally important that personnel be of the calibre and character to understand their duties and to be determined to enforce them. We can legislate all we like, and there can be rules and regulations regarding polling stations, but if the personnel in the polling stations are not confident of back-up in implementing them, all our work will come to naught. I am anxious that, by direction, rule or regulation, personnel should be properly briefed.

6.15 pm

I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) about the Minister's assurance this evening that the non-photographic identification of a voter at a polling station would be withdrawn by 1 May 2003. That is an ambitious programme for the Minister at this rather late stage of the process. I am somewhat comforted by his assurance, however. Perhaps he can indicate in his winding-up speech or in writing whether he has any further thoughts concerning the matters about which he was going to communicate with members of the Select Committee regarding driving licences—the photographic part only being available as a means of identification, quite satisfactorily—and regarding what progress has been made in respect of the photo-identity of the elderly citizen through the Translink photographic transport pass. As the process is entirely voluntary, those would help to determine how many people do not have any means of photo-identity and would greatly reduce the number who need to be serviced.

I know that many other hon. Members, especially from Northern Ireland, want to speak, and I would like to hear from them. I must tell the Minister, however, that we are disappointed—in some respects severely disappointed—by the shortfalls in the Bill and the Lords amendments.

One of the most difficult aspects of voting in Northern Ireland is intimidation on the day at the polling station. We had sought by statute or by regulation the creation of a cordon sanitaire around a polling station, so that political party activists could not act in an intimidatory fashion towards the voter. That has not been taken on board.

I am also deeply disappointed that responsibility for preventing fraud at the polling station still resides primarily with the voluntary party official known as the polling clerk, with all the legal responsibilities and liabilities that he may incur. It is probably the only instance in which a policeman can observe a crime being committed without having the power to intervene to prevent it. Again, that did not come within the compass of the Bill.

Finally, it may be a hoary old chestnut to many in the House, but much of the tension, impersonation and wrongdoing in elections in Northern Ireland could have been ameliorated considerably if the Government had had the courage to introduce that form of election which pertains in every other election in Northern Ireland except elections to the House. I refer to proportional representation. Proportional representation in Northern Ireland applies to European elections, local government elections and Assembly elections. The only elections to which it does not apply are those to the House.

I know the arguments that are used, but I find them rather light arguments, and sometimes spurious. The brutal fact is that by its nature, proportional representation would take much of the sectarian bigotry, hatred and attitudes out of the campaign and would reflect the real wishes of the electorate in Northern Ireland much better than the first-past-the-post system. That system means that if a candidate gets half a dozen votes more than their opponent as a result of fraud or personation, they can win the day. In practical terms, that could not happen under proportional representation.

None the less, I do not want to look a gift-horse in the mouth. On behalf of my party and constituents, I welcome very much this valiant attempt to correct the imperfections—to put it politely—of our electoral system, and to seek in practical terms to prevent fraud and thereby do away with a lot of the intimidation that the current system engenders.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): In a debate lasting two hours and 23 minutes, I note that the Minister took one hour and 13 minutes to make his speech and respond to the other points that were made. In other words, just over half the time was devoted to the Minister's retraction of the position that he has so assiduously argued at every stage of the Bill's passage until today.

It is understandable that the Minister wanted to take some time to explain how this 11th-hour enlightenment came upon him, although the points that he made were pretty clear to hon. Members in all parts of the House—except those whipped by the Government. I welcome his honesty in implying acceptance that the Government may have been wrong to show such a degree of inflexibility at earlier stages. Apropos of our debate on the programme motion, if time is squeezed towards the end of this debate because of the length of his speech, it will be another instance in which one is made more cautious about such motions. Fortunately, the Government did the right thing

[Lembit Öpik]

today, not least in the eyes of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), but I am a bit cautious about programme motions, so we will see how the time goes for this group of amendments and the remaining one.

Lady Hermon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I want to make two points. First, in fairness to the Minister, I took up a lot of his time with serious interventions. Secondly, last December, with regard to national insurance numbers, the Minister said:

"I am still in reflective mode".—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 320.]

The points made in Committee preoccupied him. I know that it took an awful long time to get him out of reflective mode, but he came out of it positively.

Lembit Öpik: I agree on both points. I am not condemning the Minister for the time that he took: it is a sign of strength, not weakness, to be willing to respond to interventions across the Floor of the House. It is to his credit that he did not waffle or waste our time with his responses. Furthermore, the hon. Lady's interventions were based on sound understanding of the issues and added value to the debate. I was suggesting only that the Minister and the Government are responsible for working out how much time is required, but I am not even condemning the Minister on that point: if we finish comfortably by 7 o'clock, no damage will have been done. I seek only to put down a marker, as what happens now will guide our future behaviour. However, we have had the debate on the programme motion, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I wish to turn to more substantive points about the amendments.

In view of the debate, the Minister's comments and the proceedings of Standing Committee D on 16 October 2001, all sides now finally agree that the proposal on national insurance numbers is sensible. That position has been firmly held throughout by all parties except the one in government; indeed, it seems that the Minister himself took the same view in his earlier incarnation as a Back Bencher. To the credit of the Government, they have now come round to a commonsense position that is agreed in all other parts of the House. The amendment is welcome, but it has come at the 11th hour. I seek the Minister's explicit reassurance on when he expects all the mechanics that are required to implement it to be in place. Evidently, next year's elections have a fixed date and we want the arrangements to be in place by that time.

As a wistful footnote to the remarks of the hon. Member for Reigate, I point out the changes could have been introduced earlier. In fairness to the Minister, he made the same point. We did not have to wait until 1997 or 1998 to consider the matter, but I accept that the Conservative Government made various efforts to try to close the loopholes that allowed electoral fraud to occur on the massive scale on which it has previously occurred in the Province.

Of course, we will not get certainty even with the introduction of the provisions on national insurance numbers. If people try hard enough, they will find a way through. We are playing a probabilities game, but if the amendment tightens up electoral fraud substantially and reduces it measurably in the Province—I shall return to that wider issue—it will be worth while.

It seems ironic that the process has required the upper House to talk sense into the Government. I want to make a couple of points about that process, as in some ways the most important lesson for the future is the degree of flexibility that the Government need to ensure that they do not again miss a trick on an issue such as the inclusion of national insurance numbers. I wonder what would have happened if they had been able to whip their vote in the upper House to maintain the Bill in unamended form. I am not saying that the Minister would necessarily have ignored the amendment, but circumstantially speaking, I am aware of the extreme measures that he took to justify the absence of any proposal for change on 16 October 2001.

The hon. Member for Reigate cited the comments made by the Minister in 1998. I suspect that one could argue, perhaps slightly tenuously, that the Data Protection Act 1998 made matters very different, but those changes occurred before October last year, when the Minister was scratching around to try to give the impression that what was being proposed could not be achieved. One of the examples that he gave to show why it would be unreasonable to include the national insurance number related to a childless French woman who was married to a Northern Ireland resident, did not work or claim benefits, but would be entitled to vote. Technically, such people may exist, but I can only conclude from the Minister's volte face that he now accepts that what happens in respect of such a small number of people will be acceptable collateral damage in order to close the loophole. I understand from his comments today—I refer mainly to those made in response to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon)—that such individuals would not be barred from voting by the arrangements that he outlined.

Mr. Browne: Can the hon. Gentleman work out the probability of somebody whose roots are in the Baltic states being educated in Northern Ireland and representing a Welsh constituency?

Lembit Öpik: As an aside, let me say that when I first applied for selection to represent Montgomeryshire, the Welsh Liberal Democrats held a sweepstake on who would be chosen. The odds against me were regarded as so large that they had to refund some money, because I had not been included on the list. So I accept that stranger things have happened. Perhaps I should also briefly cite the occasion when, somewhat erroneously, somebody said in a moment of rage that there were more Estonians than Etonians in the Cabinet. As the first Estonian to speak on the Floor of the House, I can claim credit for having bucked the statistics.

The Minister tried hard to justify why it would be unacceptable to introduce national insurance numbers as a kind of insurance policy against electoral fraud. All the details are there for hon. Members and the public to see in the record of the Standing Committee on 16 October, so I need not labour the point.

6.30 pm

I suggest that the benefit of being willing to listen to and accept such points at an earlier stage cannot be overstated. Two elements slowed down the process; we could have got here much faster. First, the Minister was apparently under an obligation not to give way on this point in the face of

insuperable, unarguable evidence from all sides that it was a desirable change that would make a considerable difference to the amount of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. He might have saved us time if he had taken a more circumspect approach, instead of committing himself as he did, thereafter—understandably—not being able to reverse that position until the Bill went to the upper House. Of course, this time the situation has been recovered and we are able to do the right thing now. However, on previous occasions—I shall not give a long list—the Government have been able to push legislation through, to its detriment.

My second point concerns consultation. The hon. Member for Reigate rightly cited an occasion on which neither he nor I had been consulted. The Minister gracefully apologised for that at the time, and has showed some contriteness today.

Mr. Blunt: Contrition.

Lembit Öpik: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the grammar lesson.

Consultation is absolutely vital in dealing with technically complicated matters relating to the Province. The Government have done well in consulting on many pieces of Northern Irish legislation—for example, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000—but this time I felt that Ministers were not necessarily listening to an appropriate degree.

Today's debate may hold lessons for the United Kingdom as a whole as regards electoral fraud. If there is a massive increase in the use of postal votes, we may want to assess what is working in the Province before considering implementing such changes on the mainland. Of course, that must be balanced by civil liberties, cost-benefit considerations and so forth. I put that down as a marker for future debates if it turns out that electoral fraud is prompted or stimulated by changes that we make to the electoral process.

Mr. Browne *indicated assent.*

Lembit Öpik: I see that the Minister has some sympathy with that point.

It is to the Government's credit that they have finally listened, although it has taken a long time for us to get here. I am confident that these changes will make a difference to the opportunity for organised electoral fraud to take place in the Province, although realistically it may still be possible. As the Minister said, we have conquered the summit of the debate together, but if the Government had listened to us a little more we might have found a rather faster route.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for telling us about the seriousness of this matter. Electoral fraud in Northern Ireland is a massive issue, and we should all be concerned about getting it right. Regardless of whether the Bill gets it absolutely right, it represents a considerable advance.

On using national insurance numbers for electoral registration, I feel a bit like Zebedee in "The Magic Roundabout". At one time I stood in one position, then I jumped to the opposite position, and now I am minded to jump back again—unless something dramatic happens in the next 20 minutes or so.

I, with my hon. Friend the Minister, was a member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs that produced the report. Although the Conservative spokesman pointed out that our report said that we should be under no illusion that the national insurance system was perfect, and difficulties were bound to be involved, I and other members of the Committee felt that it offered a unique and precise, if not perfect, set of identifiers, which, despite the qualifications detailed in the report, represented a good idea that could be propounded. I willingly took that position, at which point I was clearest about the issue.

When we listened to what my hon. Friend the Minister said in Standing Committee, it began to emerge that the matter was not as straightforward and clear as we had thought in the Select Committee, and to some extent those doubts remain. The balance may have moved back in the other direction, but the earlier remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) revealed areas of difficulty. The Minister's argument about the complexity and sophistication of the measures in the amendments, and the fact that other legislation potentially offers a court avenue, seems to tip the argument in favour of the measure that we initially suggested. Nevertheless, I am not as solidly and fully convinced of that as I was when the Select Committee produced the report, because genuine doubts have been sown. I discussed them in Standing Committee, and they are still there.

We will not tackle the problem of electoral registration in Northern Ireland until we tackle it for the whole of the United Kingdom. We must do that by developing a method that is as watertight as we can achieve under a new technology—that is, by using identity cards in the process of electoral registration. We have not yet reached that stage. We cannot do it in this provision for Northern Ireland, so we are making the best guess that we can in the circumstances by finally accepting that national insurance numbers, in addition to the other measures in the Bill, will order matters as well as possible—although nothing is absolutely certain, and there may be difficulties in the courts.

Another major issue is multiple registration. I remain committed to the view that that should not take place. The only concept worthy of picking up from the poll tax is that there could be registration at one sole or main place of residence. Rolling registers should enable us to develop to a position whereby a person is mainly resident in one area, in which they exercise their franchise. Again, that cannot simply be added to this provision for Northern Ireland. Indeed, Northern Ireland raises problems as regards extending registration of a single nature throughout the rest of Britain, because it has a three-month registration period. That is probably necessary so that areas are not manipulated and flooded by people deliberately moving in from the Republic of Ireland to distort a particular electoral result. As long as there is a three-month waiting period in Northern Ireland, and we are trying to fix a system with Britain, it will not be possible to have single registration provisions. We shall have to crack that problem in future.

The rolling electoral register has exacerbated the problem because as soon as people move elsewhere in the United Kingdom, they can register in the place that should

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

be their sole or main place of registration. If they move from Britain to Northern Ireland, they will have to wait three months before registering there. That will hold matters up. It will not be easy simply to move registration from one area to another.

Although I have some principled proposals that, I believe, would improve electoral registration for the whole United Kingdom and be especially beneficial in Northern Ireland, where there are considerable problems, the measure is welcome. I believe that we have got it about right.

Lady Hermon: I shall keep my remarks brief because I have intervened several times. I am conscious that other hon. Members, and not only those with Northern Ireland constituencies, want to contribute.

The Bill is infinitely better than the version that first saw the light of day. Including national insurance numbers as well as signatures and dates of birth will reduce the opportunities for electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. That must be welcomed. I pay tribute to those in the Northern Ireland Office and those who drafted the amendments on such a technical aspect of law. They have done an excellent job.

When I entered the Chamber this afternoon, I had two main reservations. First, hon. Members know that the original Bill made a specific dispensation for those who are incapacitated or unable to read. They are not required to provide a signature. The amendments require national insurance numbers or a statement that a person does not have one, and a statement about residence. It was unclear whether the voter had to make those statements. The Bill and the amendments do not provide a dispensation equivalent to that for providing a signature.

My anxiety deepened when I read the debate in the other place on 25 February 2002. Lord Williams of Mostyn made matters clear. He said:

"Amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 6 will require a person applying to be registered in respect of a Northern Ireland address to give a national insurance number, or to make a statement that he does not have such a number. The applicant will also be required to make a statement that he or she has been resident in Northern Ireland for the requisite three-month period before the date of application, and to state any other address".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 February 2002; Vol. 631, c. 1254.]

Suffice it to say that I was worried about the lack of an exemption for people who are incapacitated or unable to read and had to make a statement about residence or their national insurance numbers. The Minister's comments were designed to be useful and helpful, and he clarified the matter. He said that the statement does not necessarily have to be made by the elector. The amendments do not make that clear, and I greatly appreciate the Minister's clarification.

That leaves the three-month residence requirement. The Minister provided some insight and said that the requirement has existed since 1949. If he has been able to find the relevant legislation, it is doubtless an old Stormont measure.

Mr. Barnes: The provision is contained in Representation of the People Acts that are passed by Parliament, not Stormont.

6.45 pm

Lady Hermon: I appreciate that intervention. It is helpful to know that it is not Stormont, but United Kingdom legislation. That makes matters more interesting because 1949 pre-dates our obligations under the European convention on human rights and the 1957 EEC treaty. I want to consider both measures because the Minister should tackle both if possible.

The first protocol and article 3 of the convention on human rights have been incorporated into the Human Rights Act 1998, but would have been part of our legislation since we ratified the convention in 1953. Article 3 obliges the high contracting parties, including the United Kingdom,

"to undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature."

It does not state: "the opinion of the people resident for three months in the choice of the legislature."

My anxiety is underlined by the fact that under the 1957 EEC treaty, article 48 guarantees the free movement of workers from one member state to another. I am sure that the Minister knows that the High Court ruled in the landmark case of Van Duyn *v.* the Home Office several years ago that article 48, especially the second and third paragraphs, were directly effective in the United Kingdom. They give workers from member states, including the Republic of Ireland, the right to move freely from one member state to another.

After the treaty, the important Council regulation 1612 was introduced in 1968. It guarantees to workers who move from one member state to another the same social and tax advantages as the workers of the host member state. Given that the three-month residence requirement has existed since 1949, the Minister must deal with its compatibility with our obligations under the European convention on human rights and especially EU legislation.

Will the Minister explain the reason for the two definitions of the Representation of the People Act 1983? Clause 1 states:

"The Representation of the People Act 1983 . . . (in this Act referred to as 'the 1983 Act')".

Clause 7 repeats that by stating:

"In this Act, 'the 1983 Act' means the Representation of the People Act 1983".

That is superfluous. A definition of the principal Act would have been better; it is not defined at all. I rest my case, and look forward to the Minister's replies.

Mr. Wilshire: Unlike the Liberal Democrat spokesman, who spoke as a contributor from the minor parties, I have no complaints about the Minister's opening speech. He was helpful, patient and did his best to answer a range of important and genuine queries that hon. Members from all parties raised.

Lembit Öpik: I went to some lengths to stress that I did not condemn the Minister for the length of his speech; I was making a point about the programme motion.

Mr. Wilshire: It did not sound like that at the time; it sounded like a criticism, which prods me to say that I am not criticising. However, the spokesman for the minor parties is right that the debate tells us much about the

stupidity of the programme motion. After a sensible debate in which the Minister, quite rightly, took up a lot of time, we are about to run out of time on the first group of amendments. Two of my hon. Friends still want to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which means that there will not be the slightest chance of the Minister being able to respond fully and properly to the additional points being made, let alone to start any sort of a debate on the second group of amendments, unless people can now be persuaded to shut up. I am sure that that is what the Government would like, so that we cannot demonstrate the futility of yet another programme motion curtailing debate in the House and curtailing our opportunities to press the Minister to explain the Government's priorities.

That said, it would be wrong of me to say other than that I, like everyone else, welcome a change of heart when it is on offer. Heaven only knows, it is rare enough for any Government, let alone this one, to change their mind. We ought all, therefore, to put on record that we appreciate that. Exactly what has led the Minister to this is private grief on which I do not wish to intrude. I just want to thank him.

I want to say one or two things about the Minister's comments at the beginning of the debate. Those comments are relevant, because we had an exchange of views about why the chief electoral officer had changed his mind. I accept that the Minister does not know those reasons; he was very honest about that, for which I am grateful. We ought to know the reasons, however, because if we are to make a fair, rational judgment about these matters, we need to know what the chief electoral officer has now concluded. I hope that he has not simply changed his mind because the Government told him to. That would never be a justification.

Mr. Browne *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister shakes his head, and I am glad, because that suggests that that is not what happened. If the Minister is certain that the chief electorial officer has not changed his mind because of Government pressure, he must have some reason for that certainty—he must know what the reason was. If the Minister rules out one reason, he must have some evidence on which to shake his head and say no. I urge him to go back to the chief electoral officer after this debate to ask him the reason, and to write to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) with the answer—or place a copy of the letter or statement in the Library—so that we can see it.

Mr. Browne *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister is again shaking his head. If he would like to intervene to say why he is not prepared to do that, the House would be grateful. The Minister does not want to tell us why he is not prepared to get the answer to a question. That is typical of a Government who do not like to answer questions if it does not suit their purpose. That is entirely wrong.

Another comment that the Minister made, but did not pursue as much as I would have liked, was that all the parties in the House supported his change of heart. That is good as far as it goes, but he then went on to say that he was unable to tell us what Sinn Fein-IRA thought about the proposal, although he had a general sense that they were not much in favour of it when it was originally published. It is crucial that the House should know what the agents of terror think about our attempts to improve democracy in Northern Ireland. Not only are they prepared to ignore the wishes of their constituents in refusing to take their seats here, but if they are against this attempt to clamp down on fraud, we are entitled to assume that they welcome fraud. That would certainly seem to be the case. It is, therefore, remiss of the Minister not to have made any effort to discover what Sinn Fein-IRA really think, because we need to know.

Mr. Swire: Is my hon. Friend aware of what Baroness Park said recently in the other place? She quoted the following statement from Sinn Fein:

> "Sinn Fein believes that there is a compelling and logical argument to ensure that the electorate has the maximum freedom to exercise their vote as freely as possible."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 463.]

What does my hon. Friend deduce from that?

Mr. Wilshire: I deduce that I am glad someone has taken the trouble to think about this, and to say something about it, unlike the Minister, who clearly has not made any such effort.

Mr. Browne: I am reluctant to take up any more time in this debate, but I think that the hon. Gentleman is inadvertently misrepresenting my position. Sinn Fein was, of course, consulted on these matters, as were all parties. The quotation that the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) referred to in the other place came from the early paragraphs of its response to the consultation process, which is available for anybody to read. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's other point, I merely pointed out that I had not had a response from Sinn Fein on the point that he raised. I did not say that I did not seek a response, but that I had not had one.

Mr. Wilshire: If I misrepresented the Minister, of course I apologise, and I am grateful that he has explained his position for the benefit of the House.

The Minister said earlier that it was right for the Government to take the necessary time to get the legislation into the form that it now takes. Of course it is necessary to take a degree of time, but on this occasion, the most enormous amount of time seems to have been taken. Suspicious people such as I cannot help but wonder what caused that. Could it possibly be that one of the things going through the Government's mind was that the last thing they wanted was to upset Sinn Fein-IRA ahead of a general election? After all, the Government have been busily giving in on one-sided deals throughout their term of office, and perhaps they did not want to minimise Sinn Fein's opportunity to win more seats.

I am of an equally suspicious mind when it comes to this Government's dealing with terrorists, and it may well be that, by taking the time that they say was necessary, they will have allowed Sinn Fein-IRA to win more votes in the Assembly election than they would have done if we had clamped down on fraud ahead of it. If that is not the case, I am sure that the Minister will put the matter right.

Many issues remain to be explored in this debate; I have a list of them. They are important to the people of this country, who need to know the answers. Yet here we

[Mr. Wilshire]

are again, three minutes from a guillotine, without any real opportunity to debate what needs debating, and two of my colleagues still want to contribute. I will protest again, therefore, that I am being silenced by the Government. I am not being allowed to debate what needs to be debated. The Government are escaping from being held to account by the House by hiding behind programme motions and guillotines. That said, other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: I want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that, in the original Select Committee consideration of the inclusion of national insurance numbers, it was my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) who proposed that they should be included. A significant number of people over the past 30 years have engaged in electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland, and it is no coincidence that thousands of absent-vote applications have mounted up in the constituencies where Sinn Fein either has a Member of Parliament or is endeavouring to win the seat.

My party welcomes the Bill. It is not perfect, but it will be a substantial improvement if it is implemented in time. I hope that the Minister will take note that a court case may well end up in the House of Lords that might not permit the Assembly elections to be in May 2003; they might be earlier. That being the case, I hope that he will ensure that the legislation will be proceeded with as quickly as possible, to prevent further malpractice. There are those in Northern Ireland, principally Sinn Fein-IRA, who have mastered the art of the abuse of the electoral system to the tune of many thousands of votes. They have done that in election after election, and will no doubt do so again unless this Bill is implemented as speedily as possible. We therefore welcome the Bill, even if it costs the £750,000 that it appears from the notes that it will cost. We welcome it none the less.

Lords amendment agreed to.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Orders [28 June and this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the Business to be concluded at that hour.*

Subsequent Lords Amendments agreed to.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

As amended, further considered.

7.3 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. If the hon. Gentleman will indulge me, perhaps I might make a point of order myself, which I hope may be of assistance to the House. It may be for the convenience of right hon. and hon. Members if I remind them that, just before proceedings were adjourned on the last occasion, the promoters' new clause 1 was read a second time. The amendments to the new group were grouped with it, so they cannot be further debated at this stage, but I am prepared to allow a Division on amendment (a), which stands in the name of Mr. John McDonnell, if he wishes to press it to a vote.

After the questions on new clause 1 have been disposed of, including the Question that the clause be added to the Bill, we will come to the debate headed by new clause 3, on the European convention on human rights. The promoters' other amendments in the group headed by new clause 1, which I call to be moved, will be moved formally as and when we reach them in going through the amendment paper. Unless the hon. Gentleman's point of order relates to the matters immediately before the House—the business remaining from the previous time that the House sat—I would prefer to take it after we have decided on those matters.

John McDonnell: My point of order relates to this evening's business of the House and this evening's process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the indulgence of the House, I shall therefore take that point of order after I have disposed of those other matters, which follow on from the previous time that the House sat. That is the logical way in which to proceed. Do you wish to press amendment (a) to a vote, Mr. McDonnell?

John McDonnell: Yes.

New Clause 1

EXCLUSION OF CROWN PROPERTY

Amendment proposed: (a) to new clause 1.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 357.

Division No. 208] **[7.2 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Corbyn, Jeremy
Allan, Richard	Cousins, Jim
Barnes, Harry	Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Barrett, John	Davidson, Ian
Berry, Roger	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Best, Harold	Efford, Clive
Borrow, David	Etherington, Bill
Burgon, Colin	Flynn, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent	Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Chaytor, David	Gerrard, Neil
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*	Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*	Hancock, Mike

Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Mullin, Chris
Organ, Diana
Pike, Peter
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Shaw, Jonathan
Skinner, Dennis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Mackinlay and
Mr. Andrew Dismore.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawes, John
Heald, Oliver
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and
Mr. Mark Field.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 341, Noes 44.

Division No. 209] **[7.15 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bercow, John
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain

McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Barnes, Harry
Best, Harold
Brennan, Kevin
Burgon, Colin
Cable, Dr Vincent
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Trickett, Jon
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Dismore and Andrew Mackinlay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

John McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On today's agenda, a motion from the Prime Minister has been allowed that the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill may proceed to any hour. I thought that, except in the severest need, the House had decided against all-night sittings as part of its modernisation programme. It is also clear from the agenda that we are not even able to debate the Prime Minister's proposal to force the Bill through tonight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you confirm that, or investigate whether the motion has been placed on the agenda at the direct request of the City corporation, because I have evidence to prove that it has? On repeated occasions we have been informed that this is a private Bill and not a Government Bill, yet the Prime Minister's name is now associated with it. What status does the Bill have? Has the Prime Minister made any declarations of interest in relation to the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you confirm that I have raised my concerns with the Speaker about the procedures associated with the Bill, including the fact that I have been offered inducements to drop my opposition to it? Can you also confirm the last occasion on which this procedure was used? I believe that it was 1987. Will you reconsider the procedure for private Bills, to prevent this abuse of the House by the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister is taking away one of the last few mechanisms by which a Back Bencher can exert influence on a promoter of a Bill—that is, to delay the legislation to ensure that amendments are considered seriously.

Even if we were to go through the night, none of us is willing to put at risk tomorrow's business, which is a debate on the middle east and one of the most important

[John McDonnell]

issues facing the world today. I give you notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I advise Labour Members to withdraw from the debate, because I believe that the process has been corrupted and tainted by the Prime Minister's intervention. A number of Bills have been allowed through the House—this one in particular—when votes have been sold to business friends who have donated to both parties. It is a corruption of the worst kind to debase Parliament in that way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member realises that the Chair cannot possibly comment on certain matters. The reasons why a business motion appears on the Order Paper cannot be questioned by the Chair: it is there, and that is the fact we are dealing with. It is certainly not without precedent for a business motion to be employed in the course of private legislation.

As for the House considering its methods of dealing with private business, it is always open to the House to take an initiative to examine procedures, just as is happening over public business on the initiative of the Modernisation Committee. I do not think that I can substantially add to what the hon. Gentleman has said.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I press you on the point that we investigate the communications that have taken place between the City corporation and the Prime Minister on this matter, in relation to what representations have been made with the effect that he has placed this motion on the agenda tonight, any financial links with the corporation of London, any businesses that will gain votes as a result of this legislation, if it goes through, and any links with both the main political parties as a result?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The nature of the hon. Gentleman's complaint is such that, if he has evidence to substantiate it or believes that the matter needs to be investigated, it would be more a matter for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman that the Chair cannot question why a particular motion is on the Order Paper. The Chair must deal with the business that it finds on the Order Paper for the day.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can I therefore have a response in due course to my point that the Bill should now become a Government Bill because the motion is in the name of the Prime Minister? In a series of debates in the House, we have been informed that this is a private Bill that has no association with the Government and no Minister in charge, yet the Prime Minister has put his name to the motion to secure the Bill tonight. Can we have a response from the Prime Minister today, if he can be brought to the House, to explain his motivation for putting his name to the motion; or can we consider the procedure whereby we no longer define as private business that with which Ministers are closely associated?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The status of the Bill is unchanged by the appearance on the Order Paper of that business motion. There have been occasions in the past when a private Bill has ceased its passage and has reappeared as a Government Bill, but that does not apply in this case.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can we therefore clarify and investigate the relationship between the City corporation and No. 10, particularly in respect of communications with regard to this Bill and related matters, such as the funding of the dome by the City corporation or the substantial investment by the City corporation in terms of the wining and dining of successive Ministers and of Opposition spokesmen and Back Benchers? Can we investigate that relationship to establish whether the Bill has been tainted by unfair inducements?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Whether we can we do so is a matter that the hon. Gentleman must be advised to pursue with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a new experience for me and perhaps for many other hon. Members who may have been here as long as I have—five years. This is obviously a Bill that now has Government backing. Would it not have been in order, when it became clear that the Government backed what is essentially a private Bill, for the Speaker to advise the Government to come clean at an early stage and make it Government business, which would have saved the House and many hon. Members like me a great deal of time spent debating the Bill in this Chamber, in the belief that it was genuinely a private Bill, and in debating fundamental issues of democracy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has no such role in proceedings of this kind. It is not without precedent that a business motion has been put on the Order Paper to deal with private legislation.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has made several allegations of inducements having been made, if that were true—I hesitate to say that any hon. Member is dishonourable, but nevertheless the suspicion exists that if there have been inducements, hon. Members may be influenced—would it not be right, until investigations have taken place, for us to adjourn on this Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will maintain his hesitation before making such a suggestion about right hon. and hon. Members. There is now a clear procedure, as we have a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, as to where any hon. Member who has cause to believe that anything improper has taken place should direct such a complaint.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I repeat the point that I made earlier. I shall withdraw from this debate because I have been offered inducements. I believe that the process has been corrupted as a result of the Prime Minister's intervention today to ensure that this Bill goes through. It is meant to be private business, not Government business, but the

Prime Minister has personally intervened to undermine any prospect of the Back Bencher exerting influence, when it should be the Back Bencher's right to exert influence on private business. This process is tainted and corrupted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is nothing that I can add to the hon. Gentleman's statement.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to place on record my sincere view that this is a very bad day for Parliament. It makes a charade of our law-making process and it is disgraceful that the Government machine and the Minister can sit here and railroad through legislation that, in an ordinary, free debating environment, would not get on the statute book. This Bill extends the property franchise, which, almost without fail, Labour Members have opposed on other occasions when they have been on the hustings seeking election to this place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order; it was a statement.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you advise me and right hon. and hon. Members who are present whether there is a procedure that we can adopt that would stop this debate proceeding tonight and allow some of the serious allegations that have been made to be properly investigated? Failure to do that will taint whatever happens at the outcome of this debate. Does a procedure exist that will allow us to stop what we are doing at this moment and return to it when the issues that have been raised have been properly investigated by the relevant authorities?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not believe that what has been said amounts to a good cause for discontinuing proceedings on this Bill this evening.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think I heard you say at one point that there were precedents for the way in which this procedure was being dealt with tonight. That is true because it was used several times in the course of the 18 years that the Tories were in power. What saddens me is that, previously, when private business was extended during the night, including the Eastbourne Harbour Bill and all the rest, it was not about property rights or democracy. There were also several imported coal harbour Bills, which we managed to hold up for several years. Although they were important and were debated through the night, the truth is that they were not of the same dimension as this Bill, which we have debated not just tonight but for three years since it was first introduced.

This Bill is about people's voting rights and about extending power to corporations. It is close to the hearts of those of us who have fought for democratic rights over the years. There should therefore be no comparison with those ports Bills—which we opposed throughout the night—as bad as they were, and with the Eastbourne Harbour Bill, which was a disgrace, and for which Mrs. Thatcher stayed up all night and kept the Tories here as well. I can go through the gamut of things that occurred at that time, but this Bill is about the rights of people to vote or not to vote, which is a disgrace. This Bill should have remained a private Bill and should not have had extended to it the powers of the Government. That is why this is an extremely sad day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman says. We must now proceed.

Clause 2

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: Nos. 1 to 8.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Clause 3

QUALIFICATION OF VOTERS AT WARD ELECTIONS

Amendment made: No. 149 and Nos. 10 to 12.—[*Sir. George Young.*]

Clause 4

ALLOCATION OF APPOINTMENTS

Amendments made: Nos. 13 and 15.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Clause 5

REQUIREMENTS AS TO CONNECTION OF PERSONS APPOINTED WITH THE CITY

Amendments made: Nos. 16 and 17.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Clause 6

EXCLUSION OF CROWN PROPERTY

Amendment made: No. 19.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Clause 8

WARD LISTS: QUALIFYING BODIES

Amendments made: Nos. 20 to 22.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Schedule 1

RIGHTS TO APPOINT VOTERS

Amendment made: No. 25.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Schedule 3

REPEALS

Amendments made: Nos. 27, 29 and 30.—[*Sir George Young.*]

Order for Third Reading read.

7.44 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is often said that the House does not discharge its task of scrutinising legislation adequately. However, this Bill has been debated for more than 25 hours and over a period of three and a half years. In the course of those debates, it could be said that more or less every

[Sir George Young]

permutation and combination of circumstances that might disclose grounds for objection to the Bill have been articulated. I do not propose to detain the House by trawling through the issues, but I want to touch on one or two that have been raised from time to time.

The fact that the City wards that are primarily resident in nature will remain so has been stated many times. The point has been made, however, by Labour Members that the increased business element will alter the nature of the common council even though the residents' role in terms of their voting strength will be preserved. The proposals in the Bill have been promoted in the light of a falling entitlement of business to participate as businesses have been incorporated. The proposals are designed to restore the equilibrium, not to change it.

The promoters have made substantive changes to the Bill. The replacement of the entitlement to appoint on the basis of rateable values by one based on work force size is particularly noteworthy. Although the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) does not care to acknowledge it, the move is consistent with views that he has expressed. The City of London Labour party has been more straightforward in its response. In reacting to the change, its chairman, whom the hon. Gentleman chose not to quote, described the proposals in a press release as "radical".

One issue that preoccupied the promoters in developing the Bill was the possibility of an electoral qualification for City electors that could be conferred directly on people working in City businesses rather than having a nomination system. A commuter vote of 300,000 or more would, however, completely swamp the existing resident vote and would be unacceptable, not least to residents. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) may wish to say a word or two about the interests of residents.

Any selection of the type of commuter given the vote to bring down the electorate from 300,000 to preserve a reasonable relationship with the existing resident vote would be arbitrary and highly discriminatory. It certainly would not be representative of the composition of work forces, a specific requirement of the present Bill.

I wish to thank all those on both sides of the House who have supported the Bill during its three-and-a-half-year passage through the House. I hope that the end of that process is in sight. I will not detain the House further. I commend the Bill to the House.

7.47 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), I shall not detain the House for long. However, it is only fair that I say a few words.

As promised last November when the Bill was discussed in the House, I have carried out an extensive survey of City of London residents and asked for the views of most of them about issues relating to law and order and to drugs. It is interesting that more than two thirds of the respondents were entirely silent on City of London corporation affairs. Their priorities were obviously elsewhere, and I am sorry that it has been such a tortuous effort over the past four years to get the Bill through. Many respondents wrote positively about the corporation and it is only right that I should point that out. Some residents, of course, had concerns about what they perceived to be the anti-democratic elements of the election process, but they were only a small minority.

I want to take this opportunity to remind the House and, particularly, the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who unfortunately is not in his seat, that in the four main wards, councillors are elected by a resident majority. If the residents in the wards around the Barbican and Golden lane considered themselves under threat from the reforms that have been proposed, their concerns would have been felt by the sitting members of the common council who represent those residential wards.

We might also reflect on the fact that four of the 27 sitting members in the corporation of the City of London and representing those residential wards are, in fact, non-resident business people themselves. Eight residents represent business wards. That hardly discloses the concerns between the interests of residential and business voters on the common council that have been emphasised in the criticisms that have been made in the past. The relentless pursuit of objections to the Bill does not reflect a groundswell of opinion of the City residents whom I represent in this place.

Those objections certainly do not represent the views of business. Those who have criticised the Bill tonight and over the past four years have objected to the continued existence of the City as a separate administrative area. In that connection, it is worth repeating the comments that the chairman of the City of London Labour party made on the record before the Select Committee in 1999. He said:

> "The majority of these citizens who reside in the City do not want the City of London abolished. They do not want it attached to another constituency. I think it is fairly clear that they do not want that."

For the benefit of hon. Members, I should also like to say something about progress on the other reforms that the City is pursuing alongside those anticipated by the Bill. Mindful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of your earlier comments to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, I will seek to remain in order by being extremely brief.

The promoter has undertaken considerable work in the review of its ward boundaries. A review panel was established, comprising the recorder and the common serjeant—the two most senior judges at the Old Bailey—and the City's town clerk following advice from the local government boundary commission. Following public notices and a public consultation exercise, the review of the internal boundaries of the first two wards—Aldersgate and Cripplegate—is now almost complete.

A summary of the final recommendations was published as recently as March this year and sent to all voters, resident and non-resident, who would be affected by the changes. A more detailed report was also sent to all members of the common council and all those who had made representations to the town clerk at previous stages of the review. The final recommendations are currently out to consultation, and it is anticipated that they and any further representations will be submitted to the court of common council before the summer.

In addition, a City residents' liaison unit has been established as part of the package to reinforce the existing liaison arrangements between corporation departments

and the City's residents. Other measures coupled with that include the introduction of regular consultation meetings, attended by the town clerk and other senior members and officers, and guaranteed resident representation on the corporation's non-ward committees. For example, four seats on the policy and resources committee are now reserved for such resident members.

A further undertaking given by the promoter was that the number of members of the City corporation would be reduced to 100 by the time the new arrangements came into operation. I can report that the number of members has been already been reduced by 18 to 112, and that process continues.

As a result, the Bill represents the right way forward for the City of London and the resident population is entirely happy. It seems ironic that some of the great largesse of the City corporation often goes to the areas such as Hampstead heath, Highgate woods and Queen's park. Enormous sums are spent on those most wonderful open spaces in central London, and the City corporation puts an enormous amount of time and money into its London gateway with the east of London representation. I do not wish to detain the House any further, other than to say that I hope that hon. Members will join me in voting for the Bill on Third Reading.

7.52 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I, too, do not intend to detain the House, but it is right that there should be a brief comment from the Government before the completion of Third Reading.

The Bill has been considered in great detail for some three and a half years, as the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), who is its sponsor, has clearly said. There have been protracted discussions in Committee and debates in the Chamber on several occasions. All the points of principle that relate to the Bill have been exhaustively considered, and the House has certainly done justice to its scrutiny function.

The Bill represents a measure of reform to the constitutional arrangements in the City. The Government have welcomed the fact that the City has promoted legislation to face up to the need to put its governance on a more modern footing. We believe that the Bill represents a step in the right direction and that it will make the governance of the City more modern and more in touch with life in the City today. However, the City is doing, and must do, other things to take forward its reform agenda, some of which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). I hope that the City will wish to pursue that reform agenda.

The City corporation is a unique institution. That reflects the fact that it covers a business district with a relatively small number of residents, so it is not possible for the City to copy the electoral system that applies elsewhere in London and the country. The principle of business representation is uniquely appropriate to the City, but it must be reformed.

The current system allows only sole traders and partners of City-based businesses to vote. The incorporated companies that play an increasing part in the life of the City have no equivalent right. Other anomalies, such as the possibility to vote twice under current arrangements, will be ended by the Bill. If the Bill were not to proceed, those undesirable practices would be perpetuated. Quite simply, the choice is between reforming the City corporation and maintaining the status quo. In that context, the Government have no doubt whatever that it is right to support reform by supporting the Bill.

The remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) in his numerous points of order at the beginning of these debates are deeply regrettable. He made a series of wholly unfounded and false allegations, imputing motives to the Prime Minister and the Government for which there is no basis whatever and which I unequivocally rebut. The Government's concern is simply to assist the passage of a private Bill, which represents a modest measure of reform that most sensible people recognise as a step in the right direction. The Bill will not necessarily provide a long-term solution because of the further measures to which I have referred, but it is a step in the right direction and it is right that the House should agree to its Third Reading tonight.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 30.

Division No. 210] **[7.56 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Amess, David
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beith Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bercow, John
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ennis, Jeff
Fabricant, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark

Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Moss, Malcolm
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and Mr. George Osborne.

NOES

Barnes, Harry
Begg, Miss Anne
Burgon, Colin
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cawsey, Ian
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cummings, John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Flynn, Paul
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hinchliffe, David
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Pike, Peter
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Skinner, Dennis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Wareing, Robert N
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Dismore and John Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Malton Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

8.7 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It is both a pleasure and a relief to speak to the Adjournment at such an early hour. Whenever I am lucky in the ballot for the 30-minute Adjournment debate, the House either sits throughout the night or the main business collapses. Until the moment arrives no one is ever sure which alternative will prevail.

The first Adjournment debate that I initiated in this Chamber was on the Nestle takeover of the Rowntree factory. Everyone expected that the main business would end at midnight but, as you may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker—like me, you were a Back Bencher at the time—there were 43 Divisions on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill and the Adjournment began at 5.30 in the morning.

I rather feared that I would have to keep the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), up all night—or rather that some of her colleagues would have been here all night and she would have had to wait around for a long time. I was going to suggest that the wait for my Adjournment debate was not dissimilar to the wait that some patients experience for their operation. However, in the event, I feel as though I have been given my operation ahead of my appointment with the consultant.

The issue that I want to raise is important none the less. I am sure that the Minister will have been briefed and will understand why it is so important. Our community hospitals are held in great affection by our constituents; Malton hospital is no exception.

Two or three years ago, I visited our former colleague, Sir Giles Shaw, at the hospital. Sadly, he died about 18 months ago after a stroke. I shall never forget my visit to Sir Giles; it was a happy occasion. He said, "John, this is a great place. You are lucky to have it and I know that you will do everything you can to fight for it while you are the Member of Parliament". I did not think that circumstances would require us to have a debate of this nature at that time, but I am galvanised by the words of Sir Giles.

Malton is one of three community hospitals within the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Health Care NHS trust. That creates a difficulty. Scarborough is a small district hospital. Although the population of the area that it covers is not high, the geographical area that it covers is huge and it has to look after three community hospitals. Malton hospital is effectively run by the general practitioners at the Derwent practice in Malton, who work as clinical assistants. I have formed a good relationship with them over many years, especially as various developments have taken place at the hospital.

One recent development prompted me to request the debate, although as I have more time than expected I will take the opportunity to raise one or two other issues as well. Trust managers decided in mid March to cease all general anaesthetic operations at Malton with effect from 1 April. That caused shock and alarm in the local community. The letter sent by the trust to the senior partner at the Derwent practice said that a shortage of consultant anaesthetists meant that it could no longer provide back-up cover for GA operations at Malton hospital.

On 22 February, however, the trust sent out a staff bulletin in which it suggested that the difficulty with continuing GA operations at Malton and the two other community hospitals at Whitby and Bridlington was based on concern about clinical governance. So the issue at that time was whether it was safe to continue GA operations at community hospitals. That caused confusion and we remain confused about what lies behind the decision.

I have made it clear to the trust that we are prepared to accept that the reason for the decision is the shortage of consultant anaesthetists, and I want the Minister to use all her good offices to ensure that the vacancies are filled as quickly as possible. In a written answer from one of her colleagues last week, I was told that more than 1,000 extra anaesthetic specialists—I am not sure that they will all be consultants—are being trained and made available to the NHS. However, it seems that they do not want to live in Scarborough or the Malton area, which is a pity given the quality of life there. Although I accept that their long-term clinical career might be more challenging at another hospital, our area would be a good place for those at the lower end of the learning curve. The shortage needs to be addressed. The local community will test the Government's commitment to the health service and their argument that things are improving by how quickly those posts are filled.

The serious question in the minds of patients and medical staff is that although GA operations are suspended at Malton, they continue at Whitby and Bridlington community hospitals. That is partly because patients have nowhere else to go—Scarborough does not have the capacity to provide the theatre time required. Given that there is a lingering suspicion that it might not be safe to perform GA operations at community hospitals—the clinical governance issue—I suspect that some patients will wonder why they are being sent from Malton to Whitby or Bridlington where the same circumstances apply.

Will the Minister confirm that the withdrawal of GA operations is only a suspension of the facility at Malton? That is important. I am sure from your long experience as a Member of Parliament, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you appreciate that if the services provided at a local hospital are changed there should at least be a public consultation involving discussions with GPs, patients and the community health council locally. There has been none of that.

In my early days as a Member of Parliament, the accident and emergency centre at Malton was downgraded to a minor injuries unit—again, largely for reasons of clinical governance and staffing. There was such alarm and concern that some of my political opponents even suggested that the hospital was about to close, although nothing was further from the truth. I must stress that people are not worried that Malton will close; their concern relates to the services that it will provide. When the accident and emergency centre was downgraded, a public meeting at the local hall in Malton was attended by about 1,000 people. I am sure that there will be a similar interest if and when we consult on this latest development.

[Mr. John Greenway]

I want to concentrate on the future. Not only were GA operations unexpectedly withdrawn on 1 April, but the hospital became part of the Scarborough, Ryedale and Whitby primary care trust. A number of community hospitals in other parts of the country experienced a similar change. That development is working well in general. It enables the community hospital to concentrate on diagnostic issues and makes the best use of the facility, so freeing up time that can be spent on more serious matters at district hospitals.

The Minister must expect the chief executive of the PCT, the trust members and doctors to have their own agenda for the future. It was certainly not in their plans that GA operations would be withdrawn on the very day that they took over responsibility for the hospital. Even given the background of the clinical governance issue, they must have expected three to five years in which to plan a withdrawal or contraction of GA operations at Malton.

The PCT, the doctors and patients are worried that no alternative was agreed in advance. Some 640 patients were treated under general anaesthetic at Malton hospital in the past year. In my 15 years in the House I have worked well with the managers at the Scarborough hospital trust and have a great deal of time for them. Although they will do their best, a strain will nevertheless be placed on alternative facilities. People will have to travel long distances for relatively minor operations that cannot be performed under local anaesthetic, which is the case with many procedures.

Some of the operations are not urgent; they concern what the medical profession calls "lumps and bumps", such as minor problems with varicose veins. However, many gynaecological operations are carried out and, on a more difficult point, a number of women have terminations under general anaesthetic at Malton hospital. Clearly, they cannot wait for treatment but have to be seen and dealt with promptly, whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation.

There is, therefore, concern that Scarborough hospital and the trust can cope with the situation. It is accepted that there is a lack of anaesthetist cover, but up to now the telephone back-up cover has worked extremely well. I am told that it is unlikely to continue because of the shortage of consultant anaesthetists, but I stress to the Minister that while the back-up cover clearly is important, it is the GPs, as clinical assistants, who are doing the work. I understand that it is proposed that one of the doctors who provides the anaesthetic service should also do sessions at Scarborough to ensure that he is thoroughly up to date with all the clinical procedures and can work well with the consultant anaesthetists based there.

I seek clarification on another issue. Although consultant anaesthetists do not come to Malton for GA-based operations that are done routinely in the mid-week, half-day sessions, they have been coming to Malton on Sundays for the waiting list initiative. It will stick in people's throats if they discover that routine operations have been withdrawn, but consultants are coming to the hospital for GA sessions on a Sunday and opening theatres that are normally closed simply to do operations under the waiting list initiative. I am sure that the Minister will understand my concern about that.

I mentioned that the primary care trust has its own plans. It is important that we have public consultation about a strategic plan for Malton hospital for the next five years. If there is to be a controlled withdrawal of some of the services at peripheral sites that we have been used to, in tandem with the restructuring of service provision, the public must go along with the plans. For example, as I said, there may be more diagnostic services at Malton, and some surgery may be restricted as the day surgery unit at Scarborough hospital is built up. The public must be reassured that they will receive treatment in a timely fashion and that all the changes are intended to improve not only financial efficiency but the quality and standard of treatment. People understand what is happening, but they must be taken along with the process.

As I have indicated, people will find it difficult to understand why it is not good enough to do GA-based operations at one peripheral unit at Malton, but those operations may continue at Whitby and Bridlington. I find it deeply unsatisfactory that individual clinicians are making what are effectively strategic decisions that have profound and wide-ranging implications for patient care.

So far as the PCT is concerned, I would like to think that as the health service develops, we could have more flexibility within service provision and about who is responsible for employing whom. Someone stopped me in the street at the weekend, knowing that I had secured this debate, and said, "I gather that the primary care trust now runs the hospital. Why can't it employ its own anaesthetists?" That is a very good question. It highlights the fact that NHS structures are too rigid, and we need to bring down some of the barriers. I sincerely believe that community hospitals have an exciting future, but flexible thinking and attitudes are necessary if they are to realise their full potential.

I draw the Minister's attention to another aspect of Malton hospital's future. The two main wards are what are known, in the medical world, as Nightingale wards. I understand that when the Nightingale ward modernisation programme, if that is the correct title, was first mooted, the impression was given—although I cannot say whether this is accurate—that the wards would be modernised. Sadly, however, that has not yet occurred. I believe that the first application was not successful, but the Scarborough trust is trying again. The sum involved is £1.3 million. It would significantly reassure the people of the Malton area if the Minister announced today when she thinks that money will be provided.

From the title of the debate as on the Order Paper, "The Future of Malton Hospital", someone who did not understand the issues might have thought that the hospital was to close, but that is not on the agenda. We have been over that matter in the past few years, and we persuaded Ministers in the previous Conservative Government, in particular my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Freeman, that community hospitals had a vibrant future. However, it is harder to convince the public of that when decisions are made out of expediency because of shortages of clinical staff. I believe that Malton hospital can have a great future, but that can be achieved only if managers and clinicians in the Scarborough trust and the primary care trust work together.

We know that the Scarborough trust has problems. Its budget is constantly overspent. The recent report on the trust did not make totally favourable reading, as the Minister knows.

I end with a plea—let us not sacrifice the work that Malton is doing, and that it can do in the future, to resolve the problems of the Scarborough trust.

8.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Like the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I have the unexpected pleasure of speaking in this debate early in the evening. Hon. Members on both sides of the House talk more sense at a reasonable time of day.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. He is, rightly, eager to ensure that the highest possible standards of health care services are available to his constituents. I know that he has taken a keen interest in the services that Malton hospital provides. He has tabled parliamentary questions about it and written to my ministerial colleagues, and he has been assiduous in following up these issues. I reassure him that the Government are committed to providing high quality services for everybody, no matter where they live.

We want to provide services that are as close to people's homes as possible but that are also safe and viable. Striking the right balance between local access and high quality has always created tension in the NHS; it is a problem that we continue to wrestle with, and its impact on local services is the subject of many Adjournment debates. Getting that balance right is not without its difficulties. It is fair to say that, if possible, most of us want services almost on our doorsteps, yet we also want them to be safe and of the highest possible standard. Trying to explain to the public and patients the difficulty of striking that balance is one of the challenges that faces us all. The hon. Gentleman clearly set out the background. He raised a number of specific queries and I shall certainly try to respond to them during my speech.

The NHS plan, which was published in July 2000, set out an ambitious vision of a service designed around the needs of patients. That new approach is aimed at trying to ensure that we achieve high quality national standards, that the services are fast and convenient, and that we use modern methods to provide care where and when it is needed. To deliver that, I genuinely believe that we needed a fundamental shift in power and resources to the front line. That is why we have, in just the past couple of weeks, established 302 primary care trusts which cover all parts of England and are in the driving seat in the provision of health services locally.

From 1 April, ownership of Malton hospital transferred to the newly established Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale primary care trust. That locally based organisation will be able to ensure that Malton hospital continues to have a strong future, serving the needs of its rural population. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has emphasised the fact that we see a strong and vibrant future for Malton hospital. We are certainly not in the business of seeing services reduced or the hospital being in any danger. I have no doubt that things at the hospital will change, but it certainly has a very useful future in providing health services to local people.

The provision of comprehensive and accessible services is right at the heart of the NHS. We want to try to apply those principles to local services, and to try to strike a balance between convenience and the requirement to ensure safety and quality. Achieving that balance in the case of Malton hospital has led to the need to change the provision of anaesthetic services there.

The Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Health Care NHS trust's department of anaesthesia provides a full range of anaesthetic services at Scarborough hospital, which is the main district general hospital in the area. For many years, it has provided anaesthesia for day-case and overnight-stay patients in community hospitals in Bridlington, Whitby and Malton—all of which are approximately 20 miles from the main hospital.

Much of the anaesthetic service at the community hospitals has been provided by GPs, who work alone as clinical assistants under distant consultant provision from Scarborough. The consultant anaesthetists at Scarborough hospital have become increasingly worried that, owing to the shortage of staff, they are unable even to provide that remote supervision of all the peripheral sites. The trust is trying to provide the highest quality services possible across the whole area for which it is responsible. The decision to withdraw general anaesthetic surgery at Malton was taken because Malton has the lowest level of such activity of all three sites. So the decision is very practical and designed to affect the least number of patients.

The problem in question is really the lack of qualified staff, which is endemic in the health service. The main problem now facing the health service is not necessarily the provision of extra money. People throughout the country will say that they see the resources coming through. The NHS is growing faster than any other health service in Europe, and has undergone the longest sustained period of growth that we have ever known. However, one constraint is the capacity for trained and qualified staff across a range of specialties. Increasing the work force is thus a top priority for us.

We have said that, by 2004, there will be 7,500 more consultants, 2,000 more GPs, 20,000 extra nurses, 6,500 extra therapists and 1,000 more medical school places on top of the extra 1,100 already announced. That is a huge programme of growth. In 1996, there were 2,629 consultant anaesthetists. Five years later, there were 3,549—an extra 900—but that is simply not enough. We estimate that, over the next nine or 10 years, we will need another 2,540 consultant anaesthetists, but as we expect 1,850 extra, it is looking as if there will be a shortfall. We therefore need a massive recruitment campaign.

I know that the trust in Scarborough has been very active in trying to recruit extra staff. Mrs. Collinson of the trust has said:

> "This is a lovely part of the country to live and work and we have good educational and health services, and moderately priced housing."

She is keen to try to attract people to the area. Indeed, I believe that representatives of the trust are going to a careers fair in Berlin fairly shortly to see whether they can recruit some consultants. There is a great deal of activity.

The trust currently has an establishment for 10 consultant anaesthetists. One post has been vacant for just over a year, another became vacant on 1 April, a third will become vacant in June, and a retirement is anticipated in late summer. Against an establishment of seven middle-grade doctors, the trust currently has only three substantive appointments and four fairly long-standing vacancies. So the situation is very serious, as the hon. Member for Ryedale has said. The shortage of anaesthetists means that even remote supervision from the Scarborough site, with occasional visits to the community hospitals, is currently unachievable.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

The hon. Gentleman specifically asked me whether, if we are successful in recruiting the extra anaesthetists, it would be possible for general anaesthetic surgery to recommence at Malton hospital. Discussions have been taking place with the GP anaesthetists who currently carry out the service, and two issues have arisen. The trust is very keen that GP anaesthetists should retain their skills, so that it will not be impossible to resume the service simply because of the passage of time. It is therefore making arrangements for GPs to go to Scarborough to keep their clinical practice up to date, which is important.

The trust is also mindful of the guidance of the royal colleges. The move is to provide GA services in an environment which includes on-site intensive care and back-up services. I would not at this point rule out the resumption of GA services at Malton, but the trust must be mindful of royal college guidance as well as the need for accessibility and for local convenience for the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I have no doubt that discussions will continue, but I want to ensure that they are not pre-empted by the loss of skills among clinicians who are currently carrying out the work. It is therefore important that we keep their skills up to date.

The PCT, like the hospital trust, is disappointed that staff shortages have precipitated the withdrawal of general anaesthetic surgery at Malton hospital, but supports the operational decision in the interests of patient safety. No long-term plan has been agreed between the PCT and the acute trust. Short-term difficulties have precipitated the change in service provision.

Any strategic decision and associated significant service changes would be subject to public consultation and—if the legislation before the House has been enacted—local authority scrutiny too. I give the hon. Gentleman that undertaking because, like him, I feel that local people must have trust and confidence in their local services. Involving them in full discussion of the available options is the right way to proceed. Local accountability is key in such circumstances, and it is all too easy for local communities to lose confidence in local services if they are not involved in discussions.

Where significant change is proposed and a consultation process takes place, that process will in future be led either by the local PCT, or by a group of PCTs if the issue crosses several boundaries. At the end of the consultation process, the PCT must take into account all the comments it has received. If, as we hope there will be, there is local agreement, the change can go ahead, but if local agreement is not achieved, the matter can be referred to Ministers either by the community health council, if that is still the proper body, or by the local authority overview and scrutiny committee, after implementation of the provisions of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

If the matter is referred to Ministers, we will take account of all the available evidence. We hope to have the independent reconfiguration panel up and running soon. The panel will be able to provide independent advice to Ministers, and help us to create a more coherent framework for future service changes. In that way, local people will be able to feel that the process is fair, transparent and based on established criteria.

The introduction of the new PCTs will enable local communities to commission appropriate services for local people. The hon. Member for Ryedale is right to mention flexibility and new ways of working. The decision to devolve resources and power to front-line local organisations will result in greater diversity in the ways in which services are delivered to local people. Local communities are often innovative and imaginative because they are aware of local needs, so giving them freedom to establish a wider range of ways in which to deliver care is a good step forward.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the new PCT is committed to ensuring that Malton hospital has a vibrant future in which it continues to serve local people, and that the development of appropriate services continues. The PCT has advised me that there are no plans to withdraw further services from Malton hospital.

The hon. Gentleman is aware of the current work, initiated by the PCT, on the longer-term future of Malton and Whitby hospitals. As he said, that work includes a bid to modernise the Nightingale wards at Malton hospital. The proposal is to extend the existing Fitzwilliam ward, provide the correct match of single bedrooms and two and four-bedded bays, together with the appropriate support facilities, and ensure segregation of the sexes, thus enhancing dignity and proper patient care. The bid is being assessed against the national criteria, and I promise the hon. Gentleman that the results of the bidding process will be announced very soon; but I must ask him to be patient a little longer. I am informed that the announcement is imminent.

It is important that hon. Members have the opportunity to debate important proposals that affect local people. Representing local communities' interests and concerns is one of the most important jobs that we as Members of Parliament do, so the hon. Gentleman was right to secure this Adjournment debate.

I understand that all the patients who will be affected by the decision to suspend general anaesthetics have been contacted by the trust and supported by representatives in ensuring that their future needs are met. It is important that that be done while recruitment activities for anaesthetic services in the trust continue apace. I hope that those efforts are successful.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that general anaesthetic procedures that continue at the other hospitals do so safely. Local people may feel that procedures at Bridlington and Whitby are no longer safe, but I am told that there is a consultant anaesthetist on site at Bridlington for approximately 75 per cent. of the general anaesthetic lists, and that at Whitby the trust's medical director has agreed to take responsibility for the continuation of GP anaesthetists' lists there for a further 12 months, while certain measures are taken. There is adequate consultant cover for the other two hospitals; unfortunately, it has not been possible to retain that at Malton.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Ryedale has been able to raise such important issues. I hope that he will receive a response to the Nightingale wards bid very soon. In the meantime, I hope that he will feel able to assure his constituents that they will continue to have access to safe, high quality services at the local acute trust.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

India

1. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): What assessment he has made of the situation regarding cross-border terrorist incursions into India. [45516]

7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What recent steps he has taken to encourage the UN to supervise both sides of the line of control in Kashmir. [45522]

13. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What initiatives Her Majesty's Government are undertaking to ensure peace in the Indian sub-continent. [45528]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): In our view, only a political dialogue, not violence and terrorism, will bring a solution to Kashmir. Unfortunately, military mobilisations on both sides of the line of control remain high. On the communal violence in the Indian state of Gujarat, we are deeply concerned about the deaths and injuries on both sides of the religious divide. We have been in regular contact with the Government of India about that, and indeed about Kashmir. They have strongly condemned the violence in Gujarat, and have given assurances, which I welcome, that they will take action to bring to justice the perpetrators of the attack.

On Sri Lanka, the news is much happier, and I am glad to be able to report to the House that following the good offices of the Government of Norway, in which we have been participating, a ceasefire has now been declared between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorist organisation. We look forward to that developing into a full-scale peace process.

Mr. Dismore: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in January, after many terrorist attacks in India, the Indian Government requested the extradition from Pakistan of 20 suspected major terrorist leaders, including Azhal Masood, the prime suspect for the December attack on the Indian Parliament, Athar Ibrahim, the main suspect for the Indian airlines IC-814 hijacking, and Dawood Ibrahim, the underworld don behind a series of bomb attacks in Mumbai? Will my right hon. Friend join the USA in pressurising Pakistan to arrest those highly dangerous individuals and either put them on trial in Pakistan or extradite them to India for trial there?

Mr. Straw: It is incumbent on all members of the United Nations, including the Governments of Pakistan and India, fully to implement the requirements of UN Security Council resolution 1373 on countering terrorism. Like the United States, we have been engaged in discussions with the Government of Pakistan about their meeting their obligations in respect of countering terrorism. We believe that they need either to bring those suspects to trial—or certainly those 15 who appear on the Interpol list—or hand them over to the Government of India.

Mr. Prentice: My right hon. Friend will know that the line of control extends for 450 miles, yet there are only 45 UN military observers—one for every 10 miles of territory. Why cannot we urge the UN to increase the number of military observers in that area, which could easily become a tinderbox leading to a third world war?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that there is any problem about urging the UN, but there is a difficulty in getting bilateral agreement to the role of observers on both sides of the line. My hon. Friend will know that observers are currently situated only on the Pakistani side of the line of control. As I have made clear, we consider that the Kashmir dispute is, in essence, a bilateral dispute, but the international community, including the United Kingdom Government, remains ready to assist in that. Looking to the future, there may well be a role for observers, under the auspices of the UN, better to enforce a proper peace.

Simon Hughes: On Sri Lanka, following the Secretary of State's welcome recognition of the major breakthrough achieved, largely through Norway but also through the good offices of many other countries, will Her Majesty's Government urge not only the Prime Minister and Government but the President of Sri Lanka to take what must be the best opportunity for peace and an end to the terrible killing that the country has had for 20 years or more? Will the Government, in the context of the Commonwealth and the region, offer all assistance, both on the constitutional agenda, so that self-governance can be achieved within acceptable terms, and on the redevelopment agenda, which will clearly be vital if the northern half of Sri Lanka is to play its full part in the economy of that country and of the region?

Mr. Straw: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is yes. I place on record our appreciation of the work that he has undertaken over many years to try to bring the sides together and the attention that he has paid to the issue of Sri Lanka.

Since we are to discuss the middle east later this afternoon, I say to the House that it is a terrible commentary on what has happened in Sri Lanka that, by any analysis, more people—60,000—have been killed in terrorist outrages and in the ensuing military action in Sri Lanka than have been killed in the middle east. I applaud the work of the new Government of Sri Lanka and the

statesmanship at last being shown by the LTTE. The Government and the Commonwealth stand ready to assist in every way we can.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): The Foreign Secretary will know that later this year in the state of Jammu and Kashmir there are to be local state elections. Will he take this opportunity to place on record our Government's support for the Indian Government's continuing desire to maintain the secular tradition of democracy in that country? Will he also put on notice those who, by sponsoring cross-border terrorism, would seek to destabilise the area in the run-up to those elections?

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend knows, I have been unequivocal in condemning all forms of terrorism, not least cross-border terrorism across the line of control. As for the prospective elections on the Indian side of the line of control, in Jammu and Kashmir, we look forward to those elections being held, but it is crucial—I believe that the Indian Government understand this—that they are held in a climate of peace and security and with proper facilities for external monitors.

Iraq

2. **Mr. Greg Pope** (Hyndburn): What recent discussions he has had with the US Administration about Iraq. [45517]

8. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What recent discussions he has had with the US administration about Iraq. [45523]

9. **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): What recent discussions he has had with the United Nations Security Council concerning weapons inspectors visiting Iraq. [45524]

12. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the United States in respect of Iraq. [45527]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): My ministerial colleagues and I regularly discuss Iraq with the United States and our other Security Council counterparts. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Iraq with President Bush during his visit to Crawford, Texas slightly more than a week ago.

Iraq is in clear breach of nine separate UN Security Council resolutions, not least but not exclusively in respect of the threat posed by its weapons of mass destruction. The clear obligation on Iraq is to readmit UN weapons inspections without delay and without conditions.

Mr. Pope: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Iraq is a cause of not only regional instability but global instability; that it is right that UN weapons inspectors be allowed free and unfettered access to Saddam's weapons of mass destruction; and that if that access is denied and that denial continues, we, the international community, have the right under existing UN resolutions to take action?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is correct to point out the extreme danger posed by Saddam Hussein's failure to meet the obligations of the UN Security Council resolutions, to abandon his development of weapons of mass destruction, and to ensure that there is proper inspection of what he has or has not done. My hon. Friend tempts me to comment on issues of international law, but I shall resist and say simply that, in our judgment, views about compliance with international law need to be taken in the circumstances at the time.

My hon. Friend has raised questions about military action. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House last week, no decisions about military action have been made—nor, may I add, are such decisions, if they are to be made at all, likely to be made for some time.

Ms Munn: Have there been any discussions with the US Administration of the Israel-Palestine situation, which is of great concern and which threatens the stability of the whole region?

Mr. Straw: Indeed there have been continuous discussions between the United States and us. The middle east and the Arab-Israeli conflict formed the centrepiece of the discussions at Crawford. On Sunday I spoke at some length with US Secretary of State Colin Powell about precisely that situation and his work to secure a peace.

Mr. Djanogly: There has recently been press comment that the US Government asked the CIA to investigate the chief UN weapons inspector in relation to the last round of weapons investigations in Iraq. Does the Foreign Secretary care to comment on that and on the likelihood, if inspectors are allowed back into Iraq, of a new round of inspections being successful?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman invites me to comment on a report about alleged action taken by a foreign Government, the US Government. My reply is, no thanks.

On the more significant issue—the possibility of Saddam Hussein readmitting weapons inspectors—we and the United Nations continue to press the Government of Iraq to readmit weapons inspectors. However, the outlook is bleak in respect of compliance by Saddam Hussein. That is best illustrated by the fact that the Government of Iraq began to engage in a process of dialogue under the auspices of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan; a further meeting was due to take place a few days ago, but the Government of Iraq decided unilaterally to pull out.

Our message to Saddam Hussein is clear: if he has nothing to hide, he has nothing to fear from weapons inspections. The view of the international community is also clear—he must readmit weapons inspectors, otherwise he will be seen by the whole world to be in the clearest possible breach of international obligations.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my right hon. Friend think that there is a relationship between the issue of weapons

inspections in Iraq and the issue of the Palestinian state? Does he think that recognising that relationship could be the way forward to resolve both problems?

Mr. Straw: Of course I recognise the fact that there are political connections between the two issues. Nobody more than Saddam Hussein would like the question of his failure to comply with international obligations to be intertwined with the Arab-Israeli conflict; of course I am aware of that. However, there is no reason on account of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israel and the occupied territories for Saddam Hussein to fail to comply with his obligations. It is also a matter of record that the victims, internally and externally, of Saddam Hussein's crimes and aggression have almost exclusively been fellow Muslims—fellow Muslims whom he gassed in the south of Iran during the Iraq-Iran war and fellow Muslims whom he gassed in the north of Iraq during the Kurdistan civil war.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): As neither the charter of the United Nations, nor indeed any other principle of international law, nor even the ceasefire resolutions which affect Iraq, authorise regime change, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that, unlike others, it is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government to seek to replace Saddam Hussein through the use of military action?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained our position when he said that in practice regime change has been a means to an end of securing a proper peace settlement, human rights and the enforcement of international obligations in countries such as Kosovo, Serbia, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. We regard Saddam Hussein as, first, quite detestable and despicable on the basis of his record; I do not think that that is an issue. Secondly, he is in the clearest possible breach of international obligations. Thirdly, by his development of weapons of mass destruction, he poses a severe threat to the rest of the world, which has been acknowledged by the international community so, fourthly—I emphasise that no decisions whatever have been taken—to secure his compliance with those international obligations it may be necessary to see an end to that regime, but always in the context of international law.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Further to the question of the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), if the Foreign Secretary will not confirm that Paul Wolfowitz directed the CIA to subvert the position of chief United Nations weapons inspector Hans Blix, will he confirm that ironically the CIA found that Mr. Blix was guilty of nothing more than acting within the parameters set for him?

Mr. Straw: I am responsible for a great deal, but happily I am responsible neither for Mr. Wolfowitz nor the CIA.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): But is it not obvious, as the Foreign Secretary said, that Iraq represents an enormous clear and present danger, not only to neighbouring countries in the middle east and the Muslim population to which he referred, but very much to this country and western Europe? Will he, as far as he can, cause to be published detailed evidence of the development of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Is not this country right to be enormously grateful to the United States of America for being prepared to take the necessary action to defend our interests just as much as its own?

Mr. Straw: So far as the evidence is concerned, almost all the evidence on Iraq's development of weapons of mass destruction is already available and published. I have, and am happy to make available to all right hon. and hon. Members, details of United Nations reports on weapons inspections, human rights abuses and the development of nuclear weapons. They are already available on the website.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Publish them then; print them.

Mr. Straw: They have already been published. I am happy to ensure that they are further published in an easily accessible form—in other words on paper, not on a website—and to place them in the Library.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Secretary of State say whether he intends to publish the dossier that was in the news a few weeks ago containing the evidence of mass destruction? I understand that that is not the dossier that he has been waving about at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to say that this document is not the dossier, but most of the dossier to which she referred is drawn from such documents and other sources. No one should be in the least doubt about Iraq's flagrant violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. We do not have to wait for the publication of a dossier, which is held up only by difficulties in determining whether intelligence should be made public. We do not have to wait for such a dossier to read documents such as this and hundreds of pages more of the clearest evidence of Iraq's violation of its international obligations, in respect both of weapons of mass destruction and of its violation of the human rights of its neighbours and its own citizens.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in March 1999 a UN humanitarian panel of experts recommended a number of modifications to the sanctions on Iraq, which it thought might lead to incremental improvements in the internal humanitarian situation? One of those recommendations was to authorise foreign investment in Iraq's non-military export industries. Why is that recommendation absent from the Government's smart sanctions proposal, under which all exports from Iraq other than oil will be banned?

Mr. Straw: I am indeed aware of that recommendation. It is one that we, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, have been following up ever since. We want to see the so-called more focused smart sanctions in place. We have wanted to see them in place for well over a year and a half. Why have they been held up? The sanctions, which would apply only to defence matériel and weapons of mass destruction, rather than to

the whole gamut of imports into Iraq, are held up because of Iraq, and because of its efforts—diplomatic efforts up to now—to persuade in particular one permanent member of the Security Council, Russia, not to vote in favour.

I am pleased to say that, following our diplomatic efforts and those of the United States, Russia agreed to the principle of a goods review list at the end of November. The final process of negotiation is currently taking place, and I hope and believe that it will be possible to have the new regime of sanctions in place by the end of May, but it is the Government of Iraq who are opposing it, because they know that they will be denied a propaganda weapon, claiming—inaccurately—that all their imports are subject to and therefore controlled by sanctions. Also, they know that the more focused system of sanctions will be more effective at stopping defence matériel going into that country.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): If we start a war with Iraq and if, in line with the speculations of the Defence Secretary on the Dimbleby programme on 24 March, we were subsequently to launch a pre-emptive nuclear first strike against the Iraqi people, with probable collateral damage in neighbouring countries, does my right hon. Friend believe that that would be a moral or sane way of seeking to bring peace to the middle east and the rest of the world?

Mr. Straw: There were two big ifs in my hon. Friend's question. His remarks were a parody of what my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said on that programme. There is no suggestion of the use of nuclear weapons in that theatre. My hon. Friend is right to say that there would be some collateral damage from a nuclear strike on Iraq, and that is not remotely on the agenda. I am aware of the speculation, but in all the military action in which this country has ever been involved under this Administration and, I believe, under previous Administrations, we have been careful, cautious and proportionate in the use of military action, as we should be, and it must be obvious to the entire House and the country that the current President of the United States has shown similar care and proportionality in the decisions that he has made about military action.

Zimbabwe

3. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): What recent discussions he has had with members of the Commonwealth on Zimbabwe. [45518]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discussed Zimbabwe with leaders of the Commonwealth, including John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia, at meetings last week.

Mr. Wilkinson: Are not the continued lawlessness and brutal behaviour of the ZANU-PF thugs whom Robert Mugabe controls testimony to the dithering diplomacy of this Government and the utter failure of their so-called ethical foreign policy to bring about democratic change in Zimbabwe? Would not Her Majesty's Government be better using their time in supporting the interests of British subjects in Zimbabwe and democratic forces there, instead of selling British subjects down the river with regard to Gibraltar?

Mr. MacShane: If the hon. Gentleman can catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, he can ask a question about Gibraltar later—I thought that the main question was about Zimbabwe.

I might draw some comparisons with the constant support for the apartheid regime of South Africa given by the Conservative party when it was in government, and contrast that support with the international coalition encompassing the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United States, which has put a diplomatic ring around Zimbabwe in terms of sanctions, the travel ban and support for democratic forces there. This Government can be proud of the international coalition that they have put together to put effective pressure on Zimbabwe, in contrast with the Conservative party's love affair with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend will recognise that not only the political system but the economy in Zimbabwe is in a critical situation. What assessment has been made of the possible effect on the population of that poor country if sanctions are to apply in any rigid way? We certainly do not want it to be the people of that country who suffer as a result of their Government.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, which explains why the sanctions are carefully targeted at the elite of Zimbabwe and their interests overseas. Humanitarian and other aid still flows to Zimbabwe, but it is distributed not by the Government of the undemocratic Mugabe regime but by responsible non-governmental organisations.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Can the Minister list the specific sanctions that the Foreign Office wants imposed on Mugabe and his wretched Government?

Mr. MacShane: I have already mentioned the travel ban, other sanctions involving trade and commerce, the ban on any bilateral contacts with Zimbabwe and the financial sanctions imposed on the Zimbabwe elite. As I said, they encompass not only this country but the United States, other Commonwealth countries and the European Union. Yesterday, New Zealand imposed similar sanctions on Zimbabwe, and at the General Affairs Council meeting yesterday it was decided that there would be a moratorium on bilateral ministerial contacts with Zimbabwe. So the pressure is mounting steadily, but it is aimed at the elite, not at the suffering people of Zimbabwe.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does the Minister agree that the decision of the Commonwealth troika, including Presidents Obasanjo of Nigeria and Mbeki of South Africa, to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth following the appalling human rights abuses that went on there in the run-up to the general election shows that Africans are starting to put their house in order with regard to NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development? Will he assure me that we will start to put our house in order by securing significant extra

funds at the forthcoming G8 meeting for Africa—a continent where 40 per cent. of children still have no access to education?

Mr. MacShane: As my hon. Friend says, one of the heartening aspects of the Zimbabwe crisis has been the leadership on offer from Africa. It is Africans who have made it clear to Mr. Mugabe that his regime is unacceptable. I am pleased that it is this Government who have increased overseas aid by 45 per cent., that it is my right hon. Friend the Chancellor who has put forward proposals for a $50 billion development fund and that it is our Prime Minister who is taking the lead internationally in arguing against the agricultural protectionism that does so much damage to the export hopes of the poor farmers and peasants of Africa.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Minister agree that it is important that the growing crisis in Zimbabwe is not driven on to the back burner because of the crisis in the middle east and other problems in the world? Does he accept that the harassment, killing and other problems that arose during the election campaign have worsened since the election there? Will the Government ensure that the Commonwealth and the civilised world seek to bring stability to Zimbabwe, which remains a country with as great a potential as that of any in Africa? We want to help the people and to get rid of the Government.

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman's commitment and courage on this issue during the 1980s is well known to the House. If there is one overwhelming case for regime change in the world, it is in Zimbabwe. The new focus on Africa, led by the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, will be discussed at the G8 summit in Canada, then at the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg later this summer, and Zimbabwe will be a key element in those discussions.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the continuing oppression of human rights. Speaking as a former journalist, I have to say that the arrest and detention of Geoff Nyrota, the very brave editor of the "Zimbabwe Daily News" is the latest in a long list of cases of unacceptable harassment of the media. It adds to the other crimes for which Mugabe and ZANU-PF are responsible.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Given the virtually universal condemnation of the completely unfair and non-democratic manner in which the elections were run, and the chaos that has followed, with 70 per cent. unemployment and 116 per cent. inflation, what steps are the Government taking to bolster the democratic process in other parts of Africa—such as Sierra Leone, where elections take place on 14 May—and what steps are being taken to help the benighted population of Zimbabwe who are suffering from Mugabe's misrule?

Mr. MacShane: We continue to support all the democratic forces in Zimbabwe. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy does excellent work in promoting democracy in other parts of Africa, as do the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office through its conflict prevention fund. The funds for human rights projects that I announced a couple of days ago will increase the Foreign Office's presence and spending in Africa in order to help all the continent's democratic institutions and parties.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I start by congratulating the Minister on his diplomatic triumph in relation to Venezuela last week.

Is not it a matter of grave concern to the Government that despite all the brave words that we have heard from the Dispatch Box, since the election the situation in Zimbabwe has worsened and Mugabe has got stronger, not weaker? Is not it of particular concern that these acts are increasingly being targeted at members of the opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, and their families? There were 205 separate incidents of torture against them in the last week of March and their children are being violently and deliberately denied much-needed food aid. Does the Minister agree that the only acceptable way forward is to have a rerun of the presidential elections on a fair and scrutinised basis? What are the Government doing to bring that about?

Mr. MacShane: I am tempted to send the right hon. Gentleman to Harare to persuade Mr. Mugabe to have free and fair elections. Of course the entire international community wants proper, fair elections in Zimbabwe. The right hon. Gentleman will soon celebrate his first year in his present office, yet he has not put forward one concrete proposal for solving any of Zimbabwe's problems. The Government put together the international coalition, took the lead on sanctions and helped to persuade Commonwealth leaders to suspend Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth. Working multilaterally with our partners in the United States, the Commonwealth and Europe is the way forward. That, not hot air and waffle at the Dispatch Box, is the way to get democracy in Zimbabwe.

International Coalition against Terrorism

4. **Ms Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): If he will make a statement on the state of the international coalition against terrorism. [45519]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The international coalition remains strong. Governments all over the world have taken steps in compliance with United Nations resolution 1373 to tackle terrorism. Afghanistan has been liberated from the Taliban and much of the al-Qaeda network has been destroyed. However, all Governments can and should do more to address terrorism and the conditions that cause it.

Ms Prentice: During his visit to the middle east, is Secretary of State Powell not only holding discussions about the disaster between Israel and Palestine, but reminding our coalition partners of their responsibility to tackle international terrorism?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes. That message is constantly conveyed, not only by the American Secretary of State but by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that although the IRA is officially on ceasefire, it continues to represent an international terrorist threat? One has only to consider what happened in Colombia and elsewhere. Will the hon. Gentleman speak to his counterpart in America to ensure that the IRA is fully proscribed there?

Mr. Bradshaw: The IRA remains a proscribed organisation under section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Since 11 September, we have received excellent co-operation from the United States authorities on the matter, and we expect that to continue.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): What quantity of depleted-uranium weapons were used in the conflict in Afghanistan by British or American forces? What is the latest estimate of the number of civilians who died during the bombing campaign?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am not aware of any depleted uranium used by British forces in Afghanistan. I cannot speak on behalf of another country. My hon. Friend should treat with extreme caution the claims of civilian casualties made by the Taliban, whose unreliability was shown throughout the campaign. They tried to weave a tissue of lies in their press conferences in Pakistan.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Minister agree that the horrific events that are unfolding in Jenin seriously threaten the continued existence of the coalition against terrorism? Does he further agree that one of the first actions of the International Criminal Court should be to launch a full investigation into possible war crimes in that territory and bring the perpetrators to justice?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry to tell the hon. Gentleman that the International Criminal Court does not operate retrospectively and it will therefore not be able to take the action that he would like. However, I agree that recent action by the Israeli defence force in the occupied territories has been unhelpful in the global campaign against terrorism. We share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the worrying reports from Jenin and expect the Israeli Government to grant immediate access to all international non-governmental organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, so that a full investigation can take place. We shall have to wait and see about any action after that.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): May I remind my hon. Friend that, arising out of coalition action in Afghanistan, a handful of British citizens have been detained for many weeks in Camp X-ray in Cuba by one of our coalition partners? Their status has not been determined, no charges have been brought and there seems no prospect of a trial with any jurisdiction that we would recognise. The first duty in the exercise of British power is to defend the lives and liberties of British citizens, no matter how misguided they may have been.

Mr. Bradshaw: I accept some of what my hon. Friend says, but he should not forget that the detainees could face extremely serious charges. He is wrong to suggest that the Americans have not defined their status; they have. On two visits to Guantanamo Bay by British officials, they were perfectly satisfied that the detainees were being treated in accordance with international human rights norms.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Following the answer that the Minister gave a moment ago, what is his latest assessment of the locations to which al-Qaeda terrorists might now have dispersed? In particular, given that Yemen is probably one of the easiest countries in which such people can hide, what discussions has he had with the United States about the co-operation being given to the international coalition by President Ali Abdullah Saleh?

Mr. Bradshaw: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Although we have had a great deal of success in destroying the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan, we are still extremely worried about the networks that persist in parts of Afghanistan, across the border in Pakistan and in a number of other countries including Yemen and Somalia. We are satisfied with the co-operation that we have been receiving from the Yemeni Government. Indeed, many Governments around the world have got their act together in the wake of 11 September, and are doing extremely important work to counter the terrorism threat.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Would my hon. Friend like to reflect on the likely reaction of our Arab friends in the international coalition when they see American Secretary of State Colin Powell delaying a meeting with Chairman Arafat because of one suicide bombing, which, regrettably, killed six people, while on the same day sharing a platform with Prime Minister Sharon at the same time as Israeli troops were in the refugee camps murdering hundreds of people? If we are going to hold this international coalition together, must we not be clear that we condemn Israeli state terrorism just as strongly as we condemn suicide bombing?

Mr. Bradshaw: I have to tell my hon. Friend that there is no such thing as state terrorism. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish!"] In international law, there is no such thing. I have already told my hon. Friend that we are extremely concerned about reports of what went on in Jenin, but he is wrong to be critical of Colin Powell's mission. That mission should be welcomed on both sides of the House as a vital and timely contribution to a peace process in the middle east that we should all support.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I should say to the Minister that most Members of the House can recognise state terrorism when they see it or read about it.

So that we may estimate the strength, breadth and endurance of the international coalition against terrorism, will the Minister tell us which of its members—with the

exception of the United States and Britain—would support military action against Iraq without a new specific motion of the Security Council of the United Nations?

Mr. Bradshaw: The whole international community, led by the United Nations, has made specific demands on Iraq for it to comply with its obligations under numerous UN resolutions, when it was in breach of the ceasefire agreement reached after the Gulf war. I am not going to speculate on which nations might be willing to take possible military action, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that they all feel as strongly as we do about the need for Iraq to comply.

Gibraltar

5. **Mr. Robert Walter** (North Dorset): What recent discussions he has had with Spain on Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [45520]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): There have been regular discussions over recent months. A further ministerial meeting under the Brussels process will be held in the coming months.

Mr. Walter: The House and the people of Gibraltar would like to know what is the Government's bottom line in these discussions? What will be the future status of the citizens of Gibraltar? Will they be British subjects or Spanish nationals?

Peter Hain: Our bottom line is very clear, and has been repeated to the House on a number of occasions. The people of Gibraltar will remain British subjects if they choose to do so, and they will have our full support in doing so. We have absolutely no intention of handing Gibraltar over to Spain. That is a non-starter—another bottom line. In addition, we will retain our full control over the military base on the Rock, which is of key strategic importance to us. That is another bottom line.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): If the people of Gibraltar reject the treaty that has been put before them on joint sovereignty, can we ensure that the heads of agreement that will have been signed by the Spanish and British Governments will be withdrawn once and for all?

Peter Hain: There has been no agreement signed between our two Governments, and we are still seeking to explore whether we can reach agreement. If the people of Gibraltar in a referendum reject any proposal put to them—in other words, that agreement, because the whole package would have to be put to them—then that is the end of it. Let me just say to my hon. Friend something that applies to him and to the other critics of what we are trying to do—which, incidentally, despite all the moans and groans from the Opposition, is carrying on exactly what the Conservatives were doing in their 18 years of Government in seeking a resolution to the Gibraltar dispute. What has happened since my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister and I have sought to move matters forward is that a series of advances have been made. One is that, since 22 March, a second channel has been opened on the border between Gibraltar and Spain.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Ah!

Peter Hain: The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) says, "Ah!", but what that has done is reduce the border delays about which Gibraltarians have consistently complained. The average delay for each person crossing used to be of between 30 and 90 minutes, but that has been reduced to around 10 minutes. That is a result of our talking to the Government of Spain, making progress and seeking agreement to relieve the harassment and aggravation that the people of Gibraltar have suffered.

This Government have talked and negotiated and achieved something, whereas the previous Conservative Government achieved nothing in 18 years. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) that he ought at least to applaud that advance.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): May I take the Minister back to the beginning of that very long answer? In reply to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), he said that, if the people of Gibraltar rejected any agreement, that would be the end of "it". What is "it"? Would that mean that the agreement would be torn up by the British Government and that there would be nothing left on the table? Anything else would just not do.

Peter Hain: I do not know—[Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Wait for it. I do not know whether the Government of whom the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and some of his colleagues were members used to tear up agreements that they had reached with foreign Governments, or pretend that those agreements did not exist. Of course, once agreements have been reached they cannot simply be airbrushed away, but this agreement cannot be implemented because the people of Gibraltar will have the final say in a referendum.

Moreover, if we come to the point of reaching agreement—and I do not know whether we will or not—it is our intention that this House will be the first to hear about it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will seek to make a statement to the House, if and when we reach an agreement.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On the last day before the summer recess, I bet!

Peter Hain: I enjoy the interventions from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), but he is wrong in this case. The House will be sitting. Over the past six to nine months, the Government have kept the House informed on this matter. We have had debates and answered questions, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the pension arrangements in Gibraltar may be in contravention of EU law? What liabilities might the Government incur as a result?

Peter Hain: We are very concerned about this matter because, despite our warnings, the Government of

Gibraltar have been indulging in what we think may be discriminatory pensions practices. I have had to write to the Chief Minister explaining that. The European Commission at present is investigating these potentially illegal practices.

What is important—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members will listen for a moment, the House will wish to know that a bill of £77 million could fall on the taxpayers of Britain if, as a result of this scam, the Government of Gibraltar do not pick up responsibility and accept their obligations. So far, they have resisted—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to you, Mr. Mackay, that you must be quiet. You have asked a question, and the Minister is entitled to reply.

Peter Hain: I do not think that the House will support British taxpayers picking up a bill for a pensions scam that is down to the Government of Gibraltar. That Government must pick it up, and we will ensure that they do so.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Minister realise that there is widespread unease throughout the House at the way in which he is conducting these negotiations? Can he not accept that most people believe that the negotiations should not have begun before the pressures applied by Spain had been removed? In addition, his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brackneil (Mr. MacKay) was both ambivalent and disturbing. Will he please give the House a categorical assurance that there will be no change to the status of Gibraltar or its citizens, unless and until the majority of those citizens wish there to be a change?

Peter Hain: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I listened very carefully to what the Minister said about pensions and noticed that he used the word "scam". Does he really think it fair that a Government or people should be traduced in this House without any representation? Whatever our views on this, we are all acting on a surrogacy basis. Such people are not represented in this House although they are in other jurisdictions—in the United States, Spain, France and the Netherlands: they have no access to their Foreign Minister, their Prime Minister or those who traduce them in this place, and I think that that is very bad. I hope that the Minister will consider granting representation in this place to overseas territories. What does he say to that?

Peter Hain: My answer to that is no, Mr. Speaker. Can I say again to my hon. Friend—it is a point that I will repeat briefly—that the only way to solve a dispute like this is to talk about it and negotiate? That is what we are doing and what we are seeking to do, and the end will be decided by the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Further to the answer that the Minister gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), can I ask him a very precise question? Can he give an unequivocal guarantee to the House today that every element of any agreement arrived at with the Spanish Government on the future of Gibraltar, including those of principle relating to sovereignty, will be put in its entirety to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum, and that any elements of any such agreement, including those relating to sovereignty, that are not endorsed by the people of Gibraltar would then be deemed null and void as if they had not been made?

Peter Hain: We will put the agreement in full to the people of Gibraltar—the agreement in full. [HON. MEMBERS: "And then?"] Well, if the people of Gibraltar reject it, it cannot be implemented. I am not going to take lectures from the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). This is a group of Tories who, nearly 30 years ago, we now learn from *The Sunday Telegraph*, tried to give Gibraltar away to Spain. The Tory Government were wrong then; the people of Gibraltar should not trust the Tories now any more than they should have trusted them then. The Tories were wrong then to try and give Gibraltar away; they are wrong now to try and stop us negotiating a deal which, for 18 years, they tried to negotiate when in government. Now that they are in opposition, they are indulging in shabby opportunism.

Mr. Ancram: We always know that the Minister is losing when he retreats into history, particularly when that history predates the time when his party was committed to withdrawal from the European Union.

The people of Gibraltar will not be fobbed off by the sort of weasel words that we have heard today, and nor will we. Let me make it clear that an incoming Conservative Government would not feel bound by any agreement that has not received a democratic and free endorsement from the people of Gibraltar. Let me say, too, in relation to what we heard from Barcelona, that just because the Government can apparently be bought by any political donor, that should not lead the Minister to believe that the people of Gibraltar can be bribed into selling their heritage, their history and their sovereignty. They cannot, they will not and they are right.

Peter Hain: This is jumped-up rhetoric, frankly, from a member of a party which tried for 18 years, as we have tried for the past nine months or so, to seek a resolution of this dispute—to give the people of Gibraltar a better future, to give the people of Gibraltar an end to the aggravation and harassment that they have had from Spain for decade after decade and to try and end this 300-year dispute. We will seek to do that, despite the cheap criticisms and attacks that the right hon. Gentleman makes on us, and the people of Gibraltar, in the end, will have a better deal as a result.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

10. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What recent discussions he has had with African leaders about the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [45525]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The New Partnership for Africa's Development is a subject of frequent discussion with Africa's leaders. It was discussed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary during his visit to Africa in January, by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and by

Baroness Amos, the Minister for Africa, in her capacity as the Prime Minister's personal representative for the G8 Africa plan.

Hugh Bayley: I congratulate the Government on supporting that initiative right from the start. Does my hon. Friend agree that unless we increase the volume of trade between Africa and the Quad countries—the United States, Canada, Japan and the EU—there is no prospect whatever of NEPAD delivering what is needed? Is he aware that the value of agricultural subsidies in the Quad countries is greater than the entire gross domestic product of sub-Saharan Africa? Unless we cut those subsidies, the region has no real prospect of exporting the one commodity it has to export—agricultural produce. Will my hon. Friend tell me what the Government are doing both in this country and in the EU Council of Ministers to cut agricultural subsidies in Europe?

Mr. MacShane: Not only is my hon. Friend right, but even before becoming a Member of this place he had one of the most distinguished records on this issue. Subsidies of $1 billion a day are paid to protect the northern markets, mainly of the European Union and the United States. The Prime Minister has taken a lead, criticising subsidies on both sides of the Atlantic. My hon. Friend is right: no amount of aid, however much we increase it, can remotely match the need for increased trade and commerce and more open borders, both in the EU, and in the US and the other leading northern countries that he mentioned.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Given the lack of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe, what role does the hon. Gentleman perceive for both NEPAD and countries such as ours in ensuring that, by contrast, the impending elections in two extremely fractured African countries—Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—are indeed free and fair? What mechanisms will be put in place to help to ensure that?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman raises important points, although I should be reluctant to ask NEPAD to shoulder all the problems of Africa. Its discussions are principally about economic development. We firmly believe that the more that trade and commerce are open, the richer countries will become and the more their political processes will be stable and democratic. We shall continue to insist on the tightest monitoring of the elections in the two countries to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Is my hon. Friend aware that, last night, the meeting of the all-party great lakes region and genocide prevention group, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), heard very disturbing evidence, especially from Church people, about genocide in the Congo? Will my hon. Friend assure us that the Government are watching that carefully and are using their influence to the full?

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the DRC and the great lakes region in January with his French counterpart. We are working closely, especially with the French, who have a greater colonial heritage in that area than us, to put an end to the massacres—I think that is the correct word—that are causing such damage and anguish there. It is a constant preoccupation and we need active policy engagement with Africa—a political policy to try to secure the international rule of law as well as an aid policy.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the events in Afghanistan, one of the reasons why the G8 should make a bigger engagement with Africa, with serious resource implications, is that two failed states—the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia—pose a big threat to the African continent?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right. That is why, at the G8 meeting in Canada later this spring, the issue of Africa will be addressed. It has been very much put on the agenda owing to the active support of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. We want to improve the quality and the quantity of aid to Africa, but above all we want to allow Africa to trade and to become more attractive to direct foreign investment. It is through economic growth that the people of Africa can build a better future.

UK-Japan Bilateral Relations

11. **David Wright** (Telford): If he will make a statement on UK-Japan bilateral relations. [45526]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Japan is strong. On the global level, Japan is a key ally in our efforts to ensure global prosperity and security and to promote democracy and the rule of law worldwide. On the economic level, over 1,000 Japanese companies operate in this country, creating over 80,000 manufacturing jobs and many thousands of jobs in the service sector.

David Wright: My hon. Friend will be aware that Japanese investment in Telford has been significant in recent years. Indeed, the United Kingdom is a bridgehead for Japanese investment into Europe. Has my hon. Friend had any discussion with his counterparts in the Japanese Government about the Government's position on the euro?

Mr. MacShane: Telford is such a popular area for Japanese inward investment that, I am advised, people can get sake on tap there. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the euro issue, but Japanese inward investors continue to place their confidence in Britain. Some 46 per cent. of all investment in the European Union is in the United Kingdom and the sterling-euro exchange rate is only one of a number of factors, but if ever the Conservative party's total opposition to Europe and the euro were to be perceived as the British Government's position, that would have a disastrous impact on all inward investment into the United Kingdom.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any indication from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he intends to make a statement on the Wanless report, in view of the fact that his terms of reference require Mr. Wanless to report by April 2002?

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that it has been widely trailed that the Chancellor's plans for health spending will be included in his Budget statement tomorrow. Would it not have been appropriate for the House to have sight of the final Wanless report well in advance of the Budget? Indeed, can we not conclude from the non-appearance or postponement of the Wanless report's publication that the Chancellor's idea of a debate on those issues is to start it in the morning and shut it down just a few hours later?

Mr. Speaker: I have not been notified of any such statement, but I inform the right hon. and learned Gentleman that written Question 5, which deals with that matter, will be answered this afternoon.

Selective Schools (Transitional Arrangements)

3.32 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish that a maximum of five per cent. of pupils can be selected, by aptitude or ability, for admission to any state secondary school; to specify the period of time in which, and the means by which, those schools currently exceeding this percentage will be required to reduce their selective intake to five per cent.; to specify the criteria for such selection and the means by which schools should conduct assessments; and for connected purposes.

My Bill proposes a change—an improvement—to the current policy on selection that will have widespread support among the overwhelming majority of parents throughout the country. Of course, I do not make my recommendations lightly—I am seeking to improve policy. I call in my support what the head of the No. 10 policy unit said in a recent speech. I quote from the transcript:

"It was sometimes said that third-way politics meant that the difference between left and right had ceased to exist. This was absolutely not the case; yet nor was the third way exclusive of new and as yet unformulated strategies. Other ways—a fourth way, even a fifth way—could well be invented."

Therefore, my Bill offers the fourth way to deal with the contentious and divisive issue of selective admissions policies in secondary education.

First, it is important to recognise that three current forms of permitted selection to state secondary schools are of most concern: selection by religious affiliation, selection by aptitude and selection by ability. As the question of religious affiliation in faith schools has been widely debated in recent weeks, my Bill deals purely with selection by aptitude and by ability.

In respect of ability, there are currently more than 160 selective schools in England, spread across more than 30 local authorities. Although those local authorities with wholly selective policies are largely, although not entirely, concentrated in the south-east of England, almost one quarter of all English local education authorities are still affected by selection to a greater or lesser degree. It is also important to remember that, in addition to the vast majority of English local education authorities, both Scotland and Wales have rejected selection. It is significant that the Northern Ireland Assembly is currently considering the recommendation of the Burns report to end selection in Northern Ireland.

In respect of selection by aptitude, under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, a school which considers itself to have a specialism is entitled to select pupils on the basis of aptitude up to a maximum of 10 per cent. of the intake for a given year. Subsequently, the programme of specialist schools has been significantly developed to the point at which the Government now propose that half of all schools should be designated as specialist schools. However, only a small minority of those schools have chosen to exercise the option to select.

The concerns about selection have been debated for many years and can be summarised as follows. In respect of selection by ability, for every one grammar school there must be, by definition, three secondary modern schools to take those pupils who have failed the 11-plus examination. It is no coincidence that those local

authorities with wholly selective admissions policies tend to have greater numbers of schools in serious difficulties and poorer overall levels of performance than equivalent local authorities with comprehensive systems. It is also significant that the most recent research on selective systems by both the university of York and the National Foundation for Educational Research indicates that the most able pupils performed at least as well, if not better, in comprehensive schools as in selective schools. In those local authorities with partially selective systems, the price of selection is paid by those schools that, although notionally comprehensive, are so heavily creamed by selection that they can never hope to be in a position to attract the critical mass of highly motivated pupils that is necessary to raise performance levels across the school or to compete on a level playing field with schools that have a genuinely comprehensive intake.

In addition, concerns about the impact of selection by ability focus on the very possibility of being able to identify ability accurately at the age of 11. In the House alone, there are many individuals of high ability who slipped through the 11-plus net and whose talent was only revealed many years later. Across the country, there are millions of such people. That represents a waste of talent on a massive scale that the nation can no longer afford.

In respect of selection by aptitude, similar concerns arise. How many parents, on looking back at their children's development, could have accurately predicted their aptitudes and interests at the age of 11? How many teachers can assess such aptitudes accurately? The main examining boards do not recognise any objective tests for aptitude. It has been said that the distinction between aptitude and ability is that aptitude is seen as a measure of potential, but the question must be asked: what is the nature of that potential? Is it potential ability or potential something else? The concern is that selection by aptitude could be exploited as a means of selection by ability by the back door. The fact that, to date, few schools have chosen to select by aptitude suggests that the majority are well aware of the difficulties of both definition and assessment.

The central issue for any Government committed to increasing equality of opportunity and reducing social exclusion should therefore be the impact of educational selection at 11 on these twin objectives: how we can best develop equality of status for all our schools while maintaining diversity of ethos and continuing to drive up standards and raise performance levels for all our children? This is where my Bill can assist. It proposes a maximum of 5 per cent. of pupils who can be selected and suggests a transitional period of three years in which the reduction to that figure can take place. However, the precise threshold for selection and the time scale of the transition are clearly matters of detail that are subject to negotiation.

While gradually reducing—but not abolishing—selection by ability and aptitude, the Bill will gradually reduce differentials of status between schools because all schools would become more comprehensive in their intake. As few specialist schools have chosen to select by aptitude, the gradual reduction from 10 to 5 per cent. should cause little difficulty. Some grammar schools claim that their examination performance indicates a superior level of education and the reduction would enable us to test that hypothesis.

The gradual redistribution of pupils would ensure that all schools start to acquire the critical mass of able and motivated pupils that is so necessary. The process would reduce the extent to which allocation to a school determines a child's progress and life chances. It would significantly enhance equality of educational opportunity and reduce levels of social exclusion as the educational apartheid of the English system is gradually dismantled.

The first way of dealing with selection was to have a grammar school in every town. The second was to try to abolish every grammar school in the country. The third way has been to introduce the concept of selection by aptitude and to establish a system of parental ballots, but that is unworkable. My Bill proposes the fourth way. It recognises that the remarkable success of British primary schools has been due entirely to comprehensive education; that the startling increase in the proportion of young people going to university has been largely the result of the extension of comprehensive education; that the significant improvements in GCSE results in recent years have been achieved largely by comprehensive schools; and that many parts of England retain a highly divisive system of secondary education that works against equality of opportunity, reinforces social exclusion and constrains levels of achievement.

The Bill proposes a gradual transition to a new 5 per cent. maximum on selection by ability or aptitude; it proposes a period of three years during which the transition should take place; it would ensure minimum disruption to pupils, staff and their schools; it would require greater transparency in the mechanisms of selection; and it would bring about the most radical extension of educational opportunity that this country has seen for a generation. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.42 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I oppose what I believe is an ill-thought-out and damaging proposal. I fear that it will do nothing to raise educational standards in this country, and I very much hope that the House will join me in opposing the motion to introduce a Bill that would reduce the threshold for selection in our schools.

The Bill is not simply an attack on grammar schools; it is an attack on many state schools across the country. It is an attack on those state schools that select, for local reasons, a small proportion of their intake—currently, they are allowed to select up to 10 or 15 per cent. of that intake. The Bill is also an attack on state schools that are building up specialisations that can help them to achieve excellence in their chosen field, or it is an attack on schools that have already successfully built up such a specialisation. For example, city technology colleges have done much to improve technological skills in recent years.

The Bill has been proposed by a Labour Member, but it flies in the face of the Education Bill and the principles that lie behind it that have taken up so much parliamentary time in the past few months. This Bill goes against the powers to innovate that are set out in the Education Bill and against the city academies that will be set up under it. How can those schools find the children whom they need to achieve excellence in their areas of specialism if they have no ability to select by aptitude? How can a technology college or an arts college achieve excellence if it cannot give places to the pupils with particular skills in technology or the arts?

[Chris Grayling]

I know that the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) is a long-standing and principled opponent of grammar schools. I understand that and accept his point of view, but I think that he is wrong. I suspect that, ultimately, opposition to grammar schools lies at the heart of the Bill. I admire his determination, but disagree fundamentally with his objective. He misses the point that opponents of grammar schools so often miss—selection still exists in every part of this country, but in too many places it is selection by estate agent, not by skill. In today's Britain the chances are that, if someone is born on the wrong side of town, they will end up in a school that is less good than if they had been born on the right side.

I went to a grammar school and I had friends from all walks of life. Grammar schools in many great towns in the north of England, such as Bury, were built as centres of educational excellence. They attracted pupils from all areas—the deprived as well as the good. They provided a way out of deprived areas for many of their pupils, and they took pupils regardless of background. In my view, it is tragic that some of those great schools—such as Manchester grammar school—are no longer a part of our state education system.

The difficulty with the grammar school issue was that we tried to tackle the problems that undoubtedly existed by dumbing down our best schools, rather than by creating excellence in other schools, as the Germans did. Even now, the reality is that a selective school system can make a major contribution. Many London boroughs have a selective system, but the non-selective schools still do better than their peers in nearby comprehensive boroughs.

At the end of last year, the Office for Standards in Education highlighted the fact that, in its view, comprehensive schools do not know how to identify gifted and talented pupils, or to teach them properly. Recent research by the National Foundation for Educational Research, to which the hon. Member for Bury, North referred, reinforced the benefits that selective education can offer. It found that, for pupils of average and above average ability, grammar schools do a much better job than comprehensives. It rightly adds the caveat, which we need to bear in mind, that

"selective LEAs need to find ways of supporting those children who narrowly fail to achieve grammar school places."

We certainly need to discuss how to ensure that pupils do not miss out once and for all at the age of 11. However, dealing with that issue correctly does not mean that we have to throw the baby out with the bath water and get rid of grammar schools altogether.

The conclusion of the NFER's research is absolutely clear:

"Comprehensive authorities may wish to consider whether it is somehow possible to replicate the 'grammar school effect' in a . . . different context."

That wholehearted endorsement from an independent and highly respected research body shows that grammar schools offer something that the comprehensive system too often fails to deliver. We will not sort out the problems in our education system by chopping the legs off grammar schools, instead of investing in other schools to ensure that they can deliver the same educational benefits as grammar schools.

If we are to deal with this country's education problems, the last thing we should do is once again tackle the issue of selection. It is the wrong issue at the wrong moment. It is true that big problems exist in our education system. Any head teacher will mention over-regulation and the endless initiatives and reforms that they face. Why on earth should we choose to impose on head teachers already overburdened with reform yet another change? They want less change, not more. They want a period of stability to get to grips with the task already in hand, not a new set of responsibilities.

As a result of Government changes associated with the introduction of the Learning and Skills Council, a school in my constituency has a £50,000 funding shortfall for its sixth form. In the next few weeks, it faces the prospect of making a teacher redundant to meet that gap, unless the funds can be found by the LEA or the Government. That school selects 15 per cent. of its intake for local, strategic reasons. The last thing on earth that its head teacher needs is to be confronted with the task of reshaping her admissions processes and reorganising the way the school admits pupils, rather than getting to grips with the real problems on her doorstep.

On teacher shortages, many teachers are leaving the profession not because selection exists, but because—as one local head teacher said—they want to get out and get a life. A recent report, produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Government, shows that they are overburdened by a work load that causes many to work in excess of 50 hours a week. They are also leaving because the lack of discipline in our schools is getting out of hand, and they feel that the Government are not giving them the necessary support to deal with that issue.

The Bill flies in the face of the recent Education Bill. It would engender reforms that are unwanted by head teachers, who already have to deal with too much change. It would undermine some of our best schools while doing nothing to raise standards. It does not deserve to be introduced and I call on the House to oppose it.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 163, Noes 112.

Division No. 211] **[3.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Borrow, David
Brennan, Kevin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John

Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doughty, Sue
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lamb, Norman
Lepper, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Oaten, Mark
O'Hara, Edward
Owen, Albert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lynne Jones and
Dr. Stephen Ladyman.

NOES

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Fabricant and
Mr. George Osborne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Chaytor, Andrew Bennett, Valerie Davey, Mrs. Janet Dean, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Glenda Jackson, Lynne Jones, Dr. Stephen Ladyman, Mr. Tony Lloyd and Mr. Chris Mullin.

Selective Schools (Transitional Arrangements)

Mr. David Chaytor accordingly presented a Bill to establish that a maximum of five per cent of pupils can be selected, by aptitude or ability, for admission to any state secondary school; to specify the period of time in which, and the means by which, those schools currently exceeding this percentage will be required to reduce their selective intake to five per cent.; to specify the criteria for such selection and the means by which schools should conduct assessments; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 121].

The Middle East

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Mr. Speaker: Before we begin the main business, to the many hon. Members who have approached the Chair to ask whether they will be called to speak in the debate I can say only that this is one of those days on which they will just have to wait and see.

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): This is the first full-day debate on the middle east in Government time for some years, and it comes not a moment too soon. The conflict there is now more fragile and more dangerous than it has been for decades. Understandably, that conflict provokes great passion and partisanship, but through you, Mr. Speaker, I make one plea: that whatever our different perspectives, we use this occasion for a sober and serious examination of the issues, and above all apply ourselves to assisting both sides to move towards a peaceful solution.

The prospect of peace in the middle east hangs by a thread. There are three fundamental truths about the situation. First, neither side has a monopoly of right or of wrong. Secondly, the peoples of the area have to live together. Thirdly, neither side can achieve lasting security through force, but can do so only by having the courage to compromise.

Since the intifada began, at least 1,300 Palestinians and more than 450 Israelis have been killed; thousands more on both sides have been injured. In recent weeks, we have seen a spiral of violence following a spate of suicide bombings and the Israeli incursions into the west bank, in which many more have lost their lives and many, many more have been injured. The situation on the ground is fluid and critical. The Israeli defence force, I understand, has withdrawn today from Qalqilya, but they remain in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and a number of other towns. On the diplomatic front, US Secretary of State Colin Powell is currently meeting Israeli Prime Minister Sharon. The House will also wish to know that the military attaché of Her Majesty's Government is now in Jenin making his own assessment; if I have a report before the winding-up speeches, I will ensure that it is drawn to the attention of the House.

Like everyone in the House, I have found the continuing reports of deaths and damage, caused in Israel by suicide bombings and other terrorism and in the occupied territories by Israeli military action, deeply disturbing. I am profoundly concerned about the scenes of widespread destruction of densely populated refugee camps. We are doing all that we can to obtain an authoritative account of the conduct of the Israeli operation—that is why the military attaché is there at the moment—and its consequences. As a long-standing friend of Israel, I have to say that such scenes can only be harmful to Israel's reputation abroad.

There have been allegations of misconduct by the Israeli forces during the operation. Last week, on my instructions, our ambassador in Tel Aviv raised our concern with Prime Minister Sharon's office. I have twice spoken in the past few days to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres about that and demanded that Israel allow the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies immediate access to the affected areas, including Jenin. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who was in Jenin last week with the United Nations. Many in the House will have heard her vivid account of the situation with great alarm.

We are in constant contact with our ambassador in Tel Aviv and the consul-general in Jerusalem. I want to pay tribute to their efforts. Our staff, often at considerable personal risk, have worked tirelessly to discharge their consular responsibilities to the British nationals living and working in the west bank in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and have helped to ensure that we can fulfil our general humanitarian obligations to relieve the suffering there.

As some hon. Members will know, many of the locally engaged staff working for the British consul-general in Jerusalem are Palestinian. I have met and talked to those Palestinian staff, and have great admiration for them. In normal times, they suffer extraordinary inconvenience to get to and from work; each journey often takes them two or three hours, as they have to go through five or six different checkpoints, taking separate taxis between them. During the current Israeli defence force operations, many of our staff have been trapped in their own homes for weeks, while some have relations who have been killed or injured in the violence.

Throughout this period, Her Majesty's Government have called on the Israelis to pull their forces back, and to act in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions and the requirements of international humanitarian law. We have consistently called on the Palestinians to do everything in their power to halt the terrorist attacks. Both sides must now step back and start talking.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Foreign Secretary explain why the Government did not support the resolution tabled yesterday in Geneva, in which the United Nations Commission on Human Rights called for a withdrawal of Israeli troops from the west bank?

Mr. Straw: I am happy to do so, and shall place the text of the resolution in the Library. The simple fact of the matter is that the resolution was completely unbalanced, which is why Germany and the United Kingdom decided to oppose it. Many European countries that voted for the resolution made oral statements of objection to part of its content. I happen to think that it was a cleaner approach simply to vote against it.

Both sides must now step back and start talking. The conflict can no longer be managed; it must be resolved. So today I want to tell the House what we and the international community are doing and should do to help reduce the dreadful violence, and to bring both sides back to the negotiating table and towards a settlement. I want to use this opportunity to set out some of the elements that will have to form part of any framework for a peaceful future in the middle east.

The immediate causes of the present conflict go back to the collapse of the Camp David and Taba talks, and to the eruption of the intifada in September 2000, but of course the underlying causes of the conflict go very much

deeper. We in the United Kingdom bear some more contemporary responsibility for the current situation. It was a predecessor of mine as Foreign Secretary, A. J. Balfour, who in 1917 promised a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people.

The holocaust, which was commemorated in Israel last week, and which we commemorated in this country in January, acted to reinforce the determination of Jewish leaders to create their own state of Israel. Fifty-four years ago tomorrow that state was formally declared.

For most of the five and a half decades since, Israel's very existence went unrecognised by all Arab states. Only in 1979, after three wars, did Egypt sign a peace treaty with Israel, recovering its territory occupied in 1967. In 1991, the Madrid conference launched an international effort to conclude a comprehensive settlement.

Parallel diplomacy by Norway and the United States gave birth in 1993 to the Oslo process—an imaginative effort to bring about Israeli-Palestinian peace through a phased approach. The Palestinian Authority was established and helped to develop into an embryonic state administration, with substantial European Union and bilateral United Kingdom financial support. But crucial issues were left unresolved or ambiguous by the Oslo process, including the future of the settlements, borders, Palestinian statehood, Jerusalem and refugees. The murder of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 was a grievous blow to the peace process. Accelerated settlement building and extremist violence thereafter undermined confidence on both sides.

In 2000 there was a further moment of hope when the Israeli and Palestinian leaders met at Camp David, and later when negotiators met at Taba in the new year 2001. By then, however, the intifada had broken out. Since then, the region has been gripped in a spiral of violence, not least through the terrifying horror of the suicide bomb. We all need to understand that it is almost impossible to imagine the agony of ordinary Israeli citizens as they sift through the wreckage of yet another supermarket, nightclub or bus, looking for the remains of their loved ones.

No less hard for us to imagine is the fear of ordinary Palestinians as they cower in the ruins of their homes, not knowing the fate of their friends and family in the next village, and not knowing where the next shell may land. Victims of terror on one side; victims of occupation on the other.

There are 3.5 million Palestinians, many of them living in desperate circumstances in east Jerusalem, the west bank and the Gaza strip. There are 6.5 million Israelis, including 1 million Israeli Arabs. Their only future in the west bank, in Gaza and in Israel is living together.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelled out in his statement six days ago, there can be no military victory for either side in this conflict. The international community cannot stand by and watch as the parties fight each other to a standstill. The world has to act before irreparable damage is done to the cause of peace and the hopes of future generations.

The first priority must be to stop the spiral of violence and reprisal, and to persuade both sides to accept a ceasefire. That is the focus of the current mission to the middle east by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. The UN Secretary-General, the EU presidency and the Russian Federation gave Secretary Powell their full backing when they met him in Madrid last week, as did all EU Foreign Ministers at our meeting in Luxembourg yesterday. Of course, Secretary Powell has our full backing and support. As a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations and a member of the European Union, the United Kingdom has been actively involved. As the House knows, the middle east dominated my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's discussions with President Bush at Crawford just over a week ago.

Secretary of State Powell's task is an incredibly delicate one. It is vital that it should not be disrupted or undermined. However, our role is not only diplomatic. We are already major providers of aid to the Palestinian Authority and to those in the occupied territories. The amount of aid will double during this financial year compared with the amount provided two years ago. We have also made it clear that we stand ready to take part in monitoring the parties' compliance with their obligations, starting with the ceasefire and continuing as the process develops.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will my right hon. Friend say something about the emergency aid that the Government can offer to help in the traumatic situation following the destruction of the refugee camp at Jenin and at other places?

Mr. Straw: We stand ready to provide considerable emergency aid. We discussed the provision of aid bilaterally and multilaterally through the European Union at the EU Foreign Ministers General Affairs Council meeting yesterday. The problem at the moment is not finding the money to pay for humanitarian aid, but ensuring that the aid gets through. That is where we have been directing our efforts.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Last week, the Prime Minister was pretty dismissive when he was asked by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) about the case for sanctions. Given the events and developments of the past week, is the Foreign Secretary prepared to reconsider the case for sanctions? Usually, when a country is in flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions, sanctions are one of the first measures to be considered to ensure enforcement and withdrawal.

Mr. Straw: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I do not believe that that would be an appropriate course for us to take at this time. I believe that the whole effort of the United Kingdom and the international community needs to be directed at securing a pathway to peace, as I shall explain.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank the Foreign Secretary for giving way. The House will have heard his reply to the question about sanctions. Will he at least give the House an assurance today that there will be no arms exports to Israel and that no new licences will be granted for parts for equipment that has already been exported? Will he urge the United States to do the same?

Mr. Straw: We discussed that matter yesterday in the General Affairs Council. We did not decide on an arms embargo, but we concluded that the European code of

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conduct—a common position followed by all European Union members—ought rigorously to be applied to those exports as to others.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend at any rate give the House an assurance that the Government will make it clear to the Israeli Government that military equipment supplied by Britain on condition that it would not be used for internal order purposes will not be used to suppress Palestinians?

Mr. Straw: I have already made that clear and have answered a number of questions about the matter. I deeply regret the fact that our very good military attaché discovered a little while ago that armoured personnel carriers built in Israel, but on the chassis of tanks exported from the United Kingdom—it has to be said that they were exported 40 years ago—were being used in the occupied territories. We took up the matter immediately with the Government of Israel and I reported it to the House on the day on which I found out about it. We have followed it up and I gave the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) a detailed answer about it yesterday. We had received undertakings from the Government of Israel that such exports would not be used in the occupied territories, but, as I told the right hon. and learned Gentleman yesterday in my answer, as a result of what I regard as unsatisfactory answers from the Government of Israel to our inquiries, we can no longer make decisions about arms exports to Israel on the basis of those undertakings.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman because I mentioned him, but then I must get on.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for this passage of his speech and for the answers that he provided yesterday. Should we take those answers and what he has just said to mean that he is no longer prepared to rely on the assurances of the Israeli Government as regards the use to which any arms exports may be put?

Mr. Straw: I gave a detailed and carefully drafted answer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. The words are clear, but it is extremely important that there should be the greatest certainty here. Under the consolidated European Union criteria, by which we abide carefully, we would not export anything that could be used for internal repression or for external aggression. That remains the basis of our policy. I am happy to ensure that copies of the consolidated criteria are drawn to the House's attention.

If I may, I shall now make progress. I know that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends wish to contribute.

Progress on peace, when it happens, will come slowly through small, reciprocal steps. However, the confidence to agree and to implement those first steps will not be found on either side unless they are seen to be in a clear political context. To generate any momentum, we have to maintain at every stage a political perspective alongside the necessary concerns over security.

One of the terrible twists of the past few months is that each moment of hope—after Tenet; after the Bush and Powell speeches in November; after the Arafat speech on 16 December—has been followed by renewed outbreaks of violence, assassinations and suicide bombings, destroying, at least temporarily, the political climate for peace and playing into the hands of those on both sides whose preference is only to pursue their aims through military and terrorist means, not through compromise. The cruel irony of the situation in the middle east is that even as the parties have moved further apart, international opinion has moved further together towards a consensus about the framework of a lasting political solution.

We must all understand that there has to be more than a process: there has to be a destination. There is now a near-universal acceptance that that destination has to be the existence of two states—a state of Israel and a viable state of Palestine. That was the message of United Nations Security Council resolution 1397, which was passed unanimously last month. It is the basis of the peace plan put forward by Crown Prince Abdullah, which received backing from the Arab summit in Beirut last month.

Moreover, crucially, it is the policy of the United States. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 10 November, President Bush went further than any of his predecessors in expressing his support for Palestinian statehood. He said:

> "We are working toward a day when two states, Israel and Palestine, live peacefully together within secure and recognised borders as called for by the Security Council resolutions."

We have to keep that vision of peace firmly in view and to impress upon the parties that we expect them to work towards the same objective.

The "two-state solution" means what it says: two viable, secure, territorially sovereign and democratic states of Israel and Palestine, mutually recognised and committed to peaceful co-existence within agreed borders. Let us be clear that Palestine should have the usual characteristics of statehood: the necessary institutions and rights, including responsibility for its internal security; the freedom to conclude treaties; and freedom of internal movement of goods, services and people and of economic policy. We understand that precise borders would have to be negotiated, but Israel would have to withdraw in accordance with United Nations' Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

As I said a few minutes ago, one problem with the Oslo process was that it left some key issues unresolved, especially in respect of Jerusalem, settlements and refugees. Those issues are, however, so central both to the conflict and to its solution that they have to be addressed. At Camp David and at Taba, discussion was on the basis that the capitals on both sides would be based in Jerusalem. I believe that the parties should proceed on that basis.

On settlements, we have repeatedly called for Israel to withdraw. The settlements are contrary to international law, and all settlement activity must immediately be frozen. Again, Camp David and Taba provided the framework for handling those in the long-term future.

On refugees, I welcome the recent statement by Arab leaders that, provided there is a just outcome on this issue, they are prepared to accommodate Israel's fundamental concerns.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The Foreign Secretary is outlining a solution that we would all,

of course, welcome. After Chairman Arafat's comprehensive rejection of Barak's offer at Camp David, and of the Clinton-Barak offer at Taba, however, does the right hon. Gentleman really think that Chairman Arafat would accept any such deal at all?

Mr. Straw: My first concern is that the House and the Government should decide what we think is right. That is what I am setting out. There are many stories about exactly what happened at Camp David and Taba, and there is much to be said on both sides. When I made a similar point about what happened at Camp David to a Palestinian leader last week, he said, "Well, we only got 80 per cent. of what we wanted at Camp David. We got 95 per cent. at Taba, which proves to us that we were right to resist at Camp David. But, at Taba, it was too late." Those are points that the Palestinians make, but there is much to be said on both sides. My concern, however, is not to crawl over the entrails of Camp David, Taba or any other dismal sequence of failed peace approaches, but to build on what positively has been achieved—little though that is—and to seek to set out not just a time scale for a settlement but some sense of a final destination.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West) *rose—*

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross).

Mr. Ross: On refugees, I find it strange that we should rely on an accommodation between the Arab states in relation to Israel's concerns when, throughout most of my right hon. Friend's speech, he has referred to international law. International law is quite clear on this matter. Resolution 194 establishes the principle of the right of return and the right of individual Palestinians to decide on that. It is not for the Arab states to decide on that. It is not even up to President Arafat to decide on it. Can my right hon. Friend clarify this matter?

Mr. Straw: Of course, we have to take full account of international resolutions, although resolution 1397—the most recent substantive one—recalls resolutions 242 and 338 in particular, rather than the one to which my hon. Friend referred. We also have to take account of where we are, and it is President Arafat of the Palestinian Authority who would be the key negotiator on the Palestinian side, for as long as he occupies that position. He has said that he accepts that there has to be some accommodation of the issue of refugees. If we are to seek a solution to this terrible conflict, that has to be the case.

Mr. John Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been desperate to intervene, so I shall give way.

Mr. Taylor: I am most grateful to the Foreign Secretary. I take him back to the passage in his speech about the creation of two states. I would like to ask him whether, in his mind, there is any danger of a tragic repetition of history. Was it not the discharge of the League of Nations' British mandate that produced two states—Israel and Transjordan, as it was then called? Why did that not work? Why might the next move work, if that one did not?

Mr. Straw: There is a separate, and perhaps more academic, debate to be had about why the Balfour declaration did not work. Happily he was not a member of my party. [HON. MEMBERS: "It included Attlee."] It was not Attlee; this was in 1917. I am talking about the Balfour declaration, not the mandate.

One of the many problems is that of raised expectations on both sides, partly through the use of diplomacy for the moment—rather than diplomacy for the long term—which cannot be fulfilled. However, it is my judgment that only through a two-state solution will we ever achieve a resolution of this conflict. The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) must bear it in mind that these communities must live side by side, or not at all. People who go to the occupied territories see very densely populated settlements that share water and other facilities. There is no future for the territories, or for Israel, unless they can reach an accommodation.

The attitude of other states in the region has to be a vital part of a lasting solution. Peace in the middle east will have to be comprehensive and include full treaties between Israel, Lebanon and Syria.

Arab states said at their Beirut summit that they were ready to extend the hand of peace to Israel, if Israel would end the occupation of Arab territories captured in 1967. It is vital that the Arab leaders make that commitment believable. As a peace process develops, they must make strong efforts to quell incitement, to support moderation and, above all, to cut off funds to the extremists. They must aim to isolate those extremists, not glorify them. That includes dealing with the radical organisations in their midst that oppose any sort of peace agreement.

It must also be understood from the beginning that the aim has to be to achieve a genuine end to the conflict, settling all issues and ending all claims. Any such agreement would have to be underpinned by a UN Security Council resolution, and, if necessary, an international force to oversee the phased withdrawal of Israeli troops to the new border would need to be provided. Moreover, the international community has to stand ready to provide financial support for a settlement.

A state of Palestine would begin its life in very difficult circumstances. The violence of the past 18 months, and especially the current invasion of the west bank, have done immense damage to the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure. Many of the facilities provided by the EU and Arab countries have been wrecked.

We and our partners in the EU are now ready to help rehabilitate the Palestinian Authority and to help rebuild its infrastructure, but this must be on the explicit expectation that there are no further Israeli incursions. We cannot go on picking up the pieces.

A trust fund, under the auspices of the World Bank or the UN Development Programme, could channel resources to where they were needed. However, to return to a point that I made a moment ago, the two states would have a common interest in each other's stability, security

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and prosperity. There would have to be maximum openness in their economic relations, for their futures are inextricably linked.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I apologise to the hon. Lady, but I have taken many interventions, and many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

It is because of this mutual dependence that the more extreme solutions suggested recently—such as reoccupation, unilateral separation, and the forced transfer of Palestinian populations—could never deliver a sustainable peace. That can come only through negotiation and agreement. There is no sane alternative to a two-state solution and a broad vision of the sort that I have set out today.

I last visited Israel and the occupied territories two months ago. I have two abiding memories of that visit. One is of meeting a young Israeli volunteer at the main ambulance station in west Jerusalem. He was killed two weeks later by a sniper bullet while he was patrolling a checkpoint as a reserve soldier.

The other memory is of the faces of four young girls in Ramallah whom I saw as I drove in for a meeting with a representative of the Palestinian Authority. The girls were peering from a doorway. They were being held back for safety by their mother, but they were seeking a response from me to their waves.

When we talk about a secure Israel, we mean an end to wasted young lives, such as the life of the young Israeli volunteer. When we talk about a viable Palestinian state, we are talking about a future for those girls in which they do not have to live with the horrors that we have all seen on our television screens.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Those children and young people—everybody in Israel and the occupied territories—need peace. The world wants peace. Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat have a responsibility to deliver it. The passions and hatreds that are aroused by the Arab-Israeli conflict are so strong and so visceral that many on either side cannot bring themselves even to acknowledge that there is another side to the issue. Yet it is only through such an acknowledgement, only through negotiation and compromise that either side can achieve what it wants.

Only compromise can deliver a secure state of Israel, alongside a viable state of Palestine, whose citizens enjoy the same safety and freedom of movement and of life as those of any other state. Only through compromise and mutual recognition of needs and aspirations can the people of the region break out of the cycle of violence and reprisal and ensure that the future is not sacrificed to the grievances of the past.

4.35 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Over these past few weeks we have watched a tragedy of enormous proportions unfolding in the middle east. Not only has it brutalised the peoples of that region but it now threatens a wider conflagration that could end up burning us all.

Five weeks ago, at the start of this latest escalation, I was in the middle east with my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). As we drove through that beautiful landscape down from Jerusalem to the River Jordan on our way to Amman, the body of a Palestinian was being carried, amid militant chants, to its burial. Not far away, the body of an Israeli soldier was being taken with military honours to its burial place. These were only the first of the funerals that day—each a victim of the other. Today, there are many, many more.

It is easy to claim that violence in the middle east is nothing new. That does not make the despair any less deep, the dangers any less grave or the need to find an answer any less urgent. That is why I welcome today's debate.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have in the past, in this context, drawn on the experiences in Northern Ireland. We must be careful—the two situations are materially and geopolitically very different. The nature of the terrorist threat and the response required are also different. I do not believe that we serve either process by drawing the analogy too closely. However, some general lessons can be learned, particularly on breaking an apparent impasse.

One of the first things that I learned in Northern Ireland is that there is nothing less helpful than third parties hurling accusations from the sidelines, giving moralistic lectures or veiled threats from a safe distance, or seeking to intervene in areas where they have no locus. Such actions entrench intransigence rather than resolving it.

We all share the horror at the current violence, but indulging in accusation and counter-accusation will not end it. We can bathe in outrage and become bogged down in it or we can learn the lessons of the situation and move forward. We need to know the truth. For that reason, I welcome the fact that the International Red Cross will investigate what happened, particularly in Jenin, and also the news given us by the Foreign Secretary that our military attaché is also in Jenin and that he will report to us in due course.

I also welcome Secretary of State Colin Powell's current courageous efforts to involve all the regional powers in a resumption of dialogue and a search for a genuine settlement. He is looking for them to identify those areas upon which the search for a settlement can positively proceed. I hope that everybody in this House will wish him well. He knows, however, as we do, that a lasting settlement cannot be achieved without genuine agreement by the parties themselves, and that genuine agreement cannot be secured under duress. One of the facts of history is that too many of today's burning territorial disputes, possibly including this one, were born out of imposed settlements, and I believe that that must be avoided on this occasion.

I learned also that it is unhelpful to be partisan. We have to break free of the political zero-sum game in which we are either pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli but cannot be both. I am an unashamed friend of Israel but, equally, I have long been a supporter of Palestinian rights. I recognise the fears, aspirations and emotions that inspire both sides. Funnily enough, those fears and aspirations often mirror each other.

We have to be even-handed; we must be unequivocally clear in our condemnation of acts of terrorism and about the need to eradicate them at their roots. Equally,

however, we must never dilute our criticism of military actions by Israel that overstep the mark, of the violation of human rights or of the humiliation and harassment of innocent citizens. Where those practices are established we must denounce them, too, without equivocation.

The strongest lesson that I learned was never to give up hope. I learned that, however dark the horizon, there can always be steps back from the abyss to the negotiating table. Those steps are neither quick nor easy but they carry hope, and hope is at a premium in the middle east at the moment.

The first step is to maintain dialogue. As the Foreign Secretary said, there can be no final military solution to the problem on either side. However hostile the political climate and however fierce the fighting, each side must keep talking. That talk may be at an extremely basic level; it can be about the most rudimentary issues, but it must maintain contact. The current proposal for a regional conference at ministerial level could offer an opportunity. It does not matter how unpromising it appears initially—it could be the thin strand from which the substantial rope of real negotiation can eventually be woven.

When I visited Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres in February, low-level contacts were being maintained, despite growing violence. I was very sorry that those contacts were broken; they need to be resumed—even before a ceasefire, or indeed before an Israeli withdrawal takes place.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The right hon. Gentleman referred to low-level contacts. Will he draw attention to the fact that people in the religious communities, on both sides, have been trying for many months quietly to build dialogue? The same thing is happening in this country between Jews, Christians and Muslims who are working hard to maintain dialogue to reduce the tensions that might arise in our own society.

Mr. Ancram: I pay tribute to those who try to maintain dialogue. I have always believed that dialogue is the way out of an impasse of this kind and I certainly hope that dialogue will continue. However, there must be direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict, and that can take place at an extremely low and insignificant level without losing its value.

The second step is the gradual building of confidence. Generations of hatred and mistrust will make that a long haul. It needs the backdrop of United Nations resolution 1397 and of the generally accepted concept of two states west of the River Jordan: the state of Israel and an independent, viable Palestinian state, both recognising the reality and legitimacy of the other and both secure in their respective boundaries. Within that, the building of confidence can begin.

It must start with the most basic problem—fear. There is fear of violence and destruction in the short term, followed by the longer-term fear of domination and dispossession. The answer to both lies in security. In the short term, Israel must cease its present incursions into the territory of the Palestinian Authority and must withdraw. As a democracy, it should respond fully and publicly to the serious accusations being laid against it about the conduct of those incursions.

Equally, it is vital that the terrorist suicide bombings and the carnage of innocent Israelis that results must also be ended. Israel has a right to demand that, if she cannot pursue and apprehend those who instigate, equip and train the terrorist suicide bombers, they will be restrained by other means. When I talked to Yasser Arafat in February he seemed to be firmly in denial as to his responsibility for Palestinian violence, either in Israel or on the west bank, so if he is not prepared to restrain the bombers, other means must be found.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Has my right hon. Friend read the report produced by the BBC monitoring station at Caversham, which shows clearly that during the past year Chairman Arafat has encouraged both a jihad against the state of Israel and suicide bombings?

Mr. Ancram: I have seen several reports to that effect and I have also seen the evidence of arms shipments earlier in the conflict from Iran to the Palestinian Authority.

The important point is that Israel should receive the guarantee of security that she has a right to expect, and if Yasser Arafat cannot deliver it, another means must be found. It must, therefore, be valid to ask what action can be taken by other Arab states to constrain the terrorism and to guarantee Israel the security for her citizens that she has a duty to provide. Will the Foreign Secretary or the Minister who responds to the debate give us information about any discussions that may have been held in that regard?

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Of course everyone deplores suicide bombings, but can the right hon. Gentleman explain how Yasser Arafat is currently expected to exercise any form of control when he is under siege in Ramallah, when the Palestinian Authority's communications have been destroyed and when his own security forces have been killed, taken prisoner or dispersed? What can he do positively, given the current circumstances?

Mr. Ancram: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not understand what I have been saying. I was saying that, if Yasser Arafat cannot exercise such control because he does not want to or because he is unable to, another means to do so has to be found. Without mutual security, the confidence to make progress is unlikely to occur. That lesson has been learned in other conflicts, and we have to learn it here.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way once more on that point and then move on.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): On 28 March, Chairman Arafat clearly said in Arabic:

"On this occasion, I would like once again to reiterate our condemnation of yesterday's operation in Netanya, in which a number of innocent Israeli civilians were killed and wounded. This operation constitutes a deviation from our policy and a violation of our national human values."

Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why Chairman Arafat said that?

Mr. Ancram: I read what Chairman Arafat has said, but I come back to the same point: both sides to the conflict

[Mr. Ancram]

need in the end to believe that they are secure if talks are to proceed. Such mutual security measures providing both sides with freedom from present violence would be a crucial step forward. It would, for a start, reinstate the Tenet proposals and Mitchell recommendations, leading to a ceasefire and resumed negotiations. If that path is to re-emerge, there are further steps to be considered, because confidence in the long-term stability and security of the two states must be established.

Mr. Salmond: A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman rightly bemoaned the evidence of Iranian arms shipments to Palestinians. A few minutes before, the Foreign Secretary said that he had no confidence in the Israeli Government's explanation of the use to which United Kingdom arms are being put. In that light, and in view of the right hon. Gentleman's even-handed approach, would he now like to call for the cessation of United Kingdom arms exports to the state of Israel?

Mr. Ancram: I have not had the opportunity to read the exact words that the Foreign Secretary used in his answer, but from what he told the House—obviously, I shall study his words carefully—I would say that we would adhere to that position as well.

In establishing confidence, Israel would need to reaffirm that it accepts an independent, viable Palestinian state west of the Jordan; and the international community would need to underwrite it. At the same time, the Arab states would need formally to accept the right of the state of Israel to exist and their willingness to normalise relations with it.

The Saudi proposals in the name of Prince Abdullah, to which the Foreign Secretary referred, provide a gateway to that end, but if they are to work, they would have to recruit to their standard those who currently are Israel's most implacable foes: Syria, with its sponsorship of Hamas; Iran, with its sponsorship of Hezbollah, its vocal incitement of suicide bombers and its inflammatory talk of uprooting Israel from the region; and Iraq, with its weapons of mass destruction and its total hostility to Israel.

We need to be realistic. So long as those countries and regimes remain committed to the destruction of the state of Israel and have the ability to deliver that result, the confidence in her own security required by Israel to reach a settlement will be impossible to achieve. In the case of Iraq, I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment again today to supporting United States initiatives to remove Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, and to backing measures including the re-involvement of United Nations inspectors, but ruling out no course of action at this stage in our determination to ensure that those weapons are dealt with. The Government's recent announcement on smallpox vaccines underlines the chilling threat that those weapons could pose.

In pursuit of all this, it would help to show that de-escalating violence produces a peace dividend. Commitments by the international community that there will be investment, trade and jobs so long as peace is maintained can positively encourage the Israelis and Palestinians to come to terms. Again, I have welcomed the Foreign Secretary's remarks today in that regard.

There must then be formal negotiations towards a fair and lasting settlement. We need to understand that, in the end, the only parties that can negotiate that settlement and make it stick are the Israelis and the Palestinians. Although outside encouragement may be valuable, outside interference could be fatal. Internationally tabled blueprints, as the European Union's Javier Solana seemed to accept yesterday, can promote rather than reduce intransigence. The way forward is therefore to identify common motivation: on the Israeli side, the sustaining of a secure democratic state within pre-1967 boundaries that will not be eroded by demographic leakage or unrestricted Palestinian return; on the Palestinian side, the realisation of a self-governing and viable Palestinian state to which Palestinians can feel genuine and sovereign allegiance. Those are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, as I ascertained when I was in the middle east recently, there are people in high office on both sides of this conflict who subscribe to those concepts, which must provide hope.

Although blueprints can be counterproductive, what I call negotiating road maps or frameworks can be valuable. They do not need to provide the only answers; they need to show that the detailed elements that require resolution and negotiation are technically capable of a resolution. They are the essential first step around which political agreement can be negotiated.

Before Camp David in 2000 and Taba in 2001, I doubted whether technical solutions to the key issues of territory, Jerusalem, the settlements and the right of return were available. However, as the Foreign Secretary said, it is now clear, from formal and informal records of both Camp David and Taba, that they were, and, I hope, still are available. On territory, with a little give and take, the 1967 lines could, in accordance with UN resolution 242, form the basis for the borders between Israel and the state of Palestine. On settlements in the west bank, some land swapping and border modifications recognising, in the words of the report on Taba, both Israel's and Palestinian needs and interests, and a safe passage between Gaza and the west bank, could point the way to an acceptable outcome. On the previously seemingly intractable problem of Jerusalem, divided sovereignty, with capital status for both sides within an open city, and with respective control over each side's holy sites and vertical responsibility over parts of the Temple Mount—these could provide an answer. A demographically acceptable quota on the delicate and sensitive question of the right of return could recognise the legitimacy of the claim while balancing it against the need to preserve the Jewish state.

Those are the raw elements of a road map that can point to a way through. None is without difficulty and all require concession on each side. Every one of them requires a compromise on cherished positions. One of the sadder truths about the middle east today is that those who at this crucial moment in history find themselves in the leadership of their respective peoples are not natural deal makers or compromisers. They look to their places in history as the leaders who remained unyielding in their adherence to their principles. They regard compromise as

a weakness and a betrayal, and they are bolstered by apparently massive domestic support for their contrasting actions. On the face of it, they will never come to terms, but we must believe today that the pressures of history will make them think again, and underline again the historic role that they could play at this crucial moment.

It may seem unreal to be talking in terms of the way forward while blood is still being spilled in the middle east, and while the threat of a wider conflagration still remains, but we have no option but to do that. I remember that, in the dark days in Northern Ireland in 1993, I was told time and again that there was no answer and that we were wasting our time looking for one. I also remember, however, the never-extinguished hope of ordinary people which drove us to identify a road map of solutions that could provide a way through. That is what is now needed in the middle east.

That is why this is the time to return to the basics of informal dialogue, of elementary confidence-building measures and of even-handedness. We should not seek to dictate or to prescribe, to bully or to condemn. Our job is to be friends, with all the frankness that friendship involves. We should be ready to help, but always on the understanding that, in the end, Israel and the Palestinian people must make their own peace, their own "shalom", their own "salaam". We must give them all the support that we can in so doing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. That applies from now on.

4.55 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): One conclusion is clear from the speeches made by those on the two Front Benches: there is a substantial degree of consensus in the two spokesmen's analysis of the situation and, indeed, of the road map. It is an escalating crisis and perhaps events have moved on so fast that only the most fundamental questions are relevant here. The end point has largely been agreed, but how do we get from here to there given the fact that hopes have been frequently dashed in the past, as at Camp David and in many other attempts to find a settlement? Equally, a key question is whether the key participants are capable of moving towards that goal on their own or do they need robust external intervention that uses the leverage that is available to the international community? Perhaps we have reached the point where international and robust intervention needs now to be exercised.

I commend to the House a recent report of the International Conflict Group. It argues persuasively that, because of the failures of the past, the incremental approach is no longer relevant. The Mitchell and Tenet proposals are landmarks of the past, detached from the current realities on the ground. Events have moved on and we now need a radical new approach as we search for a solution. If the international community can put a fair and final political settlement plan on the table, it would demonstrate that community's determination and give both sides something tangible to reach for. Obviously, for maximum legitimacy, the European Union and the United States should take a leading role, but they should be backed by Russia and the Arab states.

Clearly there is considerable scepticism about the proposal for a regional conference put forward by Prime Minister Sharon this week. It smacks of a tactical concession. He has said that Arafat should be excluded from it, so perhaps it is not a serious suggestion.

However, the outlines of the overall settlement are clear. The two states should be based on pre-1967 borders. The settlement should include land swaps in areas such as Gilo, a resolution to the issue of the capitals of both states, an international force to provide stability to both states and a fair and realistic settlement to the refugee issue. The politics of fantasy that have fed the idea that there can be a substantial return of refugees must be put aside, but a fair and just solution must certainly involve some movement and a considerable effort on the part of the international community to provide financial compensation and a choice of resettlement in other areas. Despite all the faults involved in such a settlement, does any other serious alternative have a chance of being accepted?

We must address the problem of the extremist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Part of the package must also involve the rebuilding of the Palestinian Authority area. The carrot is the counterpart of the stick, and the Authority must be prepared to pay the price in meeting suitable conditions if finance is to be provided.

International involvement is just one part of the equation. Success depends on both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, so what leverage is available to the international community? Clearly the Israeli Government depend substantially on financial support from outside. For example, in the last financial year, the United States gave more than £2 billion in aid to Israel. We know about the extent of military supplies from the United States, but Israel's response over the past few weeks has done substantial damage to its cause. It has lost friends all round. It must withdraw, stop the incursions and adopt a more mature attitude to Chairman Arafat. It will have to deal with him. As the debate in the United States appears to have concluded, Israel cannot simply marginalise him and write him off. With all his problems and faults, he is there and he must be seen as part of the solution.

So far as the Palestinian Authority are concerned, it is clear that public denouncements of terrorism must be made, along with a serious commitment to preventing it. They must stop the creation of a climate in which suicide bombers are thought of as heroes, and take pre-emptive action to stop terrorist attacks. In that context, the evidence of Karine A is not encouraging. The Palestinian Authority are also heavily dependent on outside financial and other help, particularly from the European Union—a further external lever that can be used. At the moment, the two key participants—made for each other, alas, in a rather tragic way—seem incapable of reaching a solution themselves.

Neighbouring countries must also be heavily involved, because no amount of peace initiatives will work if they continue to play an unconstructive role. I welcome the Arab League declaration, but further vital steps are

[Donald Anderson]

necessary: the cessation of all support for extremist Palestinian groups engaged in terrorism, and the public condemnation of terrorism. Without that guarantee, it would be unrealistic to expect Israel to trust any settlement.

I should like to make one or two final reflections on Iraq, on which we have yet to touch. A clear nexus exists between the escalating crisis concerning Palestine, and the war on terrorism. That makes the task of building and maintaining a coalition the more difficult, as do bellicose statements by the United States on a possible military incursion to bring about a change of regime in Iraq. In respect of Palestine and Iraq, the war for the ear of the President appears in some cases to have been won, not by Secretary Powell, but by more extreme elements.

I have one or two questions on Iraq for the Secretary of State. Does he claim that a clear basis exists in international law for any military incursion? Does the Foreign Office accept that the post-1991 and post-11 September resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations are sufficient for any military incursion into Iraq? Does it also reject Richard Haas's new and dangerous doctrine of the "right of pre-emptive self-defence", which suggests that the American Administration have no serious confidence in the legitimacy provided by current Security Council resolutions? Does it disagree with those who suggest that the real agenda in respect of Iraq is regime change, and that the return or otherwise of weapons inspectors is wholly irrelevant?

Those are serious concerns. At the same time, we cannot duck the question of Saddam Hussein and the major threat that he poses to his region and to world peace. Many obstacles to peace in the region remain, and in terms of the peace process a desperate situation demands desperate measures. That is part of the tragedy of the individuals whom the Foreign Secretary described. Ultimately, a solution can be reached only through compromise, negotiation and a political process. We must be ready to do all that we can to assist in that process.

5.4 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I thought long and hard about my contribution to this debate, and I concluded early on that it would be easy to adopt a position of equidistance. I concluded that it would be easy to argue for some moral equivalence between Israel's army and the suicide bombers; and that it would be wrong to take refuge in such moral equivalence. I reached that conclusion not because some lives are worth more than others; not because I have an emotional attachment to the Arab cause or an in-built prejudice against Israel; and not because I believe that Arafat can be excused from not having done more, from not having been sufficiently robust in his condemnation of terrorist actions or from sometimes having been less than effective in the clampdown on terrorism which was his obligation and responsibility. The reason why I believe that moral condemnation cannot be neatly divided in light of the events of the past few days—I do not say these things lightly—is that one side has self-evidently been the aggressor; one side is self-evidently the more powerful; one side is self-evidently the more determined to breach international law; and one side is self-evidently more willing to ignore the legitimate protests of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia.

Our Prime Minister sought last week to draw a limited parallel with Northern Ireland. He rightly asserted the need to have an identifiable and acceptable political process marching robustly in tandem with any military response to terrorism. But one parallel is patently lacking. When the most terrible atrocities were committed at Omagh and Enniskillen, the British Government did not put attack helicopters over the Bogside and we most certainly did not invade terrorist-supporting enclaves in the south.

I do not pretend that it is always possible to act according to some international Queensberry rules in dealing with acts of terrorism. I do not pretend that Arafat has always fulfilled his responsibilities or kept his promises. I certainly do not pretend that when ordinary citizens celebrating the most important time in their religious year are brutally killed by acts of terrorism, the provocation is not intolerable. I do argue, however, that it is not just Israel's good name and its credentials as a democracy that are damaged by continuing unfettered and defiant military action, but the prospects of a settlement that is sustainable in the long term.

President Bush asked what it was that made an 18-year-old Palestinian woman strap explosives to her chest, go to a discotheque and murder—yes, murder—among others her 17-year-old Jewish equivalent. We should ask ourselves that question, and perhaps the answer is a sense of hopelessness, a lack of self-worth, or a terrible vengeance for the indignities and humiliations past and present. We should then ask ourselves this: after the military operations of the past week, how many more will feel the same? How many more will feel moved to sacrifice themselves unless measurable progress is made?

We have all seen the images of refugee camps, with mothers standing in the wreckage of their homes, fearful for their children. We have seen the most holy place in Christianity under seige, and scenes of desolation and devastation, as if a terrible earthquake had visited the area. We have heard the claims of unburied bodies, of massacre and of indiscriminate violence. Israel says, "Do not judge us harshly. We are a democracy. We are fighting for our existence", but it is precisely because Israel is a democracy that we impose higher standards than if it were not. We expect democracies to implement the resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations. We expect democracies to allow the Red Cross access when it requests it.

There have been claims and counter-claims, all of which need investigation, as the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), has said and as the Foreign Secretary acknowledged this afternoon. There should be an investigation, and it should take place as soon as possible.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): In light of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's courageous comments, does he share my disappointment at the review that was published this morning by the Glasgow Media Group and reported in *The Guardian*? In spite of what he is telling the House, it indicated, on the basis of lengthy

monitoring, that most news channels are overwhelmingly pro-Israeli. Does he agree that that is not the basis for a proper national discussion?

Mr. Campbell: I fancy that if the right hon. Gentleman addressed that question to the Israeli ambassador here in London, he might get a rather different response. We should not be concerned about the bias, perceived bias or lack of bias of these channels but about our own judgments and saying what we think is right and what ought to be done.

What is obviously right is the twin-pronged approach whereby Israel is entitled to live in peace within secure borders and free from attack or the threat of attack, and the Palestinians are entitled to justice, land and a viable homeland. Those are not new concepts. They are to be found in Security Council resolution 242, passed in 1967 after the war of that year. They are concepts that survived through the Madrid conference, the Oslo agreement and Camp David. They are the same underlying principles that now form the foundation of the Saudi Arabian proposal. Let us be clear—as the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made clear by implication, if not expressly—that these proposals do not themselves form a solution. But they offer a legitimate basis for discussion, and they come, on this occasion, with the unique endorsement of the Arab countries' meeting just 10 days ago.

However, to ensure the peace within secure borders and freedom from attack or threat of attack, I believe that the justice, the land and the viable homeland must come first. The difficulty of achieving that is shown by the fact that the settlement programme proceeds unhindered, even as we talk about these matters. How can there be confidence that a viable homeland can be created when that settlement programme is still in progress? How viable would a homeland for the Palestinians be if so much land were still put permanently aside for settlers?

The Foreign Secretary, in an interesting historical analysis of these events, reminded us of the historic agreement reached between Egypt and Israel—between Sadat, who some believe gave his life for the agreement, and Begin. We should remember that, to return the Sinai to the sovereignty of Egypt, Mr. Begin was willing to take the most severe steps to disrupt the settlements and to exclude the settlers from that land. The point is that one can do that if one has the political will to do it, and one will have the political will to do it if the reward for doing it is sufficiently attractive. If, for Israel, the reward was security within its own borders and freedom from attack or threat of attack, surely in those circumstances we would be entitled to say, "Show the necessary political will."

Mr. Maples: Is not that almost exactly what Israel did at Camp David and then at Taba? According to the Foreign Secretary, the Palestinians say that Israel offered them 95 per cent. of what they want. I am sure that we, as lawyers, would advise our clients to settle for 95 per cent. Yet the Palestinians persisted in starting the intifada during those negotiations. Why should Israel think that any subsequent offer would be accepted by President Arafat?

Mr. Campbell: There is considerable dispute about what happened at both of those places; the hon. Gentleman may be right, but that was some time ago. If we are to move forward, relying on what happened then may prove ineffective. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) has a comment to make, let him get to his feet and make it.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way even though I had not intervened. His was a feeble response to my hon. Friend's point, which was clear. If, within recent history, the Arabs were offered very much what they could reasonably have expected, in line with the formula that everybody agrees with, and they rejected that, what reason is there to think that they would accept something now? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman thinks that there is no moral equivalence between the two sides, he might find some agreement on one point: there is no moral equivalence between a side that initiates an exchange and a side that responds to it. Does he really believe that the Israelis would be in the occupied Arab territories now if the suicide bombings had not begun first?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about history, he ought to have recourse to the history of the settlements and the extent to which they have been promoted. As for the remainder of his comments, jury trial has not yet been abolished and I rest my case on the response of the jury of the whole House.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) referred to the side that initiated events. Is it not a fact that the second intifada was triggered by the wanton, deliberately provocative visit by Sharon to Temple Mount—he knowing what he was going to do?

Mr. Campbell: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. That is clear beyond question—clear even, I hope, to the hon. Member for New Forest, East, who might also bear in mind the provocation of Har Homa and the extent to which that was a source of great aggravation.

My next point is essentially domestic. I do not know whether all hon. Members have seen the leaflets that I have seen, but circulating throughout the United Kingdom, particularly in some UK universities, are hateful and hate-filled leaflets that demonstrate the most blatant and unpleasant anti-Semitism. They are an affront to decency, they disfigure democratic society and they disgrace our democracy. They are the product of twisted and evil minds. Whatever criticism any of us may make of the Israeli Government, we should all be united in the view that there is no justification for such conduct or for the circulation of material of that kind.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but does he accept that such leaflets do not come only from one side? As one who is without doubt a friend of Israel but who has recently expressed sentiments not entirely different from his own, I have received some pretty nasty epistles.

Mr. Campbell: For us, they go with the rations and with the territory. We are in public life, and we have to accept that, if we make speeches about such issues, we will receive unpleasant letters. I am far more concerned about the fact that such offensive leaflets are circulating on the campuses of universities here in the United Kingdom.

[Mr. Campbell]

Looking at these issues as I try to do, it is clear to me that there have been several opportunities for hope—albeit hope that has proved to be unjustified—and a number of false starts. Great courage has been shown along the way, for example, by Mr. Begin and Anwar Sadat, whom I mentioned, and by King Hussein. Yitzhak Rabin paid with his life: he was assassinated not by a suicide bomber, but by a fellow Israeli who was determined to prevent the progress towards peace that Yitzhak Rabin represented. Ehud Barak, who was mentioned in connection with the last meeting at Camp David, paid for his efforts with his political career.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the role of the European Union. A great deal of damage has been done to Gaza airport, Gaza seaport, the Palestinian central bureau of statistics, a forestry project in Gaza, schools and clinics in the west bank, a sewerage and pumping station in the west bank, and an irrigation scheme near Jericho in the west bank. What they have in common is that all were funded at least in part by the European Union. They will have to be restored—paid for again—but I would regard that as a worthwhile price to pay if it were part of a settlement package of the sort outlined by the Foreign Secretary.

The EU has donated about 3 billion euros to the Palestinian Authority since 1994. No one in the Israeli Government could be surprised if the EU began to consider what its response should be if that Government continue upon their present course. The EU is Israel's greatest trading partner. We know that 27 per cent. of Israel's exports come to the EU, and that 43 per cent. of its imports come from the EU. We have a trade agreement that has been entered into by the EU and Israel. Article 2 states that respect for

"human rights and democratic principles constitute an essential element"

of the agreement. If Israel continues on its present path, there will be those who will argue, with some justification, that that condition would most certainly justify suspension, or even revocation, of the agreement.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned some distinguished Israelis who oppose the policies that are being pursued. Will he also mention those in Israel—in the minority though they may be—who totally oppose what Israel is doing, believe that such policies bring discredit on the country and have the bravery to demonstrate in every way possible against the occupation and the crimes that have been committed in the past fortnight?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. No doubt he had in mind also those members of the armed forces who have been called upon to serve in the occupied territories and have declined to do so, doubtless at risk of prosecution or something of the sort.

The proposals that the Foreign Secretary advanced are, in substance, the same as the proposals of the shadow Foreign Secretary. They have the unequivocal support of the House because they represent a staged journey and a route map. They contain all the necessary ingredients for a settlement, especially the need for it to be buttressed by UN resolution and acknowledgement that substantial financial assistance will be required, perhaps not only for the Palestinian Authority, or a viable Palestinian homeland, but for Israel—the costs to Israel of these activities must be enormous.

It is right also to refer to the obligations of other Arab states. There is no point in going to a summit of Arab nations and endorsing the Saudi Arabian proposal if one is not willing and prepared to implement the responsibilities that will fall to one's country if the proposal is implemented.

There was reference also to the principle of mutual dependence, which can be achieved only by negotiation and agreement. It is relatively straightforward in the relative calm of the Chamber to argue for these things; it is much more difficult to see them carried through. The unique quartet of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia is probably the best bet for ensuring that the things that we believe are right, and which in my judgment are most certainly in the interests of both the people of Israel and the Palestinians, are finally implemented.

I wish that I could pretend that the road towards that settlement was an easy one, but it is most certainly one that must be followed.

5.24 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): First, I apologise for my voice. I had dust in my lungs once before from when I went down a coal mine; this time it is dust from Israeli tanks in Jenin. That is no exaggeration. I am grateful to the BBC and "Today" for giving me the opportunity to go there. We do not often thank "Today", but I do so most warmly on this occasion. It was kind of those concerned to enable me to go.

Along with the head of the UN relief programme, I went to Jenin on Friday, where I was able to see at first hand some of the things that were going on. We had tremendous difficulty getting into the town to begin with; there seemed to be many tank commanders every step of the way. It took us a total of six hours to deliver relief supplies to some of the 1,000 women and children who had been taken out of the refugee camp a few days before. Those women and children could describe what they saw; they were not particularly interested in the United Nations presence, although we were the only ones in town. There was a complete curfew. At one point, we saw a sea of men going down the road, but within half an hour they came back. The Israeli army had called out every man over 16 to a central point. I found it chilling just to watch that.

We tried to get to some of the hospitals, as we had medical supplies and doctors and nurses in the UN convoy, which was clearly marked with UN flags and "UN" on the side of the vehicles. However, we had great difficulty getting to the hospitals, and it took us six hours to deliver important medical supplies. Most of the hospitals had had their electricity cut; only one small private hospital had its own generator. People were therefore working in difficult conditions. The UN people with us who spoke Arabic took down in detail the statements of the women to whom we spoke. They said that when the Israeli army came into the camp, it called people out of their houses, particularly men. They had seen men come out of houses with their hands above their heads who were then shot. They saw people wounded on

the ground; other people could not go to help them. Those who were watching were obviously reluctant to come out of their houses.

Our presence in the town was not popular with the Israeli military and at one point we were surrounded by six tanks. I did not know that tanks were quite as big as some of those that I saw. I was pleased to talk to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on a mobile telephone and describe what was going on. I was glad that he took immediate action and put out a press release later in the day. He called in the Israeli ambassador in London and asked people at the embassy to go to Mr. Sharon's office in Tel Aviv. The UN representatives were impressed by the fact that the Foreign Secretary was on the telephone, particularly when they saw the press release later in the day. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for taking that action.

I have no idea what happened at the camp, apart from what we heard in those eye-witness accounts. However, one of the men who came back down the road in our direction was the mayor of Jenin, and he talked about a catastrophe. He claimed that up to 1,000 people had been killed. I have no idea whether or not that is true, but that is what he said. He said that what happened would be counted among world tragedies, like Sabra and Chatila, for which Mr. Sharon had some responsibility in the past.

Today, I checked with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the organisation with which I went into Jenin. It waited for eight hours yesterday with two trucks of food and water and a medical team. It was then allowed in, but was not given a liaison officer, nor was it allowed to offload its supplies. It managed to throw food to 30 people on its way out. Today, UNRWA has been allowed into the camp, but only into one area. It has set up a distribution point. A curfew is still operating, but the Israeli defence force has promised not to fire on people collecting food and water.

Yesterday, Richard Cook, head of UNRWA, was denied access not only to the camp but to Jenin itself. With him was the director of relief and social services and the new co-ordinator of relief projects in Jenin, who had flown in from Jordan, as well as representatives of the Swiss, Danish and Dutch Governments.

I spoke to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Two small hospitals are near the entrance to the refugee camp. A man from the International Red Cross had been standing by there for four days when I met him. He said that he could see people in the windows of some of the houses in the refugee camps—that is, the houses that are still standing.

The Palestine Red Crescent reports that from 6 am to 2.10 pm today, its teams awaited permission to enter the camp and resume rescue operations. At 2.51 pm, teams were allowed into the camp, but with an Israeli army escort. At 3 pm, the army escort left the teams—11 paramedics, three doctors, 10 IRC personnel and two ambulances. The teams distributed water and provided care for the sick. No search and rescue teams were operating in the camp.

Yesterday, the teams worked in one area that covers about 10 per cent. of the camp. Seven bodies were recovered and seven others could not be recovered. The teams are asking for equipment that is used after earthquakes, when houses are demolished on such a scale. They believe that after all this time people are still alive under the rubble. If that is the case, that equipment must be brought into the area. I saw a UN ambulance with a bullet hole in its side. We learned that the driver had been arrested with the keys and the ambulance could not be moved.

I cannot tell the House about the women and children—they were so traumatised and upset. They were not interested in the UN food and clothing, and instead kept calling for news of their husbands and sons, from whom they had not heard for several days and still have not heard today.

No political or security objective can justify targeting and punishing civilians in this way. It is not enough for the European countries simply to bleat condemnation. They need to withdraw European ambassadors from Israel, they need to impose an arms embargo, as Germany has already done, and they should consider what economic sanctions can be imposed. After all, British taxpayers' money is being spent on infrastructure in the west bank, and that is being ground to dust by the Israeli army.

This is the moment when the European Union should show its mettle and implement its own plan, regardless of the objections or intransigence of the United States or any other country. At present the Palestinian leadership are so beleaguered that they are not in a position to negotiate anything. The Israelis' present policy is not working, and the sooner they realise it, the better.

5.32 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The subject is difficult to consider with any degree of clarity, not least for the reasons given by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Those of us who have been targeted by the National Front because of our refusal to take other than a non-racist position know just how beastly, unpleasant and utterly immoral is the racist understanding of any situation, not least the one under discussion.

To try to talk about Israel in these circumstances is often to invite the use of one's words as in some way racist, rather than political. I much honour Members of the House and even more those people in Israel who have raised their voices with the same degree of honest and objective criticism in respect of what has happened in the middle east as they have on other issues, and who have been consistent in upholding human rights, even when it pains them to speak in such a way of the Government of Israel.

I hope that I am one of those who does not have to start off by saying that he has always been, in the general sense rather than in any particular sense, a friend of Israel, who is committed to the maintenance of the state of Israel, and who believes that we have a responsibility for that, because it was our forefathers who to a large extent both made it possible and recognised its rightness.

In that context, however, there is a fundamental distinction between the Israeli action and that of the Arabs: Israel is a state that has the trappings of a state and claims the legitimacy of a state. The more it rightly claims that legitimacy, the more it must be judged by the standards of a state and of democracy. That is where the distinction lies. It is not that one excuses for one moment the actions of individuals such as Chairman Arafat or Saddam Hussein; it is simply that one cannot treat as acceptable the decision of a democratically elected Prime

[Mr. John Gummer]

Minister and Government to invade their neighbours and threaten civilians who, by their nature, must include some who are innocent of any the crimes that have been committed. One simply has to say that the actions of Israel are unacceptable because they would be unacceptable in any other state—

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: If I may, I shall continue, as I have but a short time.

If Israel is to be treated and defended as a state, as most if not all of us in the House wish her to be, the converse must also be true: in circumstances such as these, she must also take the responsibilities of a state.

Michael Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall not do so, as there is only a short time available.

Michael Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: To save time—I know precisely what the hon. Gentleman is going to say—let me explain that extra time is allowed for interventions, but not for responses to them, so it is entirely a matter for the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide how much time he loses.

Mr. Gummer: It is therefore important to recognise that it is not in any way to criticise the Israeli state for its hugely understandable reaction to the awfulness of the suicide bombers to say that the result of that reaction is unacceptable. The reason why one has to make that remark as a friend of Israel is that that reaction makes it incredibly difficult to see how one should move forward. A different reaction of the sort that might have been made by some of the great Israeli leaders of the past might have given a glimpse or glimmer of hope. That is why one speaks in sadness.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) spoke about the need for maturity, which leads me to the second issue that I want to raise. There is a huge need for maturity in these discussions, not only in terms of the Israeli Government, who are under such huge provocation, but in Washington and the United States. I cannot believe that it is helpful in the current circumstances for the voices of intolerance to be raised to the degree that they have been not only in the speeches of Mr. Netanyahu, but in the American Government's approach to the problems of Iraq. I yield to no one in my hatred of the Iraqi regime and my non-acceptance of its refusal to allow the visits of United Nations observers or weapons investigations that any sensible and proper state should allow. Neither do I yield to anyone in my belief that Saddam Hussein would be very much better off the scene. However, we have to deal with the world in which we live and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I cannot believe in building an approach that says that we judge what is in our self-interest and self-defence and can thereby do anything we like, irrespective of the international law of the United Nations or the evidence that is before us.

I am still banned from having my questions on the bombing of the Sudanese aspirin factory answered in the House because the Prime Minister tells me that it is a matter of national security. Nevertheless, I remind hon. Members that that was done because of the CIA's absolute certainty that the factory was producing biological or other weapons. It was wrong. It had not shown the degree of accuracy in foretelling the future that we might have expected of it, especially in the light of 11 September. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and to the Foreign Secretary that if the Prime Minister and President Bush should wish to take action, I shall need much more than their assurances that they have the evidence but cannot share it with me.

This is an issue not for those who have historically been members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, but for those of us who have given the strongest and toughest support to cruise missiles and so on. We must have the evidence, because it is too dangerous to use this, the cockpit of the world, as a means of carrying out internal political agendas and gaining votes for internal political purposes.

We have to talk so seriously about these matters because it is hard to find the truth. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes says, the truth is not all on one side. If it is unequal today, it may be different tomorrow. That is part of the awfulness of the whole issue. The word of which we must remind ourselves is maturity. If we are to be mature, we must call on the Israelis to shoulder the burdens of being a state and on the United States to shoulder the burdens of being so powerful that it has to get it right.

5.43 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I became a friend of Israel when I was eight days old, and I have the scar to prove it.

The confrontation between Ariel Sharon's Government and the Palestinian terrorists has become an international crisis, which, unless handled decisively, could create a dangerous wider conflict and disrupt the economies of the developed world. The suicide bombings organised by Palestinian terrorist groups are atrocities with which no civilised community can cope. Earlier this month, an Israeli friend visited me here and told me that his trip was an escape from hell. He went back to hell. Last week, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the bus stop outside his kibbutz, where I have stayed many times, killing eight innocent people.

The deaths of hundreds of innocent Israelis are horrifying and have created an unsustainable atmosphere in Israel. The suicide bombers are mass murderers whose aim is to kill the maximum number of victims. Yet we need to ask ourselves why young Palestinians, men and women with their lives before them, decide to turn themselves into human bombs. We need to ask how we would feel if we had been occupied for 35 years by a foreign power that denied us the most elementary human rights and decent living conditions. We need to ask what the Jews did in comparable circumstances. In 1946, the

Irgun, controlled by Menachem Begin, who later became Israeli Prime Minister, blew up the King David hotel in Jerusalem, slaughtering 91 innocent people, 17 of them fellow Jews.

Ariel Sharon responds to the suicide bombers by using the full force of the Israeli army. He is having absolutely no effect in ending the terrorist acts. The suicide bombings and the slaughter of Jewish innocents continue and, as Colin Powell said while in Israel, will go on—not only regardless of what Ariel Sharon's army does, but impelled by what it does. We have now witnessed—my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) described her experiences—the full impact of the Israeli assault on the Palestinians. We have seen what happened in Jenin.

In 1948, the Palestinians denounced what they described as a massacre in the village of Deir Yassin. It was denied that there was such a massacre, but it was later officially established by the incoming Israeli Government that 254 Palestinians had been murdered wantonly by Begin's Irgun and the Stern gang, led by Yitzhak Shamir—later, like Begin and Sharon, a Likud Prime Minister.

It is undeniable that something dreadful happened in Jenin. Despite an Israeli attempt at a cover-up, the press have now managed to get into Jenin. The Telegraph newspapers, which are pro-Sharon in their editorial line, deserve credit for reporting objectively what happened in Jenin last week. *The Sunday Telegraph* said:

"Without doubt something very terrible had happened to the Palestinian refugees there".

Yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* described how Israeli soldiers beat Muntaha Seraya with their fists and guns after bursting into her home. Four months pregnant, she suffered a miscarriage half an hour after the soldiers left. Today's *Daily Telegraph* accepts the Palestinian estimate of hundreds killed. *The Times* today describes the "stench of death" in Jenin, and *The Independent* calls what happened there a "war crime".

The difference between the Deir Yassin massacre and what happened in Jenin is that Deir Yassin was the work of terrorist groups denounced by mainstream Jewish organisations, whereas the horrors in Jenin were carried out by the official Israeli army. In 1901, Henry Campbell-Bannerman asked, "When is a war not a war?" Talking about the British Government and the Boer war, his answer was, "When it is carried on by methods of barbarism." Sharon has ordered his troops to use methods of barbarism against the Palestinians. Two thousand years ago, Tacitus said, "Solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant",

"They made a desert and called it peace."

That is a precise description of Sharon's actions.

It is time to remind Sharon that the star of David belongs to all Jews, not to his repulsive Government. His actions are staining the star of David with blood. The Jewish people, whose gifts to civilised discourse include Einstein and Epstein, Mendelssohn and Mahler, Sergei Eisenstein and Billy Wilder, are now symbolised throughout the world by the blustering bully Ariel Sharon, a war criminal implicated in the murder of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila camps and now involved in killing Palestinians once again.

Sharon is not simply a war criminal; he is a fool. He says that Jerusalem must never again be divided, yet it is divided in a way that it has not been for 35 years. I used to walk, shop and dine in east Jerusalem. No westerner or Israeli would dare to do that now. The state of Israel was founded so that Jews would no longer be penned up in ghettos. Now the state of Israel is a ghetto: an international pariah.

Sharon has reduced Israel's economy to its worst state for nearly half a century. As a consequence of his policies, more innocent Israelis have been killed by terrorists than for decades. More Israeli soldiers are being killed than at any time since Sharon tricked Begin into invading Lebanon 20 years ago. Sharon has rehabilitated Yasser Arafat, who had become sidelined and discredited and is now a Palestinian icon. The United States Secretary of State waited on Arafat in Ramallah like a petitioner. If Sharon succeeds in exiling him, Arafat will be welcomed throughout the world as a spokesman for the oppressed Palestinian people.

Sharon's most dangerous enemy is Iraq. Although I ardently wish for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, I have my doubts about taking action against him now because the confusion in American policy makes success extremely unlikely. The current fighting in Afghanistan involving the Royal Marines six months after we first went in shows how much more difficult a campaign would be in Iraq, with its huge, well equipped armed forces. In any case, Sharon has made it impossible for the Americans to take action against Iraq. If they did, the whole Muslim world would be united against the United States, the coalition against terrorism would disintegrate, and western economies could suffer a disaster comparable to the oil shock of 1973.

It is time for the United States to take action. Sharon must make a full withdrawal from Palestinian territories. If he does not, economic sanctions and an arms ban must be imposed. In 1956, President Eisenhower ordered the Israelis to withdraw from Sinai, which was occupied during the Suez war, and the Israelis, under a sensible Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, complied.

In 1991, when the Israeli Prime Minister, former terrorist and assassin Yitzhak Shamir refused to participate in peace talks in Madrid, President Bush senior imposed economic sanctions by withholding $10 billion in loan guarantees from the Israeli Government, and Shamir turned up in Madrid. President George W. Bush told the Israelis to withdraw from the Palestinian territories. Instead, Sharon has stepped up his aggression. Jenin has happened since Bush's call for withdrawal. The international credibility of the United States presidency is at stake. If Bush continues to be defied by Sharon, the United States presidency will be proved ineffectual with ominous consequences for the entire free world.

Our Prime Minister is an internationally respected statesman. He must use his influence with the United States—the special relationship—so that Bush speedily compels Sharon to return Israel to the international community. No alternative is acceptable. If it does not happen, the outlook for us all is bleak.

5.52 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who has again demonstrated his passion and knowledge of this subject. Whenever middle east matters are debated, one cannot fail to be struck by the depth of feeling, experience and knowledge that is

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

consistently displayed. That has been borne out so far today. There was a remarkable consensus between members of both Front Benches, and we are privileged to debate in relative calm, which is currently foreign to those who live in Israel.

We are debating a genuine crisis. As the Prime Minister said last week:

"There are many situations, both at home and abroad, which are called a crisis when, in truth, they are not. In this case, however, it is hard to overstate the dangers or the potential for this conflict to impact far beyond the region."

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has shown that. The Prime Minister continued:

"It is, indeed, a genuine crisis, and one on which all of us, in whatever way we can, small or large, have a duty to act."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 22.]

Despite the variety of views that are likely to be expressed, I agree with that.

Although I speak as chairman of Conservative Friends of Israel, I shall try to argue as even-handedly as I can. It must be obvious to all that, whatever our views, if we call on the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories and on the Palestinian Authority to tackle the terrorism of the suicide bombers, we also must try to understand the viewpoints of both sides. It helps no one for us to replicate here arguments, the results of which we condemn in the middle east, without at least attempting to understand others' points of view. This time, the messages are not mixed. Both sides must exercise restraint and put an end to violence.

As chairman of Conservative Friends of Israel for the past four years, I have visited Israel several times. I have had the opportunity to meet members of the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority, our ambassadors and consuls in Israel and Israeli ambassadors in Britain. It would be safe to say that my views do not differ from those of my counterpart, the chairman of Labour Friends of Israel, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), who is in his place and from whom we may hear later. I have frequently hosted meetings with him for the Jewish community and others when Israeli politicians have visited the House.

Others have described circumstances in the Palestinian areas, notably the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), whose memories are so fresh and raw. I should like briefly to describe the state of mind as I perceive it—perhaps from the outside—of people living in Israel, not only now but since the state of Israel was established.

We do not remind ourselves frequently enough that Israel is a tiny country, one third the size of the state of Florida. It has been said several times that it is a democratic state, where politics are fiercely argued and as vehemently valued. It is surrounded by much larger nations, some of which make no secret of their violent opposition to its very existence. Its only international airport is in easy rocket range of potential aggressors, as are its major cities and its main highway. It has been invaded by its neighbours three times in living memory: in 1948, 1967 and 1973. During the Gulf war, it was a target for Scud missiles. It is no place for the paranoid.

The escalation of terrorist suicide bomb attacks in the past few weeks has created fear and dread for people who are trying to live their lives. In the wake of the events of 11 September, the Israeli Government believe that they are justified in claiming that their military action is intended to root out terrorism. They also claim that documents recovered from Palestinian camps prove links between terrorist attacks, those sustaining the terrorists and Chairman Arafat.

David Horovitz wrote in *The Independent* on 11 April:

"Israelis are deeply troubled about the impact on Palestinian civilians of the current military offensive—natural empathy combined with the realization that the bitterness this assault is causing will rebound to their detriment. But they feel strongly that at the root of the intifada is not 'the occupation' which Mr. Barak tried to end but an Arafat-engineered suicide-bomber-backed effort to destroy all of Israel."

Furthermore, Israelis feel overwhelmingly strongly that although Israel as a democratic state can deliver a ceasefire, Chairman Arafat cannot deliver an end to the suicide bombings as a quid pro quo. That is a major blockage to a peaceful solution. However, I believe that Chairman Arafat's recent condemnation of suicide bombings is welcome. The importance of guarantees cannot be overstated.

Israel, in its current preoccupation with its security and the rightness of its cause, must take note of international opinion. As the Foreign Secretary said, 450 Israelis have died in the current conflict, but 1,300 Palestinians have died and 1 million Palestinians have been living under curfew. The world has seen the terrible destruction of Jenin.

In this country, we have suffered the terrible insecurity caused by terrorist attacks and bombings. We know what they can do for national confidence. However, there must now be movement on both sides. Israel must withdraw from Palestinian Authority territory and terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians must cease. Arab states must recognise publicly the right of the state of Israel to exist, and there must be a reciprocal agreement on the way forward for Palestinians.

In one sense, tragically, things have gone backwards since the Camp David agreement when, under the leadership of Prime Minister Barak, a deal was on the table. For whatever reason—one has been adduced this afternoon—Chairman Arafat could not accept that deal. The non-acceptance of the deal has, understandably, increased cynicism in Israel as to whether Mr. Arafat can deliver any agreement. The fact that Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative is consonant with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 1397 represents some indication of a possible political way forward.

It must be clear to everyone, however, that military or terrorist solutions are not the way forward. Nor can those acquainted with the situation endorse the view that Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat can, as a result of international pressure, somehow just shake hands and move straight on to high diplomacy. With passions running as high as they are, and with wounds so deep, it is not possible to think that they could, at this time, discuss the future of the settlements, the partition of Jerusalem, or the status of refugees. Those questions will have to be tackled, but only when there has been some sort of return to order and normality, when both Israelis and Palestinians can focus on the bigger picture.

For the moment, Prime Minister Sharon must give the world an end date for his incursions into the west bank, and the world must be given the facts about what has gone

on in Jenin. Chairman Arafat must continue to make it clear that he condemns terrorist suicide bombings, that he endorses a ceasefire and that he will return to dialogue.

The question of guarantees for Israel is, of course, the nub of the problem for the Israeli Government, and it is one of the reasons why the Israeli military action seems to be set on defying world opinion. First must come an end to the violence. The international community cannot reiterate too often that, no matter how long the conflict goes on and no matter how many innocent lives are lost, the state of Israel will still be there, and so will the Palestinians. The players on the ground, however, are the democratically elected Israeli Government and Chairman Arafat. They must move.

6.2 pm

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): I welcome this debate. There have been calls from other speakers that we should be calm, and I respect that injunction. This Chamber can also be a place in which to express anger, however, especially when we see the injustice that we are witnessing now. There is anger on the streets in my constituency about what is going on. My Muslim constituents cannot understand why there are threats from America, backed by our Prime Minister, to attack Iraq while we are doing nothing about the massacre of Palestinians.

After supporting the Palestinians' calls for a homeland for so long, I have to ask whether there will ever be an end to the despair of the Palestinian people. In 1947, they were dispossessed of their homes, their land and their heritage. Seventy per cent. of their land had been taken by 1949, and the remainder was illegally occupied in 1967. Even in that remainder, settlements grow apace; there have been 34 more settlements since Sharon came to power.

The Oslo peace accord, signed in 1993, gave a glimmer of hope, as did Camp David. The reality, however, is that those on the right in Israel never accepted those agreements. They never wanted them. While Rabin was alive, and while Barak was in power, there was a road to peace. That was partially destroyed by the assassination of Rabin and the fall from power of Barak.

Mrs. Ellman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Singh: I am sorry, I shall not have time.

The peace process has unravelled not because of Palestinian terrorism but because of the continued expansion of settlements in the west bank, and because those who succeeded Rabin never wanted that peace process. Sharon was elected on a ticket of peace and security, but he is presiding over a massive escalation of violence and killings. He is not interested in peace. He is interested only in destroying the Palestinian people and continuing the illegal occupation of the west bank and Gaza that has gone on since 1967. If anybody doubts what makes Sharon tick, they need only think back to the massacres at the refugee camps at Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon in the early 1980s. He is continuing that policy, as we are now seeing in Jenin.

Sharon calls this present invasion Operation Defensive Shield. He says that it is intended to destroy the infrastructure of terror. It is neither of those things. A suicide bomber does not need an infrastructure of terror. The truth is that this operation represents Israel's—Sharon's—reign of terror against the Palestinian people. Nobody wants to see the death of anyone on any side, but in the last 18 months, hundreds of Israelis and thousands of Palestinians have died, not counting the deaths in recent weeks.

Nobody supports suicide bombers, but we must ask what motivates a young girl to carry out such an act. What is the frustration and despair that makes her give her life? This is not an even battle. It is hard to be even-handed when the sides are not even. One side is an occupier; the other is an occupied people fighting against helicopter gunships, jet fighters and tanks. Against that, the Palestinians have only their lives to give. That is what creates the suicide bomber.

What is happening in the west bank is an atrocity. Why have journalists, aid organisations and human rights organisations been banned from Jenin? The answer is simple. It is because Sharon does not want us to know what has been going on there. The truth is emerging, however. It is a horrible truth involving civilians under siege and being murdered, their houses being reduced to rubble, assassinations, executions, gunship attacks, tank attacks and rocket attacks. The Palestinian people have not even been allowed to bury their dead.

The United States of America could have stopped this. I am sure of that. I wish that Bush junior had followed some of the examples set by Bush senior in trying to resolve this issue. It is clear, however, that the silence—until very recently—of the American Administration and the American President was a green light for Sharon. I am convinced that that green light existed, and I am convinced that that is why Sharon has not withdrawn now. He knows that, intrinsically, the American Administration support him.

Do not the United States Administration understand the danger to the region, or the danger to their own policies on the coalition against terror? Do they not also understand that, if Saddam Hussein is this great tyrant who needs to be removed—I do not support the latter proposal—there is a danger that that will never happen in the present circumstances? So much of the damage being inflicted now is going to take a long time to repair. The USA and the international community should hang their heads in shame for allowing this situation to develop for the Palestinian people over the last 35 years or so. Yes, Israel should be entitled to its security, but that question has moved on. The question now is: when will the Palestinian people be entitled to security? When will they be entitled to peace, a homeland and dignity?

The United States calls on Arafat to rein in the suicide bombers. Arafat is in a room somewhere without electricity, surrounded by tanks and machine guns. I do not know about him, but most people in that position would not be able to control their bowels, let alone suicide bombers. Bush's call on Arafat to control the suicide bombers is ridiculous. The infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority has been destroyed; security forces have been arrested and killed. In no way is Arafat in a position to do anything of that nature at present.

If Sharon's name were Milosevic, we would be acting now. If Sharon's name was Milosevic, we would be talking about war crimes and war criminals. It is time that the international community acted. It is time to give the

[Mr. Singh]

Palestinian people a homeland and a home. It is time, now, for sanctions—economic and military—against Israel. It is time, for once, that we helped the Palestinian people.

6.11 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I have only a few points to make.

On occasions of this sort and in debates of this nature, it is easy for us to spend time beating our breasts and saying how terrible it all is, and then to engage in individual expressions of long-held views consisting mostly of a denunciation of the opposite view to the one we tend to favour. With respect to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), I must say that that is what we have just heard: a very one-sided view. Things—I was going to say "sadly", but as it is not sad I shall say "hopefully"—are, in fact, much more complicated.

It may seem absurd, when we are considering the terrible events of recent months, to sound a note of optimism. We should not forget, however, that what has happened over the last 20 months or so—since Camp David and the start, or renewal, of the intifada—has not returned us to the situation that existed before the Oslo accords. Minds have moved, and have moved decisively. I believe that that applies not just to a few moderates on both sides, but more widely.

When I was in Jerusalem in January last year, while the negotiations in Taba were still going on, I had the privilege of meeting Faisal Husseini, now sadly departed. He said something that I will never forget: "If we had been having this conversation 10 years ago, I could not physically have got the word Israel past my lips: I could not have said it. Now the negotiators at Taba are negotiating on whether the Palestinian state is to have 92 per cent. or 96 per cent. of the west bank."

The commitment of both sides to entitlement to the entirety of the land west of the Jordan has gone—for ever, we hope. So let us not lose sight of the fact that minds have moved in the last 10 years. We must hope that things do not slide back, and that we do not return to the extreme views that tended to be held before.

What has changed in that period of 20 months? We know that the process of the moving of minds, and the achievement of an intellectual consensus in favour of commitment to the new agreement, involve a huge amount of confidence and a huge amount of trust. During those 20 months, the trust has evaporated. It is not entirely pointless to ask why that has happened, and where the blame lies—not for the sake of settling scores and playing the blame game, but because it is important to understand and accept what went wrong if we are to remedy it.

Let us be blunt: there is blame on both sides. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who said that Israel should expect to be judged by a higher standard. Israel is a democracy; it is a fully established state. It is, in fact, a very argumentative democracy—and that is healthy, but it must nevertheless expect to be judged according to a higher standard.

I could wish that the Israeli Government had been much more restrained in their reaction to the intifada. At the time of the Gulf war, the then Israeli Government exercised what seemed to be almost superhuman restraint in not responding to Iraq's direct attacks on populated civilian areas in Israel. That superb restraint won them the high moral ground. I could wish that today's Israeli Government would exercise the same restraint. That, however, is easy for us to say in this well protected House of Commons, here in the United Kingdom. We are not the ones who face the daily threat of having our families—our children—blown up by suicide bombers.

It is obvious that Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have been lamentably to blame in failing to control the terror, and indeed, in many instances, in positively encouraging it. It is easy for us to hope for restraint; but we should recognise that Ariel Sharon belongs to a strand of Israeli thought that has held for decades that Palestinians will only acquiesce in Israel's existence at the point of a gun.

If we are thinking about blame, we should also accept that the Israeli Government's decision to go on creating settlements on the west bank in the aftermath of the Oslo accords was highly provocative, and appeared to constitute a determination to ensure that the peace process did not reach a satisfactory conclusion. It looked like—again—an attempt to change the facts on the ground, so that residual matters not disposed of in Oslo could be disposed of only in a way that would be more favourable to Israel. It was contrary to the spirit of the Oslo accords.

It would be hugely helpful to getting the process back on track if the Israeli Government accepted that this is the case, and that mistakes were made. A statement to that effect would constitute an earnest of their serious intention to resurrect a peace process capable of resolution.

What about blame on the Palestinian side? I spoke of the Palestinian Authority's lamentable failure to curb the terror. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said that Israel had the trappings of a state and the status of statehood. That is true, but one of the obligations that goes with statehood is the obligation to protect citizens.

I do not know what I would want to do if terror was emanating from a neighbouring territory and the established authority in that territory refused, or was unable, to take steps to enforce the law and ensure that those behind the terror were brought to justice, other than going in there and enforcing order myself. That is not to say that everything Israel has done has been proper or proportionate. As is increasingly clear, we shall have to wait to find out exactly what happened at Jenin. It seems fairly clear, however, that what happened was well beyond the scope of any appropriate intervention in a neighbouring territory.

I think that we are right to expect Mr. Arafat to be unequivocal in his condemnation of suicide bombers. A Labour Member quoted something he had said, which included the comment, "This conduct is a deviation from the established policy of the Palestinian Authority". I do not think that that is quite the unequivocal condemnation for which we are looking.

We are all too used to Mr. Arafat's issuing some form of condemnation in English to appease his western allies—generally of a qualified nature—while at the same time, speaking in Arabic on the Arabic broadcasting channels, not only failing to condemn but positively

encouraging such action. We should accept that that happens. If it carries on happening, it will perpetuate the nightmare.

We should also expect Palestine's Arab neighbours, and those states that support Palestine, to change their ways. The Saudi peace plan is encouraging, but it would be more credible if the Saudi Government did not at the same time positively tolerate the promotion of terror by Palestinians. Saudi Arabia is an autocracy, and one of the benefits of that is that the Saudi Government ought to be able to control terrorist activity, but they are not so able. It is very important that action be taken to condemn such activity.

In the end, there must be compromise, and negotiation; otherwise, nothing like a satisfactory conclusion will be reached. However, both sides must acknowledge that there have been serious mistakes along the way.

Neither Ariel Sharon nor Yasser Arafat would be anyone's choice of dining companion, let alone of negotiating partner, but they are the ones who are in place. They may be bloody fools, as someone once said, but they are their own bloody fools, and we cannot choose to change them. We—the west in general, although Britain has a particular influence in the area—must use our influence to persuade Sharon and Arafat that, in the circumstances that obtain in the middle east, true leaders must accept that some mistakes have been made, and move forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.21 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): This debate has been characterised by some excellent speeches, and some passionate ones as well. I do not want to talk about Iraq other than to pick up a comment made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). Referring to Saddam Hussein, the right hon. Gentleman said that we should deal with the world as it is and that, having dealt with the world as it is, we should decide to do nothing. I do not think that that is an option. The possibility that weapons of mass destruction might pass from Iraqi hands into the hands of international terrorists means that, in the end, we will have to do something.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) offered an important and sobering—chilling, even—account of recent events. It was all the more important for coming so early in the debate.

I have no hesitation in agreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), who said that at the heart of the conflict lies the gross, offensive, unacceptable and intolerable denial of human rights for the Palestinian people. It may be true that those people are led poorly and weakly, that the Palestinian Authority—which, by all accounts, is riddled with corruption—presides over them in an inadequate manner, and that too many Palestinians have absorbed the mindset and methods of the terrorist organisations that hold sway. However, although that complicates and clouds matters, it does not alter the basic, salient fact that the conflict will not end until the Palestinian people have a free, independent and viable state of their own. Everyone's efforts must be directed towards achieving that outcome.

One key point that I wish to make is that the creation of a state for the Palestinian people is as important for the Israelis as for the Palestinians themselves. Of course, Israel must take all reasonable measures to protect its citizens. Only the most partisan and one-sided advocates of the Palestinian cause would expect anything different. When people cannot take buses, sit in cafes or go to family weddings without there being a possibility that they will be blown up, they must of course act to defend themselves. However, we must also understand that long-term security for Israel can be achieved only if the Palestinian people form a state, and move on from what they are at present—a rag-bag of refugee camps, isolated and deteriorating towns, and terrorist cells.

The Palestinian state, once formed, would become part of the international community and system. It would have to play by the rules. It would be deterred from wrongdoing, in the same way that every other state in the international community is deterred. It would have to invest in peace and neighbourly relations, like any other state, because that is what economics and trade would dictate. The Palestinian state would also have to build up the security apparatus required by any normal state.

I believe passionately that Israel must work towards establishing that Palestinian state. At present, Palestinian policemen and gunmen operate hand in hand. That would no longer be possible in a state that was internationally and legally constituted.

I shall not engage in the blame game. That would be sterile, as we all know what has happened in the years since Oslo. Oslo was about building peace, but Israel built peace with one hand and settlements in the occupied territories with the other. Similarly, the Palestinian leaders built peace on good days, but hate on other days, and they have armed and trained terror units.

We now have two very angry old men who are unsuited to creating peace on behalf of the people whom they represent. They are going at each other with weapons of war, destroying any semblance of trust that ever existed, and deepening the hatred between their peoples.

I do not believe that the Israelis embrace Ariel Sharon as their natural leader. I think that they support Sharon and his policies because they feel that they have no option. Everyone involved—and all the Arab nations, as well—must work on creating an alternative option for the Israeli people to embrace.

The Israeli state was founded on principles of social justice, democracy and respect for other people. That is why Israel has always been able to draw on a well of sympathy and support in the British Labour party. That sympathy still exists, because the founding values of the state of Israel still exist, however much they might be obscured by current events.

In their apparently contradictory attitudes, the opinions of Israeli people continue to reflect those founding values. The mass of Israelis support a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians. However, although 76 per cent. of Israelis favour the creation of a Palestinian state, a similar proportion—74 per cent.—support the current security policy. That is what happens when decent, civilised people are terrorised to within an inch of their wits' end.

We must accept that many people in Britain would react in the same way if bombs—twice the size of the ones at Birmingham, Warrington, Omagh, or Enniskillen—were to explode twice a week in our country. Yet however

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desperate we might have felt, we would have known that the answer did not lie in our Army seeking not only gunmen but what appear to be reprisals against innocent citizenry, as seems to be the case in Jenin.

My last point is about the Americans. Any success in creating a peace process will require strong external pressure. The only source for that pressure will need to come from the Americans, who need to be engaged, full s[illegible] and full-time, and win the trust of both sides. That means putting aside their supporter's scarf if they are to go between the Israelis, the Palestinians and the Arabs. We will not persuade the Americans to take on that role by bleating and complaining about them or cutting across what they are doing. Our job is to persuade the Americans to stop wavering, acquire resolve and resume their international responsibilities to play the role that only America can play in these terrible conditions.

6.31 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I hope that tomorrow the Foreign Secretary will invite the Israeli ambassador to come to his office—I do not say summon him—and give him a copy of *Hansard*. There is a message running through this debate. Parliamentarians who are deeply attached to Israel—some have an attachment going back many, many years—are deeply distressed by what is going on at the moment.

I cannot claim to have been a friend of Israel for as long as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who made a most moving speech. However, within weeks of entering the House of Commons in 1970, I got together with Lord Janner, as he now is, and others, and we formed the Campaign for the Release of Soviet Jewry. We worked hard to get people visas from the then Soviet Union to go to a land which, if not exactly flowing with milk and honey all the time, was a land of freedom, a true democracy, a country of which we could all be proud to be friends.

One of the first countries that I had the privilege of visiting as a Member of Parliament was the state of Israel. I went with a group of colleagues; the House must remember that it was just three years after 1967. We stood on the Golan heights, visited the other historic parts of Israel, and went to the holy places. We all came back conscious of the pioneering spirit of the Israeli people, conscious of their vulnerability and conscious that almost all their neighbours wished to push them into the sea or crush them one way or another.

Over the years, one has watched Israel develop and one has been extremely glad that a degree of normality began to come to the middle east. The way in which Begin and Sadat came together was deeply impressive; the part played in that by President Jimmy Carter was also extremely impressive. Now, of course, the situation is very different. Israel has, over the past two months or more, forfeited its right to claim the moral high ground. I find that distressing.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) spoke most movingly of her recent experiences. She brought home to us, in a way that nobody else has done, what is going on at the moment. However, we have only to watch our television screens and read our newspapers to realise that crimes are being perpetrated—I use my words carefully and deliberately—by a civilised state that are bound to forfeit the respect of the world for that state.

Mr. Sharon has one great accomplishment: he has virtually united the world in condemnation of the enormity of his actions. He has created a situation in which many who were sceptical about whether there should be a state of Palestine now accept it and promote it as official policy. I am glad about that; I think that there should be a state of Palestine, side by side with the state of Israel—both within secure guaranteed borders, enjoying international recognition and a degree of international protection. Mr. Sharon has indeed taken the agenda forward, but he has behaved, as the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) said, as a Milosevic—a war criminal. He has used the apparatus of a mighty army and a civilised democratic state to crush.

Nobody in this House cannot but condemn the suicide bombing, but what drives a 16 or 17-year-old girl to go into a restaurant or to a bus stop and blow other people and herself up? I say to Members of this House that if they had been born where she had been born, if they had been taught what she had been taught and if they had been deprived of hope as she had been deprived of hope, they might have done the same. The true poor of the 21st century are those who have no hope. In Palestine, they do not have hope, and we must recognise that.

I yield to no one in my defence of the state of Israel, its right to exist, and to no one in my condemnation of any terrorist barbarism, but I say to the Prime Minister of Israel and his Government that they have brought many of these atrocities upon their own people by the way in which they have over-reacted and over-retaliated. They have forfeited the respect of their friends; they have made a great country into a pariah nation. They have behaved in a way that puts them beyond the pale of decency and civilised values.

It is not easy to say these things so strongly, but I say them because I believe them to be true. I hope that tomorrow the Israeli ambassador will convey to his Government just how many of his friends in this Parliament, on both sides of the House, feel about their actions. He should see, in particular, a copy of the speech by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, himself a Jewish Member, with an impeccable record in this regard. I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber—I hope that he is not blushing outside.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Not much chance.

Sir Patrick Cormack: That is wisely said. However, the right hon. Gentleman is, above all else, a friend of Israel. Let the Israeli Government realise what they are doing to civilised opinion in this Parliament at Westminster.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said, in a powerful speech, if the Americans do not take a firm grip, the whole substance of the fight against terrorism is undermined. Saddam Hussein is a brutal and terrible dictator who has done the most despicable things to his own people. I have great sympathy with everything that the Prime Minister has said about him, but I know that if action is taken against him while Sharon is in power and behaving in the way that he is, the middle east will go up like a tinderbox. All those who are inclined to join the coalition or who are uneasy members will desert it.

When I visited the United States with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs shortly before Christmas, I was impressed by much of what we were told. Nobody

could stand at ground zero and fail to be deeply moved, but I was disturbed by the fact that many of the people we met did not seem to realise that unless the Palestine-Israel conflict is brought to an end, on sensible and civilised terms that allow the existence of both states, the breeding ground for terror will remain.

I hope, therefore, that the message will go out from the House today that there is no one who is not committed to an independent, democratic state of Israel; but also that there is no one who is not deeply disturbed by the way in which its Government are behaving at present.

6.41 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the heartbreaking situation in the middle east. I do so on the eve of yom ha'Atzma'ut, the Israeli independence celebration, for which, this evening, my constituents will be gathering in a determined but solemn manner.

I speak as chairman of Labour Friends of Israel, as an avowed supporter of land for peace and—as everyone who knows me well is aware—as a passionate believer in a democratic Palestinian state existing alongside a safe and secure Israeli state, as a neighbour rather than as an enemy. I fully endorse the Prime Minister's statement that there is no exclusively military solution to this complex political problem.

I support the Tenet proposals, the Mitchell plan, the Camp David proposals and the most recent Saudi proposals. I endorse the idea that they could form the basis of a new UN resolution that would garner broad international support.

In advocating anything that would bring the two sides closer together in a just settlement, I believe that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians want a peaceful resolution of the problems. Both communities have hurt, bled and died for far too long. Both communities accept the painful need to make difficult concessions.

From my background as an avid supporter and chair of Labour Friends of Israel, I am happy to associate myself with all the proposals that advocate the creation of a democratic Palestinian state. I was in Israel when the secrecy about the Oslo talks was broken and the accord became public. I joined tens of thousands of Israelis from all political backgrounds in an almost spontaneous Peace Now demonstration in the enormous public square in Tel Aviv. That square has now been named after the late Yitzhak Rabin as, tragically, he was assassinated there. I admit to breaking a small council byelaw when I was there by joining many hundreds bathing in the public fountains, such was my joy in the belief that a new opportunity was on the horizon. Sadly, we are where we are now.

It is easy to apportion blame, but in my short comments I want to try to put my perspective in context. It is clear that a generous offer was made at Camp David. Our Prime Minister made that point, as did President Clinton. The deal was not ideal for either side. It involved painful concessions, but I believe that they would have been built on if peace had been maintained. It was a continuing process rather than a permanent settlement.

We must all be honest about what a minority of terrorists hope to achieve. There has been a lack of perspective about that. Some hon. Members have said that the peace process was destroyed by the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, but in fact when Shimon Peres was the caretaker Prime Minister and the Labour Government were trying to negotiate a peace settlement, there were regular terrorist bus bombings. When Ehud Barak was trying to negotiate during the build-up to Camp David, bus bombings and suicide attacks were a regular occurrence. While the peace process was going on and hope was at its highest, terrorists continued to bomb innocent civilians in an attempt to undermine the process.

Neither of the last two Labour Governments of Israel were brought down by differences between the left and the right over the economy or other factors of that nature. Those Administrations were supported by the people of Israel in the hope that they could deliver peace and security, but history will judge that, unfortunately, that was not the case.

For people in Hamas and Islamic Jihad and for some of those in Al Aqsa—the so-called martyrs brigade—no concession would be good enough. We all know that drastic action is needed on Israeli settlements, but even if not one settler remained, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and some in Al Aqsa would continue to bomb innocent Israelis. Even if there were the most expansive Palestinian state, those people would continue to bomb innocent Israeli civilians.

Many Israeli civilians do not believe, or are unconvinced, that there is a partnership for peace. Israel, under a Labour Government, rightly withdrew from Lebanon. Although that took far too long, it was in full compliance with UN resolution 425, yet Hezbollah continues to mount terrorist attacks and launch rockets across the border. We have to accept that there is a hardcore coalition of organisations, and, yes, states, that does not believe in Israel's right to exist. It includes Syria, Lebanon and elements in Iran, Iraq and, sadly, in the Palestinian Authority. Arms shipments from Iran are delivered to the Palestinian Authority. There are strong allegations—although an independent assessment has yet to be made—that the Authority is providing funds for the families of suicide bombers. Elements in the Palestinian Authority glorify the suicide bombers while describing their activities as outwith its agreed policy or strategy.

The difficulty for all of us who want to see the two states living alongside one another is that while the majority of Palestinians and Israelis accept a peace settlement—albeit with painful concessions—a hardcore minority will never accept one. Who will guarantee the ceasefire for the people of Israel? Who will protect them against Hamas or Islamic Jihad? Will Chairman Arafat—or, in a Palestinian state, President Arafat—give that guarantee? It cannot just be willed in English or in Arabic, on television or radio; it must be given through action, not merely in words of equivocal condemnation or criticism. Until that guarantee can be delivered, I have substantial fears that Israel will be unable to make the essential and difficult concessions that are necessary.

The coalition of terror, which involves states and individual benefactors throughout the region, has killed 126 innocent Israeli civilians in the past month alone—Jews and Israeli Arabs alike. In this debate and on other occasions, hon. Members have drawn parallels with Northern Ireland. During the horrific dark days of the troubles there was disgraceful bloodshed and mass

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slaughter in Northern Ireland, to the eternal shame of those in the IRA and other organisations who carried out those deeds.

On average, every year, 31 innocent civilians were brutally murdered by the IRA and their friends, yet in only one month, 126 innocent civilians were killed by suicide bombers in Israel. In one month alone, Palestinian terrorists killed more civilians than the IRA managed to kill in four years of the troubles at their darkest. That tragic loss of life has led the majority of Israelis, who are peace loving and wish to reach an accommodation with their neighbour, to turn to alternative means.

There is pain and suffering on both sides—we all know about the deaths of Palestinian children, mothers and grandmothers—but I shall cite just one terrible example: the recent slaughter in which a suicide bomber killed 28 innocent Jewish civilians as they celebrated Passover, including Frieda Britvich, 86 years of age; Anna Yakobovitch, 78 years of age; and Eva Weiss, 75 years of age. All three were survivors of the holocaust, and all three lost their lives to a suicide bomber on the eve of Passover.

We have to ask ourselves honestly how we would react as a democracy that wishes to reach an accommodation and accepts the need for painful concessions. How would we choose to react? I say that not as a friend of Ariel Sharon in any sense, as everyone knows. In conclusion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has spoken for 10 minutes.

6.51 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Like most hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) rightly concentrated on the dreadful events that are unfolding in Israel and Palestine even as we speak. At this stage of the debate, it might be helpful if I pick up the various more casual remarks that have been made about Iraq because this will be one of the few opportunities that we have to question a Foreign Office Minister and express some concerns about British and American policy, which could lead to military action against Iraq in the near future. I hope that it goes without saying that I do so as one who abhors everything that Saddam Hussein has done and who, as Tom King's Parliamentary Private Secretary during the Gulf war, saw at something fairly close to first hand the effects of Iraq's invasion of its neighbour, Kuwait.

The first set of questions that I should like to pose to the Minister who will respond to the debate deals with the implications of any such military intervention, and the implications for Iraq itself. Most hon. Members have been impressed that America and the international coalition have identified people who could lead Afghanistan in the future. In fact, if anything, almost too many people have been identified and delicate negotiations and diplomacy will be needed to ensure that good people run Afghanistan. But there is no such opposition in Iraq that could take over from Saddam Hussein.

There is no point whatever in military action to remove Saddam Hussein and replace him with someone just as bad. The further implication would be the almost certain break-up of Iraq as a nation state, which is not necessarily desirable for the stability of the middle east. When I was Tom King's PPS, I visited northern Iraq and saw the excellent work that our soldiers were doing to protect Kurdish Iraqis from attacks by Saddam Hussein. There is no doubt that the Kurdish people in the north would wish to have an independent state. The possibility of a greater Kurdistan would lead to instability and have a huge effect on our NATO ally, Turkey.

Equally inevitably and, I suspect, rightly, the Shi'ites in the south would wish to have independence. They would probably form a statelet very dependent on Iran. That would lead to greater instability because it would give even more power and influence to Iran, which is far from a force for good. There are grave implications for Iraq itself and for its neighbours, and the fragile international coalition against terrorism could well break up, as other hon. Members have said.

I noted, as other hon. Members must have done, the Arab League summit in Beirut earlier this month, when even Kuwait rejected military intervention in Iraq. Our many moderate friends throughout the middle east would be at least embarrassed and, at worst, heavily destabilised by any such military action. I need hardly say that the harm that it would do to the present awful crisis in the middle east—the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians—does not bear thinking of, so, on that count alone, I urge caution.

The second set of questions that we should ask deals with what exactly is new. Saddam Hussein is a very bad man—he has been for a very long time. He has inflicted gross cruelty on his own people and, some 10 years ago, he invaded his neighbour, Kuwait. But what has happened in the past two, three, six or nine months that requires military intervention to be considered that had not happened before? We are not told what weapons of mass destruction he has now that he did not have then.

If we were to take military action against every rogue state and every disagreeable dictator who has dangerous and serious weapons, we would have to consider many other candidates. There is Libya, which used its weapons of mass destruction in neighbouring Chad. There are Iran, North Korea and even China, but there is rightly no suggestion of military action against those countries. Instead, there is a sensible policy of containment and deterrence.

I have repeated time and again the self-evident truth that Saddam Hussein is a very bad man indeed, but he is not mad. I believe that he understands a deterrent and there has been no further incursion into neighbouring countries because, by and large, the no-fly zone over Kurdish northern Iraq has been maintained by us and our allies and because, after the Gulf war, he knows just what would happen if he were in any way implicated in any terrorist activity.

There is therefore no justification whatever for our American allies, supported by our own Government, to take military action against Iraq in the foreseeable future. In the long term, such action would be highly dangerous and destabilise not just the region, but world peace and the world economy. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would take a huge amount of convincing before our armed forces joined the Americans in any such military adventure.

6.59 pm

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): It is significant that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) said, we are having this debate on the eve of the 54th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel.

I last visited Israel in 1999 with a delegation from Labour Friends of Israel. One of the things that those delegations always do is speak to Palestinian representatives, as many of my hon. Friends and colleagues who have taken part in those visits will know. Indeed, on my first visit as a Member of Parliament we met Marwan Barghouti, who has just been arrested. We had an hour or so with him, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) will remember. In 1999, we had lunch at the American Colony hotel in east Jerusalem with Palestinian representatives, one of whom was the Palestinian mayor of Jerusalem, Ziad Abu Ziad, whom we have seen on television from time to time. He said something very significant, which has stuck in my mind: "If you are truly Labour Friends of Israel, you must also be Labour Friends of Palestine. That means that you must support a Palestinian state, a true state that lives not back to back but face to face with Israel in peace." Those words have always struck me as very important and very wise. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said, it is significant that more than three quarters of Israelis would support a Palestinian state if it brought them the security that they are so desperate to achieve. It is, of course, also significant that so many Israelis support the current leadership of Ariel Sharon, who is causing so much violence, death, destruction and mayhem among innocent Palestinians.

I support the recent moves by the Arab League for a peace settlement—land for peace. That is supported by most of my colleagues in Labour Friends of Israel and, I am sure, by the vast majority of Members of Parliament. However, it is not good enough simply to say we will get rid of the Bantustans of area A, area B and area C, and the towns that are isolated from each other in the Palestinian territories; we must do much more than that. There must be investment in infrastructure, the creation of a civil society and the creation of an economic infrastructure, so that the economic development that is so sadly lacking in Palestinian areas can be used to develop the wealth and standard of living of ordinary Palestinians, which fall so far behind those of ordinary Israelis.

On my last visit, I went to east Jerusalem. The poverty there is palpably a factor that gives rise to the militancy of many Palestinians. When one considers that there is a 20-fold difference between the gross domestic product per capita or the annual income of a Palestinian compared with that of an Israeli, one begins to understand why there is so much bitterness. It is not good enough simply to have a Palestinian state; there must also be massive investment so that the standard of living can be increased—perhaps not to that of the Israelis, but so that a democratic, peaceful, civil society can be created in a state of Palestine and that we can have a truly and properly established state and bring justice to those Palestinians.

I want to say a few words about what is happening in Israel. We have heard many stories and many tales of ordinary Israelis and the way in which they have lost their lives, the lives of their children, and the innocent people whose lives have been destroyed by the suicide bombers. I was in Cyprus on 27 March on a Foreign Affairs Committee visit when I turned on the television and saw, on CNN, the news of the bomb in the hotel in Netanya. My good friends—and my constituents—Debbie and Michael Ziff were in Netanya at the time. They were not going to that hotel, but they knew it well. This was on Seder night, the night before the Passover begins, so it was going to be very crowded. Twenty-seven people died, and many more were injured. I shed many tears, along with many others who saw that news.

What was the response of Ariel Sharon's democratically elected Government? The Israeli leadership says that it was to root out the terrorist infrastructure—there is an infrastructure even for suicide bombs. Brigadier-General Eyal Shlein said:

"We went out on a mission with the intent of destroying the terrorist infrastructure to thwart terrorist attacks, and to remove the threat of terrorism inside Israel. This is one of the most justified wars, and I am very much at peace with it."

Is that a justified response to the horror and carnage of suicide bombing? I recently received an e-mail from my cousin who lives in Ramat Aviv. She is now too frightened to go shopping. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said in his excellent speech, the fact is that Israel is becoming a ghetto—that is what the Jews tried to escape from when they set up the state of Israel. It is not good enough for ordinary Israelis to be too frightened to go out of their own homes. It is not good enough for my cousin who lives in Tel Aviv to send me an e-mail saying that he did not know, for six hours, whether his son, who is doing military service in Gaza, was alive or dead, when three soldiers were killed a few weeks ago.

What is the solution? I have been as horrified as all hon. Members by the reports that we have read—the kind of reports that were published recently in *The Sunday Telegraph*—of murder, mayhem and carnage in some of the Palestinian cities as well as the camps. A significant piece appeared in *The Times* on 12 April. It was written by Stephen Farrell in Ramallah. Obviously, the Israeli army did not want him to be in Ramallah, and one of the soldiers of the Israeli defence force said to him:

"You f****** Europeans, you have got it all wrong."

So began the familiar outburst before it headed in an entirely unexpected direction:

"Should I be here? No. Should any Israeli tanks be here? No. I have more sympathy with these people than any of those f****** settlers we are supposed to be looking after . . . You're going to write about massacres, aren't you, say we are killing them all in Jenin, all over the West Bank. We're not. But you won't write that."

Of course, the journalist did so, but those comments were very significant.

I am in an unenviable position as a constituency Member of Parliament who represents about 10,000 Jews and about 10,000 Muslims—I cannot win, whatever I say. I did do something that I felt was right, however—I signed the advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 29 March. I shall not read it all out, but part of it states:

"We condemn the use of terror by extremist Palestinian groups. Nevertheless, this terror should not blind us to the deeper issues posed by Israel's occupation of and current behaviour in the Palestinian territories. It is in recognition of these issues that voices are being raised in Israel to point out that the moral foundation of the Jewish state is being destroyed by the occupation."

Three hundred Jewish people signed that; I was the only Member of Parliament to do so—and, believe me, I have had a bit of flak from my constituents for so doing. I do not apologise, however, because, in the end, how many people have to die before there is a solution?

[Mr. Fabian Hamilton]

We know that violence breeds further violence; that is absolutely clear. I agree with Naomi Chassan, the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, when she says, "Withdraw the troops now." The moral high ground has been lost through such action. All I can say is this: we know that there will be a solution—eventually, one day, all the parties will have to negotiate peace in the middle east. The only question that remains is: how many innocent Palestinians and innocent Israelis must die in the meantime?

7.8 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The last two speakers from the Government Benches have done something to redress the balance of this debate. I concur with much of what they said. Indeed, I am surprised at how overwhelmingly the balance of the debate has been tipped the other way.

Since I have been involved in politics, my sympathies have been largely with the Palestinians—60:40 or 70:30. As many of us have done, I have tried to balance the right of Israel to exist as a state against the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and the indignity of having their land occupied, and the continued building of settlements, for which the current Israeli Prime Minister is largely responsible.

My attitude to that changed about 18 months ago when negotiations started at Camp David and culminated at Taba, in which President Clinton invested an enormous amount of time and the prestige of his office, and in which Prime Minister Barak of Israel went to extraordinary lengths to reach a settlement with the Palestinians. As the Foreign Secretary said, Barak offered them, in the words of a Palestinian negotiator, 95 per cent. of what they wanted. That was not just turned down flat; it was not even used by Arafat as a basis for continuing negotiations. In the middle of those negotiations, Arafat restarted the intifada for some trumped-up reason. Perhaps it was because Sharon went to the Temple Mount. *[Interruption.]* At that time Sharon was not even a member of the Knesset, let alone a member of the Israeli Government. If the leader of the Palestinians is not more mature, there is not an awful lot of hope.

It is not surprising that Israel and, perhaps more important, the United States have given up on Chairman Arafat as a negotiator for peace. We want a compromise, and that fact has been laid out by both Front-Bench spokesmen and by many speakers in the debate. A great many people in Israel want a compromise, but a good deal of Arab and Palestinian opinion does not want one. It wants the destruction of the state of Israel, and that might explain why Arafat cannot or will not reach a deal.

It seems from the events of the past few months that Arafat is really a terrorist at heart. The Al Aqsa brigade is not a child of Hamas; it is a child of Fatah. We have to ask what kind of regime encourages teenage schoolgirls to become suicide bombers. What kind of sick mentality or sick thinking encourages people to do that? It may be understandable that the occasional adult decides to become a suicide bomber, but it is obscene for a regime that claims to be a Government to encourage children to carry out such acts.

I hold no brief for Sharon. He has made the situation much more difficult, and the chances of reaching a peace with him are very limited indeed. The reaction of Israel may have been brutal, but it cannot have been unexpected. I wonder whether the aim of the Palestinian Government was to provoke an overreaction from Israel so that they could gain world sympathy. Arafat has created a Sharon Government. He had much better options than that. He could have reached a peace deal with Barak, and he could probably have reached one with Rabin and Peres. He created the Netanyahu Government and he created the Sharon Government, and we are all reaping the results of that.

I am afraid that I am a pessimist—perhaps that is why I am a Conservative. I do not believe in the perfectibility of human nature or that it is as good as people like to pretend it is. I think that things will get worse in the Arab-Israeli conflict before they get better. I suspect that we will need new leaders on both sides before a peace deal is struck.

On 11 September, four sets of suicide bombers in the United States of America killed 5,000 Americans. The reaction of the western world was united, and we carried a good deal of the rest of the world with us. We started the war against terrorism and we saw the attacks—rightly in my opinion—as a fundamental assault on our interests and as something to which we had to respond.

Since September 2000, just after the Camp David talks, there have been 67 suicide bombings in Israel and 29 of them have taken place since 11 September. However, when Israel reacts to eliminate that threat, we call for their withdrawal and United Nations resolutions are passed to condemn them. This debate has demonstrated the one-sided nature of the arguments.

The Israeli reaction has been brutal, but it remains to be seen whether what happened in the refugee camp in Jenin was a war crime. However, the reaction has been over the top and we must acknowledge that, if there were no suicide bombers, there would be no Israeli defence force incursions on the scale that there have been. The suicide bombings came first.

What is the difference between the Israeli reaction to the Palestinian suicide bombings and our reaction to the suicide bombers in the United States? Terrorism is terrorism. I do not see a moral distinction. There is a practical distinction and that is what the issue comes down to. Our Government and the American Government are driven by the fact that we are engaged in a war against terrorism in which our Arab allies are an important ingredient. The United States is thinking about and perhaps even planning an attack on Iraq to replace the regime there, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) will forgive me if I do not pursue that point. However, it will be difficult to replace that regime if the situation in the middle east has been inflamed by the Arab-Israeli conflict re-emerging in the way that it has done. That is why there is a difference and that is why it is in our interests to cool the situation down. However, we should be very careful about pretending that there is a moral difference between one kind of terrorism and another.

If Israel withdraws, which United Nations resolutions and many speakers in the debate have called for, what guarantee is there that the suicide bombings will stop? They will almost certainly continue. No one has answered the question and I do not pretend to have an answer myself, but reasonable Israelis are entitled to an answer.

The middle east is the source of most of the world's instability, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not the only cause of that. The threats are not just regional and nor do they affect only our oil supplies. Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are a serious threat to the west and to our fundamental interests.

In the attacks on 11 September, 14 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. The leader of the hijackers was an Egyptian. Mullahs in Saudi Arabia have developed and exported their peculiarly toxic brand of Islamic fundamentalism, which is a perversion of a great worldwide religion that almost all of us—perhaps all of us—thoroughly respect. It certainly deserves our respect, but what has emerged in al-Qaeda and its associated organisations is a toxic and poisonous brand of that religion that seeks to justify murder on a mass scale. The mullahs have succeeded in exporting that toxic brand of their religion to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Chechnya, the Philippines and even to the United Kingdom.

The problem is not created just by the mullahs; it is financed by Saudi money in one form or another. A recent article in a Saudi newspaper accused Jews of drinking the blood of Christians and Muslims in religious ceremonies. Saudi Arabia has a Government-controlled press. As someone said earlier, one of the advantages of an autocracy is that one can at least get what one wants in the newspapers. We have all met extremely well-educated and urbane Saudis, Egyptians and other Arabs, and can any of them seriously believe that that accusation is true? The Egyptian newspapers constantly carry diatribes against America and they fuel anti-western feeling. When combined with a fundamentalist brand of Islam, it creates many of the problems that we face.

The Saudi ambassador to Britain has recently taken to writing light-hearted and amusing letters to *The Spectator*. Last week he put pen to paper and wrote a poem that was published in a Saudi newspaper. It lauded one of the Palestinian teenage suicide bombers. It praised her and said that the gates of heaven were open to her. We are dealing with a serious problem in Saudi Arabia. It is our ally and we rescued it from a potential Iraqi invasion during the Gulf war. The stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia, who are there to protect it from Iraq, is Osama bin Laden's casus belli. He constantly says that his actions are designed to get American troops out of Saudi Arabia, but the country refused to allow our Prime Minister to land there and to talk to its Government in the aftermath of the events of 11 September.

We must face the fact that we have some not terribly attractive allies in the war against terrorism. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are at the heart of opinion in the Arab world. One has most of the money and the oil; the other has the intellectual influence. However, both of them are running failed economies. Egypt is a failed state and Saudi Arabia's GDP is half what it was 10 years ago. Saudi Arabia will find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to provide jobs for young, relatively well-educated Arabs. There are no political outlets for dissent, which is focused in the mosque. That is stoking up the problem. I hope that our foreign policy in handling the war against terrorism will address the issues affecting some of our allies.

7.18 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I believe that everyone will agree with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) when he attacked anti-Semitism. Any form of racism is totally unacceptable. He referred to the disgraceful article in a Saudi Arabian journal and the blood-libel allegations against Jews. The columnist has since been sacked, but only after pressure from the United States.

I am highly critical, and have been for some time, of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians and I shall turn to that issue in a moment. However, I want to make it clear that I am totally opposed to suicide bombing. Such atrocities cannot be justified in any way. In the main, they are targeted at civilians in Israel and they cause death and destruction to people who are not involved with Israeli policy in the occupied territories.

It is also important to recognise that suicide bombings play into the hands of those in Israel on the right wing and the ultra-nationalist right wing who use them as a justification for what is happening now. We should bear it in mind that the suicide bombers and those who organise them have one thing in common with the right wing in Israel: both are totally opposed to a negotiated settlement leading to a viable Palestinian state, co-existing with an Israel without its post-1967 occupied lands.

We have heard from some of my hon. Friends about the atrocities that have undoubtedly occurred in the past two weeks as a result of the Israeli action. The essence of the tragedy is the Israeli occupation since 1967 of the west bank and Gaza. Understandably, Palestinians see Israel as a colonial power that rules a people against their wishes. Even if the current Israeli policy were somewhat different, the situation would not change. We must try to understand that Palestinians feel humiliated and deprived of respect and statehood, living in wretched refugee camps for years on end, often jobless and denied adequate basic facilities—even such as sufficient water supply. To believe, as Israeli propaganda would occasionally have us believe, that Palestinians live like that deliberately to gain world sympathy is simply a refusal to face up to the facts. If a breeding ground for terrorism exists, it is what is happening—and has been happening for the past 35 years—in the refugee camps.

I have always argued—indeed, it has been my position since 1948—that Israel has a right to exist. I am not usually reluctant to state my views, and if I were a Zionist, I would say so, but I am not. Like most people—Jews and non-Jews alike, and certainly people in European countries, the United States and many other countries outside the Arab world—I believe that, as a result of what happened to the Jews, not only the holocaust but the 2,000 years of acute anti-Semitism that led to what occurred between 1939 and 1945, there is justification for a Jewish state.

In 1967, I was one of those Members of the House of Commons who argued that Israel had a right to defend itself, and I have not changed my views about that in any way, but I am totally opposed to Israeli occupation of the west bank and Gaza. If it is argued that, because of the events of 1967, Israel had no alternative, I would argue—indeed, I did so when that war ended—that Israel should use that land as a negotiating point in bringing about a settlement with the Palestinians. Instead, of course, the Israelis have adopted the very opposite approach. It is all very well talking about the Oslo agreement, which I support, and further negotiations, but what has Israel actually done in the occupied territories in the past 35 years? We know the answer: it has built its settlements—in defiance of international law. Tens of

[David Winnick]

thousands of Israeli settlers are living on land that belongs to the Palestinians, yet we ask ourselves why the Palestinians feel such resentment and bitterness. Would not we feel that way if we were them? Would not the Israelis feel the same if they were in that position? Why should we be surprised?

It must be recognised that Sharon does not want a Palestinian state. Virtually everyone who has contributed to today's debate, however much they may disagree, has argued in favour of a viable Palestinian state. That is the policy of the British Government, and even President Bush has used such words. However, does anyone believe for one moment that Sharon, the party that he represents and, as I said, those even on the right of Sharon—if such a thing is possible—want a viable Palestinian state? We must realise that the whole of Sharon's political career has been concerned with building a settlement, holding on to the occupied territories and denying the Palestinian people a state. We are dealing not with an Israeli Prime Minister who wants a proper negotiated settlement, leading to the type of solution that we want, but with a very different type of politician.

We are right to refer back to what happened in Lebanon. Is current Israeli policy and the crimes—indeed, the atrocities—that have been committed in the past fortnight very different from what happened 20 years ago in Lebanon? As hon. Members have pointed out, was not Sharon himself instrumental in Israel's going into Lebanon? What a fiasco that was. How many innocent lives were lost? When Sharon was elected last year, I said to the Prime Minister that we should remember those refugees who were butchered in Lebanon in 1982. Should we not do so? It is perfectly true that Israel was not responsible for the killings as such, but Sharon was indirectly responsible. As minister for defence, he was brought before a court of inquiry in Israel. It found that he was not the sort of person who should hold such a position, and rightly so, but now he is Prime Minister.

This issue cannot be resolved until Israel withdraws totally from the occupied territories. As I have said, Israel's right to exist is not in question. Arab states may not like that—understandably, they wish that the events of 1948 had not occurred—but an increasing number accept the reality of the situation. The way to resolve the issue is to bring about not a "statelet", but a viable Palestinian state that is no less sovereign and independent than Israel itself. That state should be responsible for matters such as security, and for combating terrorism.

I am glad that this debate has taken place. The United States is the one country that can put pressure on Israel, and I hope that it recognises that responsibility. It is all very well its considering Iraq, and so on, but its immediate responsibility is to put economic and financial pressure on Sharon, so that, at long last, there can be justice for the Palestinians. They deserve it, and they should get it.

7.27 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am pleased to participate in this important debate on behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. As hon. Members will recognise, both parties are committed to democratic constitutional change and self-determination for our countries. Therefore, recognising the right and aspiration of both Israeli and Palestinian people to national self-determination and security comes easy to us. Like many who have spoken, we want to put on the record our condemnation of acts of violence in the region—whether acts of state violence by the Israeli Government, or terrorist attacks by Palestinian factions and suicide bombers. We associate ourselves with the calls for an immediate cessation of all acts of violence.

We also support moves to codify the Saudi Arabian initiative: a resolution of the Security Council of the United Nations that would require the withdrawal of Israeli troops to pre-1967 boundaries, the Arab world's acceptance of the legitimacy of the Israeli state, and the establishment of a viable, self-governing and independent Palestinian state.

We have heard moving speeches throughout the debate. I was particularly struck by the testimony of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) concerning conditions in Jenin and elsewhere. If they have not already done so, I urge all Members to read an article in London's *The Times* today, by Janine di Giovanni, who writes from the Jenin refugee camp. She writes:

"The refugees I had interviewed in recent days while trying to enter the camp were not lying. If anything, they underestimated the carnage and the horror. Rarely, in more than a decade of war reporting from Bosnia, Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, have I seen such deliberate destruction, such disrespect for human life."

In a previous career, I worked as a journalist. For one of my assignments I spent a great deal of time in the former Yugoslavia reporting on Croatia, in particular, and on the cause of the civil war there. I saw a great deal of destruction. I have not been to the west bank or the Gaza strip, but like other hon. Members I have seen many of the pictures and much of the television coverage. Rarely have I seen so much destruction caused in such a short time. Although there was also terrible destruction in eastern Croatia and Bosnia, it was wrought over many years.

The Israeli Government justify the actions of their defence forces—so-called—as dismantling the infrastructure of terrorism. It is clear to everyone, however, that their aim is broader than justifiably dealing with the terrible suicide bomb attacks. It is instead an attempt to dismantle the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority.

In preparing for the debate, I tried to find out what neutral observers on the ground have been saying. Other hon. Members have given various facts and figures. Today's update by the Palestinian Red Crescent confirms that it was denied access to the refugee camp in Jenin for 10 days. It was not allowed to remove the injured or the dead, and of course it is terrible for Muslims if they cannot bury their dead within 24 hours. Red Crescent was allowed in once but its movements were restricted to less than 10 per cent. of the camp area. In Bethlehem, Israeli forces continue to prevent ambulances and medical teams from gaining access to the Nativity church area, Manger square and the old city. In Jenin, Israeli forces continue to surround the town's hospital.

Oxfam writes today that it is concerned about the

"gross violation of international humanitarian law",

including violence against civilians and humanitarian workers and the denial of access to meet immediate need. It fears that there will be a serious health crisis due to people drinking contaminated water. Oxfam is also aware that Israeli soldiers have failed to honour agreements made by

senior officers to allow repair of water pipes. That and all the other points raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House—I agree in particular with what was said by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson)—challenge us all to call for and bring into effect a step change in the international community's reaction so that it uses its leverage. I also agree with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the time has come to think about the use of sanctions to effect that.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On sanctions, we have heard much about even-handedness and it is true that we have to take a mature approach to both sides. However, is it not supremely ironic that we are considering the use of force, even warfare, to deal with one country—Iraq—that has consistently broken UN resolutions, yet we are not prepared to consider imposing even limited arms sanctions against another country that has also consistently broken UN resolutions since 1967? Does my hon. Friend agree that unless the Israeli Government are prepared to trade land for peace, we will not see a resolution of the conflict in the land of Israel?

Angus Robertson: I agree with my hon. Friend and will deal with Iraq in a moment. On sanctions, however, it is important that we do not avoid mentioning developments at a European level, which have not been discussed so far. I note with interest that Members of the European Parliament representing the European Socialists, the Liberals and the Greens/European Free Alliance, of which our parties are members, recently voted overwhelmingly to suspend the EU's association agreement with Israel. I note with sadness that that was not endorsed by the British Government or many others at the meeting of the EU Council of Foreign Ministers yesterday.

It is also sad that the UK Government did not support the initiative that my party colleague and the Foreign Minister of Germany, Joschka Fischer, presented to the Council meeting. Ironically, the plan embodied points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It called for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops, international peacekeepers patrolling a buffer zone, a declaration of a Palestinian state, an end to Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas and negotiations on Israel's borders and the status of Jerusalem. I agree with the Prime Minister when he says that inaction is not an option in the face of breaches of UN resolutions. For that reason, I very much hope that the UK Government will pursue those matters in the UN and with our EU colleagues and support a robust response.

I dislike Saddam Hussein's regime as much as anyone else in the Chamber, but we still wait for the famed dossier on the weapons of mass destruction programme of Iraq. Dossiers and intelligence on al-Qaeda were shared and briefings were done on Privy Council terms in the run-up to the situation in Afghanistan. Why is the same not true of the Iraqi information that we have been promised? We still also wait for a specific UN mandate should military options be undertaken on Iraq. What we are not having to wait for, however, are clear breaches of UN resolutions when considering the situation in Israel. Like the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), my comments are aimed at Israel in particular because it is a democratic, independent state and should be judged by a higher standard. However, like the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), I think that the extraordinary provocation and senseless killings by suicide bombers are a massive challenge to the Israeli authorities to protect their citizens.

Nevertheless, on balance, the time has come for the countries that can influence Israel to act decisively. We have a responsibility to use the political and economic leverage that we possess to influence change. Although I welcome the recent change in tack by the United States and the mission of Secretary of State Powell, it is time for the US Administration genuinely to press Israel to withdraw from Jenin and the other occupied areas. It is also high time for the EU and the people in Europe to lead by example.

7.37 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I have visited Jerusalem only once, in 1965, when I was a very young woman. It was an incredibly interesting visit and I was struck everywhere I went by the ability of the young people whom I met to speak English. I was amazed by their wonderful grasp of our language. I remember what an enormous impression it made on me at the time, when I was still ill-informed about the history of that region, when they got out their ID cards and said, "I am a Palestinian."

I have thought many times in the past few weeks about those young people and a young woman in particular to whom I spoke. Now, of course, they are probably grandparents if they are still alive. They, their children and their grandchildren have lived through a terrible time in which they have suffered goodness knows what deprivations or humiliations. They have all lived out that history in a way we can only imagine.

There have been many courageous people in those generations who have struggled for self-determination and many who have done despicable acts, but it is extraordinary that the struggle has taken so long and has come to this. If I am shocked by what has happened and find it utterly unbelievable, then how much the more so those people of the middle east?

I have no special expertise or associations in the context of the debate, but I want to join all those who have spoken in expressing my wish to see an independent state for Palestine and a state of Israel that can live in peace and security.

I join with all who condemn the suicide bombings. There can be nothing more terrifying for people than going about their work and ordinary daily events not knowing whether they may stand or sit next to a person who is about to blow himself or herself, and them, to destruction. Undoubtedly, we would all find it impossible to live with such a threat and not feel the need for revenge. Nothing can justify the suicide bombing, but equally no military action can eradicate it. What is so shocking about the current events is that we can, as many people have done in this debate, almost track them back to a time when lasting peace was within our grasp.

There has been a debate among Opposition Members about what happened at Taba. I have had sight, as others may have done, of the paper that is called, in EU-speak, a non-paper and is the account of the EU special

[Joan Ruddock]

representative to the middle east, who wrote at the time that although there were serious gaps and differences between the two sides,

"it also shows that both sides have travelled a long way to accommodate the views of the other sides and that solutions are possible".

Furthermore, in that contemporary account, the EU representative records that both sides had agreed to the 4 June 1967 lines in accordance with UN resolution 242, as a basis for borders. Both sides had agreed in principle on land swaps, on refugees, on Jerusalem and on the involvement of an international force. Both sides had reservations and, tragically, neither side was prepared to commit at that time, when the intifada had already started, Israeli elections were pending and there was uncertainty over the future of Ehud Barak. We will never know whether, given the time and opportunity, that peace process could have concluded successfully.

What we do know, however—this is why I cannot be even-handed in this matter—is that the election of Ariel Sharon, on 6 February 2001, ended all hope of that settlement. He said that he would insist on a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, that there had to be Israeli control over security areas on the west bank, and that there could be no right of return for Palestinian refugees. It is that attitude that has denied justice, peace and, perhaps even more importantly, any hope to the Palestinians who have carried out the madness of suicide bombing.

When we unreservedly condemn the suicide bombers, we must equally condemn the 70-odd political assassinations carried out by Israel. Of course Israel has an absolute right to take steps to protect its citizens, and it must, but the actions that have been taken in the past few weeks go far beyond that aim; as somebody said today, Ariel Sharon is a fool to believe that they could have any meaningful result for those young people.

Professor Paul Rogers of the Bradford school of peace studies has said that the military operations have a different purpose, which has become clear as the effects of the war have become apparent. He says:

"They are, in short, aimed at destroying the capacity of a putative Palestinian state to operate."

Those sentiments were echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick). The international community cannot allow those sentiments to prevail. It cannot allow this impasse to continue.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, the Mitchell and Tenet proposals and the Saudi peace initiative provide an international consensus on the best way forward for securing an end to the cycle of violence and a return to negotiations. As others have said, we can no longer wait for those two old men to cease their quarrel and come to the table. We, the international community, have to bring that about. I am not sure, as others have said, that a ceasefire has to be a prerequisite. We have seen previously how a demand for seven days' continuous cessation of violence prevented negotiation. There is the difficulty that Chairman Arafat undoubtedly faces of policing any ceasefire, if indeed he agrees to one.

It is for the leaders, under the influence of the international community, to start talking now even while the violence continues. We cannot go down the confidence-building road proposed by Mitchell which will take so long. This is so urgent that it has to happen now. I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I have no time, and others may not have time, to go through the dossier and the briefings sent by Amnesty International and Oxfam to Members of Parliament today, but the Government must read those documents to see just how horrific the conditions have been. Clearly, the aid agencies have seen those conditions at first hand, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) so movingly demonstrated.

In conclusion, we must do more than we have already done. I applaud the attitude of our Government, but we must put an absolute ban on any export of arms to Israel at this time. We could do more, perhaps within the European Union, to consider other sanctions. We must continue constantly to put the maximum pressure on the United States of America because as others have said, it is the one nation that holds the key to the solution of the crisis. It must accept its responsibility; we must ask that of the USA. It must get the two sides in the dispute to rise to their responsibilities as well.

7.47 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Bournemouth is twinned with that very similar coastal resort in Israel, Netanya. The hon. Members for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) and for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) have reminded us that last month a suicide bomber destroyed 27 lives and injured more than 100 of Netanya's citizens, most of them elderly, as they sat down for a Passover supper. The mayor of Bournemouth sent his counterpart in Netanya a message of condolence on behalf of us all. It has been his fourth such message during his year in office. Israel has used that atrocity to justify its current offensive in the occupied territories.

There is, of course, no justification for such acts of terrorism. In the total absence of any curtailing influence over those who perpetrate them, we should have sympathy with Israel in seeking to defend itself from them. However, as many hon. Members have said in this debate, until Israel offers the Palestinians a credible prospect of a homeland of their own, such atrocities will continue. Only the people of Israel, as citizens of the only responsible civilised democracy in the region, can insist on their political leaders seeking a settlement by negotiation which will enable them to live in peace and security for the first time in their history.

Of course we should support initiatives such as the one undertaken by Colin Powell. The role of the international community is to encourage a climate in which negotiations can recommence and succeed. Thus we should welcome Crown Prince Abdullah's plan, which, although neither new nor his, calls in the clearest terms yet for the universal Arab recognition of Israel. We should consider Mr. Sharon's plan for a regional conference, as well as the concept of an organisation for security and co-operation in the middle east—an OSCME—to emulate the success of the Helsinki process in consolidating peace in Europe, as proposed by the Council of Europe.

The devastation of the Palestine refugee camp in Jenin, graphically described by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), should concentrate our minds on how to resolve the greatest humanitarian challenge in the middle east: the existence of densely populated refugee

camps. There are 59 refugee camps in four host countries and the occupied territories, housing 1.5 million refugees. A further 2 million refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which provides them with support and services, as it has done for more than 50 years with the continuing generous financial support of the international community.

As the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) rightly says, most of those refugees are effectively homeless and stateless. They are the prime sources of terrorism against Israel and the international community and of support for the current intifada, but as long as their situation remains hopeless, there will be no settlement in the middle east. We all have an interest in resolving their position.

In 1998, in its resolution 1156, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe endorsed proposals that would provide a permanent settlement and a secure future for all those refugees, and enable those camps to be closed. The proposals accept the reality—as do a growing number of Palestinians and Arab states today—that there can be no right of return to Israel, although Israel has agreed to accept some of the refugees to reunify families. I believe that the rest would accept one of the current options: citizenship in their host country; acceptance of offers of resettlement to other countries; or real citizenship in a viable state of Palestine.

The message I want to convey in today's debate is that the international community, especially the European Union, should give clear and firm support to those proposals and consider how they might be funded. A new United Nations "Palestine refugee and displaced persons final status" fund has been proposed. We should wait no longer for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians to resume on that and all the other final status issues. We should have an international plan ready for all to see as soon as possible.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will find details of the proposals in his Department. They were the subject both of a conference at Warwick university in March 1998 that was addressed by his predecessor, the late Derek Fatchett, and of my Adjournment debate on 28 April 1998. It is relevant to recall them now as a way to resolve one of the obstacles standing in the way of peace in the middle east.

7.53 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I hope that the House will not mind if I do not follow the path laid down by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson). I had the misfortune to follow in one of his paths during an investigation into the future of Palestinian refugees undertaken in September 2000 by the Joint Parliamentary Middle East Councils. One of my abiding memories is of sitting in a refugee camp listening to refugees tell us that they were—I shall not use their language; hon. Members can read the report for themselves—fed up to the teeth of people from various organisations coming to the middle east, asking them how they felt about their situation, getting the information, then returning home and producing their version of what they had been told. We had to spend a lot of time assuring people who had been refugees since 1948 that we did not intend to do what the hon. Gentleman had done when he visited the area in another capacity.

While listening to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, I recalled that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) and I have spent most of our adult lives working on these issues. Had we been asked back in the 1970s what we most wanted for the Palestinians, we would have said that we wanted them to have a home and to be able to sit down at a table with the Israelis and talk about how they could live together. However, we recognised that support from the Americans would be required to make that happen.

In the midst of the events taking place in the middle east, it is difficult to see any light at the end of the tunnel. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has recently returned from his talks with George Bush, and it is important to remember that those of us who have been involved in these issues have striven for many years to make the Americans understand their responsibility. Only with the active engagement of an American Administration will we achieve an end to the problem.

I shall not spend time going over the comments already made by speakers in the debate. Everyone has their own opinion. Instead, I shall speak specifically about the issue that I believe will derail our efforts again and cause us even more heartache in future: the notion that we can resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict without recognising that the refugees are at its core. Unless we deal with that problem, as set out in resolution 194 passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1949, there is little or no chance of ever achieving peace in the region.

Like many other middle eastern peoples, the Palestinians have a direct and profound attachment to their land that is apparent as soon as one talks with them. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) is no longer present. Under the 1947 UN resolution 181, British mandate Palestine was partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states. Under that plan, 86 per cent. of the land owned or inhabited by Palestinians was taken away from them and given to someone else.

I do not excuse what happened afterwards, but most of those who have been involved in these matters would agree that the people who have most let down the Palestinian Arabs are the Arabs themselves. The 1948 war that followed the end of the British mandate led to the flight or expulsion of two thirds of the Palestinian Arab population, and to the Israeli conquest of 25 per cent. of the territory that had been allotted to the proposed Arab state, in addition to the land set aside for the Jewish state—of which, as I said, 86 per cent. had been Palestinian owned or occupied.

In 1967, Israel occupied the remainder of Palestine—the west bank, the Gaza strip and the rest of Jerusalem. That caused a second exodus of about 500,000 Palestinians. The refugees from 1948 and 1967 now live in the west bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, the Gulf, Europe and the Americas.

Of the 3.8 million refugees registered with UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency, which was set up specifically to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees, 33 per cent. live inside one of UNRWA's 59 refugee camps. That is the background against which it is said that the Arab states must decide what will happen to the refugees. It is not up to those states. If anyone believes that it is, a major mistake is being made, and one that will come back to haunt us. The outcome will be catastrophic.

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

If I were living in Israel, I would not want to talk about the refugees. We cannot get Israelis to talk about them. If there are refugees, we must ask from where they came. Who made them refugees? To where do they return? All refugees have that right. Of course, if they all returned, Israelis would say that that would be suicide. That word is used again. Yet again the Palestinians are referred to in the context of suicide for someone else. When they exercise their rights, somehow that becomes a threat to someone else.

No one has asked them what they feel, what they believe and what they understand. Not even the Palestinians have done that. We did. The JPMEC went to the area in September 2000, and we took 40 hours of evidence from Palestinian refugees. That has been reported, and a document has been sent to every Member of this place. The report is entitled "Right of Return". It is not a frightening document. Evidence was given for 40 hours and tapes are available for anyone to hear. Tomorrow, the Arabic version of the report will be published. There will be a verbatim account of what the Palestinian refugees are saying.

Not one Palestinian wants to kick Israel into the sea. The Palestinians accept the reality that there is a state of Israel. They accept that if they accept the right to return, they will have to live in Israel. They want that right so that they can decide for themselves. Yasser Arafat cannot negotiate that right away on their behalf. One of the reasons why the Oslo process failed is that the multi-track approach did not include the views of the Palestinians. The refugees were not spoken to. That is not possible.

I ask right hon. and hon. Members to take some time to read the report. The Palestinians recognise that they do not want to visit on others what has happened to them. They know that times have moved on. They know that they cannot return exactly to what the situation was. They understand that there will have to be accommodations. However, they have rights. If we do not recognise those rights, we will lose, and quite heavily. There will be more problems. The issue will not be resolved unless that is recognised.

We need to consult the Palestinian refugees, but there is no mechanism whereby those who are not within the Palestinian Authority in the west bank of Gaza can even communicate with the Palestinian leadership. It is significant that all the Palestinians accepted that the PLO was their representative body. That still did not give the PLO the right to negotiate away on their behalf their right of return.

We could use—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

8.4 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Today is yom ha'Zikaron, the Israeli day for remembering the fallen soldiers who died fighting for Israel. They were fighting for a Jewish homeland. Tomorrow is the anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, three years after the end of the second world war. That was a war during which 6 million Jews were systematically and brutally murdered in a plan to wipe out Jewry everywhere.

I am not Jewish, nor do I have a large Jewish community in my constituency. However, I am a strong supporter of Israel. That is because in the period ending only 15 years before I was born, across the channel just a few hundred miles south-east of my constituency, Jewish men, women and children were being gassed. The Jewish people need a homeland.

In discussing the middle east, and especially the situation in Israel, we have become accustomed to using phrases such as the cycle of violence, intransigence on both sides and the failure of negotiation. They are phrases that seem to imply that each side is as bad as the other; that each is equally worthy of our support or, more usually, our condemnation.

There are however, important different differences between Israel and its opponents. Israel is a democratic country that upholds the rights of its citizens and uses military force only for self-defence. It is surrounded by countries that are, to a greater or lesser extent, hostile to its very existence. Every day, Israel faces fierce and even deadly opposition to its very survival from enemies who seek their ends through force and terror rather than through democracy.

As UN Security Council resolution 242 declared 34 years ago, it has

"the right to live at peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

That right is still not recognised in full by many of Israel's neighbours.

The Palestinian Authority is a haven for terrorism. It glorifies suicide bombers through its media and tells them that they are martyrs. It has authorised the Tanzim militia, an organ of Yasser Arafat's Fatah PLO faction, to fire upon Israeli civilians and soldiers. It tries to import arms and ammunition from terrorist allies such as Iran. It tells its people and educates its children to believe that every ill is the fault of Israel.

The unfashionable truth is that the greatest obstacle to peace in the middle east is not a breakdown in diplomacy. The biggest obstacle is terrorism on the citizens of Israel. That is terrorism which Yasser Arafat, as President of the Palestinian Authority, has done nothing to end. At Oslo, in 1993, and elsewhere Arafat has renounced terror and agreed to control it, but terror continues unabated. If Arafat can call an end to the terror, why has he not done so? If he cannot, what possible claim does he have to a place at the negotiating table?

It has come to be accepted that the cause of the current crisis in Israel was the visit by Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in September 2000. Like many things that come to be accepted about Israel that is wrong. The roots of the present crisis can be found two months earlier at the summit at Camp David. Palestinian spokesmen have said so themselves. Communications Minister Imad Al-Falouji, for example, was reported in the semi-official Palestinian daily newspaper *Al-Ayyam* on 6 December 2000 to have said that

"the Palestinian authority had begun preparations for the outbreak of the current intifada from the moment the Camp David talks concluded, this in accordance with instructions given by Chairman Arafat himself."

It added that this was a

"culminating stage to the immutable Palestinian stance in the negotiations, and was not meant merely as a protest of Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount."

The Camp David summit illustrates in microcosm the story of Israel's relations with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. This was a summit at which hopes were high for real progress. The world called for flexibility on both sides and Israel responded. Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered unprecedented compromises—real sacrifices—to achieve a workable and enduring peace. He offered 94 per cent. of the remaining land of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. He offered Arab and Christian east Jerusalem, and he offered an additional parcel of the Negev to make up for the additional 6 per cent. He could not meet every Palestinian demand but he offered genuine concessions. What was the Palestinian response? The proposal was rejected out of hand and then we had the current intifada. That is how we find ourselves now.

Israeli civilians are subjected every day to violence and mayhem. People in Jerusalem, Haifa and every town in Israel are afraid to leave their homes and Israeli leaders and soldiers struggle every day to protect and defend them. An accusation often levelled at Israel is that it is not really interested in peace. It is alleged that it prefers to remain in military conflict rather than negotiate with the Palestinians. This accusation is unjust. After generations of conflict, the people of Israel yearn for peace. Their leaders are willing to achieve it through negotiation, hence the offer made by Mr. Barak.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gibb: No. The change of Government in Israel has not destroyed that willingness at all. Prime Minister Sharon—I am no great defender of him—expressed his readiness to return to the table to make painful concessions for a true peace. He has stated his acceptance of the Mitchell plan. But Israel understands that peace cannot exist in the shadow of terrorism. We should respect its leaders' firm resolve not to negotiate under fire and their determination to take action, which the Palestinian Authority should have taken, to destroy terrorist capability.

In recent days, attention has focused on the Jenin refugee camp. The pictures emerging of the aftermath of the battle are ugly and brutal. But it is easy to overlook the facts: between September 2000 and the beginning of Israel's action there, Jenin was the source of no fewer than 23 terrorist attacks on Israel, including suicide attacks on Afula and Hadera. The Palestinian Authority knew Jenin was a centre of terrorism, but did nothing to prevent the attacks or to apprehend the perpetrators. There were pitched battles in Jenin; 13 soldiers were ambushed and killed, and 23 soldiers were killed in total. We have yet to see what did happen in Jenin, but Israel has been careful to minimise civilian casualties, which is why the mission has taken so long, and why Israeli forces have suffered. The Israelis could have done what we did in Afghanistan: they could have conducted aerial bombing of the area, which would have resulted in far higher casualties overall, but fewer Israeli casualties—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gibb: It is said that the military action against terrorists will simply encourage more fanatics to join the militant brigades to wage war on Israel; there is some truth in that. But those people, like the young woman who blew herself up in Jerusalem on Friday killing six Israelis, cannot supply their own explosives, plan their campaigns, finance their operations or import their own arms. Israel is therefore taking action against the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure—a task that Arafat should have undertaken himself.

Our Prime Minister said last week that the only way to resolve the conflict is not to take sides. With respect to the Prime Minister, who is undoubtedly committed to do everything in his power to help bring about peace in the middle east and whose support for President Bush in the fight against terrorism has been inspiring, he has got it precisely the wrong way round on Israel. First, terrorism has to stop, and we must side with those who oppose terrorism and oppose those who support terror. We must not equate the perpetrators of terrorism with its victims.

Some people say that the situation in Israel can be compared with that in Northern Ireland; the parallel to be drawn is that if only the two sides will negotiate, peace can be achieved. But like the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), I believe the lesson is quite different: progress towards peace can be made only when terrorists decide that they will not succeed through violence. President Arafat has done nothing to suggest that he has yet made that decision.

Many people argue that the situation in Israel is not quite as simple as I have described. In some ways that is true; there are many questions, not least about land, that go back many generations and myriad grievances will need to be addressed if a lasting settlement is to be achieved. Those things are a matter for negotiation, to the success of which Israel is committed. One does not have to be a committed Zionist to understand Israel's stance against terrorism; one merely has to favour democracy over terror.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.14 pm

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): With the obvious exception of the last contributor, hon. Members have been reluctant to apportion blame for the current conflict. However, it is possible to do so. It is not just Israel and Palestine that are responsible; others should shoulder blame for what is happening in the middle east, including nation states such as our own, other European democracies and the United States of America. They have long remained inactive, allowing Ariel Sharon to take his war to the occupied territories over an extended period.

In his recent statement to the House on the middle east, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, developed the message of his address at the George Bush Senior Presidential library in Texas on 7 April and said:

"Doing nothing is not an option."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 23.]

He was, of course, referring to our response to the worsening situation in Iraq. I accept that there are different views about what should or should not be done about that, but most hon. Members believe that the Prime Minister and the President of the United States would have been wiser to call for action against the genocide and bloodletting in Israel and Palestine which, as we know, has led to the deaths of 1,500 Palestinians and more than 400 Israelis. That death toll has risen substantially over the past few days.

[Mr. Tony Clarke]

In addition, we have seen on our television screens not just pictures of the refugee camp in Jenin but disturbing reports suggesting that the conflict could extend beyond Israel's borders to other Arab nations. When we see scuffles and military action in and around other Arab states, we must take a step back and see what we can do to try to prevent the crisis from worsening and spreading.

President Bush's "axis of evil" speech was rightly criticised; it was not well received in this country or across western Europe. President Bush did himself and the office of President a great disservice by lumping together countries such as North Korea, Iran and Iraq as an evil threat to western democracy. He must have had criteria for judging those countries—a way of determining their ranking in the league table of evil. He would have had to include the following in his list: whether nation states aggressively occupied others' territory; whether they were in breach of United Nations resolutions; whether they were willing to defy international law and opinion; and whether he thought them capable of using military force against a civilian population.

If President Bush used those criteria, he would have to include Israel in his statement about countries that form an axis of evil. Those double standards have led to much unrest and disagreement, both in the United Kingdom and across the world, about what action should be taken in the middle east, not just in Israel and Palestine but in Iraq. Such double-speak has led to people like me arguing that without renewed UN authority, and while the situation in Israel and Palestine remains unresolved, UK military action in Iraq would be at best immoral and at worst illegal.

I said that we should shoulder some of the blame and guilt. There have been many warnings in the House and elsewhere about Ariel Sharon's endgame since he came to office. I tabled an early-day motion on 30 October 2001, which received 102 signatories. Like many other Members who tabled early-day motions on the same subject, I was trying to highlight for the Prime Minister and the Government our concerns about what would happen unless action was taken. My motion welcomed the Prime Minister's statement calling for a viable Palestinian state and asked the Government to hold Ariel Sharon to account. It talked about his incursions and his continued occupation of the west bank and Gaza in defiance of American calls for Israel to withdraw. What hope is there of Israel listening to President Bush now, if way back in October 2001 when the USA and President Bush were calling on him to withdraw from the Palestinian territories, Ariel Sharon took not one jot of notice? The early-day motion warned that unless the peace process is restarted, the Palestinian Authority will be undermined and the region further destabilised.

Since then, the situation has deteriorated. I had the pleasure, and the displeasure, of being in Israel and Palestine at the start of the intifada. I believe that the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) do the House a disservice when they suggest that Ariel Sharon's walkabout, as it was described at the time—Ariel Sharon's setting foot in the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount—was not the cause of the latest unrest and the intifada.

As someone who was on the streets of the west bank at the time, I can tell the House that there was only one reason for the unrest. There was only one reason why Palestinian youth took to the streets and started to engage Israeli troops, and the reason was Ariel Sharon's actions that weekend. Let history show that to be the case, and let apologists not suggest that there were other reasons for the start of the intifada at that time.

During my visit to Palestine, I visited villages in the west bank—Batir, Husan and Wadi Fuquin—where I saw some of the forerunners of the present conflict. We were shot at while visiting charity projects for World Vision. Israeli forces entered villages, answered stone-throwing youths with live bullets and dumdum bullets, which are illegal under international law. I then visited Bethlehem and Rachel's tomb and witnessed the shooting of a young man within 20 yards of where I stood. I felt that I as a westerner was clearly picked out and allowed to walk within gun-sight of Israeli defence force soldiers without being shot. They were clearly targeting individuals for assassination and have continued to do so ever since.

I went to Gaza city and visited the Shiffa hospital. I walked around the intensive care ward. It must have been clear to all the consultants and surgeons that none of those occupying the 14 beds would survive their injuries. I spoke to the parents and relatives of those lying there. Anybody who wants to know why there are martyrs and why people become so desperate that they will give up their own lives should speak to the relatives of those who have been butchered and assassinated by Ariel Sharon and the Israeli defence force over many years. One can then start to understand the pain that they feel and why they feel so hopeless that they resort to such terrible acts of terrorism.

Mrs. Ellman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I do not have time.

Time prevents me from saying all that I had intended, but in the remaining time I shall mention two matters. When we discuss international aid in the Adjournment debate tomorrow, we must turn our attention to the humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in Palestine and the occupied territories of the west bank and Gaza, particularly in Jenin. Oxfam and World Vision speak today of gross violations of international humanitarian law, military targeting of medical personnel, denial of medical care and violence against International Red Cross and Red Crescent workers, and they give examples of such terrible atrocities, including the systematic—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.24 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I apologise for being rather creaky. I sometimes wonder whom I would sue if I had a deep vein thrombosis in the Chamber after a long-haul debate.

Even before the recent Israeli offensive on the west bank, the humanitarian situation was very grave indeed. Life was hard for Palestinians. Some may ask why it should be, when they are surrounded by friendly Arab states, some of which are extremely wealthy. Nevertheless, I repeat that life is very hard. Child malnutrition in Gaza has doubled in the past year. I repeat: doubled. Unemployment in Gaza is

85 per cent., the result of border closures. Thirty-seven per cent. of people in Gaza and 15 per cent. on the west bank are living in poverty—that is, on less than $2 a day. That has happened over the past year or so—a breeding ground for terrorism, if ever there was one.

Recent events in Jenin have horrified the international community, however many terrorists were hidden there. That was eloquently and vividly described by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd).

Over the years, the European Union has provided a large amount of aid to try to combat the problems of the Palestinians, but much has been destroyed by Israeli action. The list provided by the Department for International Development in response to my parliamentary question on 26 March is in the Library. I have a copy. Twenty-two European Union projects have been destroyed or badly damaged. Some were mentioned by name by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell).

The airport at Gaza is totally destroyed. The list includes schools, hospitals, the sea port, forestry projects, landfill sites and water installations. I heard from Oxfam today that the engineers are not allowed to go in and repair them. The lack of clean water is a huge problem for the Palestinians. The list goes on and on. Almost 20 million euros worth of aid has been blown up in the past two weeks.

I well understand that the Palestinians are not entirely without blame. It has been said tonight that they hide terrorists among civilians so that the civilians suffer too. I have seen reports, and been given reports by constituents, of Red Crescent ambulances being used to transport explosives and terrorists. There is blame to be laid there, but we must remember that terrorism is desperation and it is a very dirty business.

In the eyes of the world, Israel must take responsibility. It is seen as exerting disproportionate force. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) put it eloquently when he said that we expect more of a state like Israel.

Will the Minister say who will refund the European Union? There are many calls on those funds from all over the world. Will Israel be forced to pay reparations for the damage? If not, how can those essential services be restored?

I had a useful meeting with members of the Jewish community in my constituency on Sunday evening. They are eminent and highly regarded members of my community, one a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. I love and respect them all. They asked me to make three main points in the debate tonight. First, Mr. Sharon is not admired by them, nor are his methods, but they are firmly committed to a free and secure Israel and will always support the Israeli people. Many have relatives there and visit them often.

Secondly, my constituents want to support the Palestinians' right to their own free and secure state in Palestine, and wish to see withdrawal from the occupied territories to facilitate that. The settlements must indeed go. Thirdly, and above all, they wish me to say that they welcome the Saudi peace plan and the recognition by the Arab League of the legitimacy of the state of Israel. They felt that that was a huge movement forward and that the international community must not lose the opportunity to build on that gesture. They want negotiations based on the plan.

My constituents showed me an interesting piece written by Amos Oz, a well-known left-wing Israeli. I confess that I did not know of it, but some in the House may do so. I should like to quote what Amos Oz said:

> "Israel is fighting two wars. Only one of them is just. One is the Palestinian nation's war for its freedom from occupation and for its right to independent statehood. Any decent person ought to support this cause. The second war is waged by fanatical Islam, from Iran to Gaza and from Lebanon to Ramallah, to destroy Israel and drive the Jews out of their land. Any decent person ought to abhor this cause. Yasser Arafat and his men are running both wars simultaneously, pretending they are one."

Of course, we must support the just war, but we should abhor the unjust war against Jews worldwide that is waged by Islamic fundamentalists. I contend that the unjust war is one of the reasons—if not the main reason—for the suicide bombings, on the basis of a combination of desperation and hopelessness, laced also with a huge dose of religious fundamentalism.

There is already much evidence of anti-Semitic campaigns being waged in universities, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife pointed out. I have brought evidence with me of what is happening in universities in this country in terms of action against synagogues and individuals throughout Europe. Just as we urged people to support the ordinary Muslim after 11 September and not to blame them for the acts of fanatics, we must support our Jewish friends throughout Europe who do not like the methods that are being used by the Israeli Government. I hope that the Minister will assure us that action will be taken against anyone who is found to be inciting racial hatred.

The situation in the middle east is dangerous and terrifying for all of us and I urge the Government to seek to use all means—I support wholeheartedly many of the suggestions made in the House—to bring the two sides together yet again.

8.32 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): We are witnessing the tragedy of the conflicting rights of self-determination of two peoples and the consequences of the derailment of the peace process that should have led to the creation of a new, independent and viable Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. That derailment happened when Yasser Arafat decided to walk out of negotiations 17 months ago and resort to terrorism—a decision that was criticised by the PLO's major negotiator in Jerusalem, Sari Nusseibeh, who said that it was a major missed opportunity.

That major missed opportunity has been a tragedy for all in the region. In Israel, we see the carnage caused by the work of suicide bombers who deliberately target civilians in cafes, at 12-year-olds' birthday parties and discos, and families and elderly people in particular as they sit down to religious festivals. We have seen targeted carnage in places such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Netanya, Hadera, Beersheba and Afula. On the west bank, we see the tragedy of destruction and loss of life as the Israelis make their incursions into the Palestinian west bank in an attempt to prevent suicide bombers from planning and executing new outrages.

I deplore the loss of civilian life, and the loss of the lives of innocent people. Where there is evidence, outrages must be punished, but surely it is absurd to suggest that any Government can ignore the continuous

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

targeted killing of its citizens by people who believe that their country should not exist. Let us consider what happened in just one week this month. The casualties in Israel caused by the deliberate targeting of civilians for no other purpose than the creation of terror are the equivalent of 400 people killed in this country, with 2,500 injured. That would be the United Kingdom equivalent of what happened in Israel in one week in April—and that is not an isolated week.

As many hon. Members have said, attention must be concentrated on how we move forward, but before that can be achieved a number of unpalatable and extremely difficult facts must be faced. First, terrorist suicide bombings by Palestinians are directed against the existence of the state of Israel. We have heard much today about the desperation that may drive some people to commit these atrocities and massacres against Israeli civilians, but let it never be forgotten that suicide bombings began on Israeli civilians when the peace process was under way. They began when Rabin and Peres began their peace initiative; indeed, they brought down Shimon Peres' Government and ushered in the Government of Netanyahu, who was not committed to the peace process or to peace. History then repeated itself, and it was the suicide bombers who brought down Barak's Government as he fought so hard to achieve a genuine peace. The result of the suicide bombings carried out while Barak fought hard to bring peace was the ushering in of the Sharon Government; again, we saw coming into power a Government led by someone who was not dedicated to peace.

It is important to remember that the continuing outrages committed by Palestinian bombers and by people shooting indiscriminately have occurred to a great extent within the green line, or within Israel's 1967 borders, so I fear that it is promoting a misleading fallacy to pretend that suicide bombers are the result of occupation of the west bank and Gaza, much as I deplore that occupation and want it to end. I believe that the evidence shows that those suicide bombings are about the attempted extermination of the whole of Israel and what is seen as the occupation of Palestine.

The second unpalatable and difficult fact that has to be recognised is the reality that Yasser Arafat is part of the terrorist network. There is abundant evidence that he broke the promises that he made at Oslo while that peace process was ongoing, where he said that he would deal with conflicts and difficulties in a peaceful manner and without resorting to violence. At the end of 2000, he ordered his security services to release many Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists, many of whom had been convicted for terrorism under the Oslo provisions.

Mr. Savidge: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Ellman: I am sorry; I have no time.

Perhaps even worse, information has now been revealed on the Israeli incursions in the west bank, and specifically on its incursions into Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah, giving direct evidence that Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have been the paymasters of the terrorists, including the very recent ones who are still wreaking havoc.

Invoices have been found in Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah from the Al Aqsa martyrs brigade, which is directly connected to Yasser Arafat, asking for reimbursement from the Palestinian Authority for explosives for bombings in Israeli cities. Those requests were directed to Fouad Shoubaki, the Palestinian Authority's chief financial officer for military operations. Some, dated 16 September 2001, ask for money for bombs and to finance posters promoting suicide bombers. Indeed, since that date 12 suicide bombings have been carried out in Israel by that very group.

The Israelis have found and made available a handwritten note from Yasser Arafat dated 19 September 2001 authorising payments to three militia leaders, including the Fatah commander Ziad Muhammed Daas, who masterminded the suicide attacks at the Hadera bat mitzvah massacre on 7 January 2001. That massacre, which took place at what is in effect a birthday party for 12-year-old Jewish girls, killed at least six people and injured 35, many severely.

That is recent evidence, unearthed by the Israeli incursions into Ramallah, of Yasser Arafat's continuing direct complicity in the direction of terror, which is being perpetrated to ensure that there can never be peace.

It is important for everyone who seeks peace to remember that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians will not be resolved without recognising the impact of international terrorism. Iraq is deeply involved through its funding of the families of suicide bombers. Recently, Iraq decided to increase its payments to the families of suicide bombers, who now receive $25,000 every time a suicide bomber goes out on a mission.

There is awareness of the involvement of Iran, especially in the case of the Karine A, which was carrying a shipment of arms to the west bank. Fortunately, it was intercepted by Israel. Those arms were intended for the purpose of firing on Israeli cities, in direct contravention of the Oslo agreement. Syria is involved in direct funding of Hezbollah and Hamas.

Hon. Members referred to the increasing number of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews in this country and other countries—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.42 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): It is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, because there have been many fine speeches, which I cannot hope to emulate. They introduced passion, commitment and a great deal of understanding of the situation in Israel and Palestine.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), like my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), assisted the debate by ensuring that we balance an understanding of the issues as appreciated by those who live in Israel, and have suffered at the hands of terror for so long and to such a dreadful extent, with an understanding of the perspective of Palestinians who have suffered so much injustice.

At times I felt that some hon. Members strayed into representing views, or even repeating propaganda, more than aiding genuine understanding. Nevertheless, it is to

the credit of the House that anyone who cares to read the whole debate, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) suggested, will at least, even if they do not think that an appropriate balance was struck overall, appreciate that we understand many of the views of those involved and trust and respect one another in doing so.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, that sense of trust is precisely what is missing in the middle east process. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and the Foreign Secretary explained how past negotiations and discussions brought the parties close to the point where they could see an end, but did not reach it. Although we can argue about who was to blame—Ariel Sharon at Temple Mount or Yasser Arafat promoting the intifada—agreement was not reached and trust between the parties broke down. There is now such an absence of trust that it is difficult to see how they can be brought together.

As we move towards the conclusion of this debate, I do not envy my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) or the Minister their task of trying to sum it up. We have to think not only of what has happened and who is to blame but of where we are now and where we should go. There has been insufficient emphasis in the debate on the American Government's desire to play an active part in seeking a way forward, with which we can assist, and too much cavilling about what may or may not have been a lack of commitment on the part of President Bush after what was clearly an immense effort by President Clinton to secure agreements.

It is hardly surprising that President Bush thought that he would not devote so much political capital and energy to securing an agreement in the middle east in the immediate wake of his election. He knows that he has to do it now. That is not simply because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the genesis of so much terror and crisis across the world, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire said; more particularly, it is because the Americans know that only they have the ability to bring the necessary influence to bear on the Israelis. It is no good believing that anyone else can do that. It is even worse for us to make suggestions about sanctions against Israel, as that would simply convince the Israelis that they had no option but to defend themselves entirely according to their own justification and judgment, rather than according to the judgment of the international community. The Israelis must understand that the international community understands and supports them, their right to self-defence and their right to exist.

President Bush said in his speech in the rose garden:

"This can be a time for hope, but it calls for leadership".

Of course, that leadership must come not least from the Americans. We should applaud the fact that Secretary Powell is in the middle east meeting some of the participants in this conflict. We should particularly applaud the fact that he is meeting Chairman Arafat. We in this country do not necessarily understand how that will be received in America, or how difficult it is for the American Secretary of State to meet Yasser Arafat, for example, or members of the Syrian Government. It is difficult, but he is doing it.

We need to determine how to escape from this position of mutual mistrust and incomprehension. On the face of it, that will not happen with Ariel Sharon at the helm in Israel and Yasser Arafat at the helm on behalf of the Palestinians, but how do we move from that position? We cannot govern who is democratically elected as Prime Minister of Israel, or Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. We have, however, reached the point at which we must tell Prime Minister Sharon that he cannot determine who speaks for the Palestinians in these negotiations. So, it will be either Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Arafat, or neither of them. Secretary of State Powell's meeting with Chairman Arafat could be interpreted as important in that respect, because he accepts that Chairman Arafat has that authority for the time being. Prime Minister Sharon should also accept that.

I entirely support what my right hon. Friends the Members for Horsham and for Devizes said earlier about the nature of the problem, and about where we need to go from here. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said, we must understand that there is a Palestinian cause, but it is not one that justifies terror. We must understand that the Israelis have the right—and, if necessary, we must offer them responsible support in exercising their right—of self-defence and striking back against those who would use terror against them.

We must understand that even in the context of further negotiations that may lead to a settlement, which is plausible, we will not eliminate terror levelled against Israel, whatever its source—whether it comes from Hezbollah, from some of the fundamentalist Islamic groups supported in Iran, or from anywhere else. We must be prepared to support Israel in the process of distinguishing between legitimate Palestinian causes and the pursuit of terror.

We must do something else as well. If we expect a high standard from Israel in respect of how it exercises its right to self-defence according to the rule of law, we should also expect the Palestinian Authority, if it aspires to statehood, to meet the standards of statehood. That means ensuring that it exercises the monopoly of coercive power within its state, that it does not allow terror to be used from that state with its consent or even through negligence on its part, and that it uses the rule of law to bring those responsible for terror to justice.

8.51 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): In the years during which I was on the campaign trail with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I used to describe him as the best Foreign Secretary that Labour never had. I think that he proved that again this evening.

The real Foreign Secretary, on the other hand, sought at the outset to inject a tranquilliser into the debate. He proceeded on that basis to paint a picture that I thought bore little relation to the reality of what is happening on the ground. He and his opposite number seemed to be building sandcastles in the air, talking of a peace process that no longer exists and of all the things that Ariel Sharon will have to do—which, as is manifestly and abundantly clear, he has no intention whatsoever of doing: he will tell anyone who is listening, and indeed those who are not, that he has no intention of doing them, not now, not ever. They made demands of Arafat that he do this and that in his cell in Ramallah. He was being asked to control—from a cell full of holes, without water, without a toilet, without a telephone, without electric light, without policemen,

[Mr. George Galloway]

without an army, without transport and without the ability to leave Ramallah—the destiny of millions of his compatriots.

In the Foreign Secretary's discourse and in that of his opposite number, I smelt no whiff of the cordite of the ordnance that, as we speak, is shattering the edifice of the basilica of Bethlehem. In their, if I may say so, rather complacent Front-Bench consensus I did not smell—as I did so vividly when my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) was speaking—the death camp of Jenin. I did not picture the children drinking sewage. I gained no grasp of the immediate, desperate tragedy of all this.

Instead, we heard a long recitation of what we all know already—of what the final solution of the conflict will have to be, namely two states living side by side. We do not need to debate that; what we need to debate is how we get there. Nothing that the Front Benchers had to say led me to believe that they had any manifesto or programme for bringing that about. We should compare what they said with the radical set of proposals presented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. He actually had a plan for how we and the United States could, and should, force Sharon to the negotiating table, and for the concessions that he must be forced to make. We should compare that with our own Government's performance. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) pointed out, in the United Nations conference yesterday we could not even bring ourselves to vote to condemn the massacres. The Foreign Secretary said that the resolution was unbalanced, but it was not so unbalanced that most of our European partners could not vote for it. Why was that impossible for us?

What is Britain doing to rise to the occasion? We are selling guns to Ariel Sharon. In fact, the Government are selling more weapons to General Sharon than we sold to Ehud Barak, the so-called dove who preceded him. The Minister answered my earlier question, so the Government know that Israel is brazenly breaking former assurances that it would not use those military weapons in the occupied territories. The Minister said that he would demand an assurance on that, but we have had none. The Foreign Secretary said today that he could no longer rely on Israeli assurances. Given those facts, what is stopping us announcing now that we will sell no more arms to General Sharon?

Time will not permit me to develop more than a few extra points, so I shall deal with two dramatic events that have occurred over the past couple of days. They are pregnant with further disaster, and I direct my remarks to those friends of Israel who have been eloquent in the past few minutes.

First, the capture and proposed trial of Marwan Barghouti; is a very dangerous development. Marwan Barghouti; is the second most important man in Palestine, and he may well be the president of the Palestinian state one day. He is not an Islamic fundamentalist or extremist, but a leader of the progressive nationalist wing of the Palestinian resistance. The friends of Israel must accept that when Sharon marginalises, imprisons and murders the leaders of the nationalist wing of the Palestinian resistance, he ensures that the torch of nationalist leadership will pass to the irrational and irreconcilable Islamist fundamentalist forces. They are the main beneficiaries of Sharon's rampage through the Palestinian territories.

I ask this of the friends of Israel: please do not harm, humiliate or, after a kangaroo court trial, imprison Marwan Barghouti. With Yasser Arafat, he represents the last hope of a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said earlier, from the Opposition Front Bench, that Arafat was not flexible. My God, Arafat is so flexible he could be made of india rubber. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that another Palestinian would be more flexible than Yasser Arafat, his learning curve has some way to go.

Barghouti and Arafat are the last hopes of a two-state solution. If we lose them, we are in for prolonged war between Islamic fundamentalism and Israel. How any friend of the Jewish people could think that that would be a step forward beats me.

My second, and final, point, concerns the proposal from General Powell in the past 24 hours for a regional peace conference that did not involve the Palestinian leadership. Someone in London will have to tell our special friends in Washington that the Palestine Liberation Organisation became the sole legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people more than 25 years ago. No Arab leader, however much of a puppet he may be, would ever turn up to speak for the Palestinians at a conference from which the Palestinian President was forbidden, and certainly not at a time when that President is besieged and imprisoned in a cell in Ramallah. We have to shoot down that moth-eaten kite now, because it seems to be emerging as the only concrete product from General Powell's ill-fated and ill-starred visit to the region.

In conclusion, I implore the Government to be bolder and more imaginative. We have a special responsibility here: in this building was authored this tragedy when one people promised a second people the land of a third people, without consulting any of the three peoples concerned. Balfour did not speak for the British; the Zionist movement to which he promised the land at that time was not only not hegemonic among world Jewry but represented only a small fragment of opinion in world Jewry. The Palestinian people, whom even Balfour said had inalienable rights that must not be prejudiced, were the last and least to be consulted about that historic declaration.

We have a special responsibility to try harder than other people, to go the extra mile to get justice for the Palestinian people when we played such a seminal part in the tragedy that has befallen them. The great Albert Camus said:

"All civilised people have a duty; not to be on the side of the executioners"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.1 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Even if the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) has little time or patience with the Foreign Secretary, there are plenty of voices on the official Opposition Benches who appreciate what the Government are trying to do and applaud the measured tone and balanced approach that the Foreign Secretary took this afternoon.

I believe that the Palestinians played into the Israeli rejectionists' hands by refusing a generous deal with Ehud Barak at Camp David less than two years ago. I believe, too, that the Israelis have now played into the Palestinian rejectionists' hands by responding to terrorist bombings with a military offensive. Terrorism should be met by proportionate and effective measures, and that is not happening.

I hope that the House will not play into the hands of the rejectionists of both sides by adopting double standards. If ever there were a case of extremists feeding off each other, it is this one. It has reduced the prospect of rapprochement between Israel and the Palestinians to the present dire straits.

I have been sad to see that double standards have explicitly been applied in the course of this debate. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), the foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, said that because Israel is a democracy, we expect a higher standard from it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) similarly said that because Israel is a state, we expect a higher standard from it. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who belongs to the Scottish National party, said that Israel is a democratic state and should be judged by a higher standard. What is this if not moral relativism? If we wish to condemn one side or another in a terrible conflict such as this, we must apply similar standards of morality to each side. We must not say that because one side in the conflict is a state or a democracy, it is unacceptable for it to overreact to terrorism, but because the other side is not a state or a democracy it is less morally reprehensible for it to embark on terrorism in the first place.

My view is that Arabs have consistently tried, over many years, to destroy Israel and, since 1967 at least, Israelis have consistently tried to colonise occupied Arab territory. After 1967, the Israelis were in a position—had they wished to be magnanimous—to conclude peace settlements with their erstwhile enemies. They were not magnanimous and when Sadat successfully launched the Yom Kippur war in 1973, it was an opportunity for the Arab nations to regain some self-respect and to negotiate realistically with the Israelis to bring about peace. Sadat and Begin seized the opportunity after 1973 and, as was said earlier, Sadat—whom I regard as one of the heroes of the history of the middle east conflict—paid with his life for his foresight, generosity and courage.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) claimed that nobody supports the suicide bombers. Tell that to the people who organise telethons in Saudi Arabia to raise vast sums for the relatives of those bombers. It is a fact—alluded to previously in the debate and not, as far as I know, denied—that many of the suicide bomb attacks have been carried out by the Al Aqsa martyrs brigade. That body is directly linked to Fatah, and there is little doubt that it would not continue those terrible activities if Yasser Arafat were not willing for it to do so.

There is an example of the support for the suicide bombers in an article published as recently as 1 April in the Saudi press—in a Government-controlled daily called *Al-Jazirah*. It says of the Passover bomber:

"May Allah have mercy upon you . . . mujaheed and martyr, the quiet hero who infiltrated so elegantly and spoke so gaily. You defended your religion, your homeland, and your people. You attached no importance to any Arab summit; you did not wait for international agreements; you did not follow television interviews; you did not pause because of dead Arab and international reactions that neither help nor hinder."

The article uses similar words to describe the supermarket bomber, a young teenage girl. It states:

"May Allah have mercy on you . . . You left your home for the path of martyrdom and Paradise. Your family knew not where you were headed, and knew not that you had chosen the way of martyrdom. There was nothing to stop you . . . You proceeded with a determination, will, and strength rarely found, even impossible to find, in a 16-year-old girl."

The article concludes by asking that Allah and the angels welcome both of them as religious martyrs and beseeches Allah to give them

"the highest level of Paradise".

Is it only Sharon who is the cause of the present situation? Many people have chosen to load him with all the guilt and to say that he is why the present situation is so disastrous. Only yesterday, however, *The Times* published an article written by Ehud Barak himself. He said of the missed opportunity at Camp David that the Arab states and Yasser Arafat had been offered

"a contiguous and independent Palestinian state, over more than 90 per cent. of the West Bank."

This is Barak speaking—not Sharon the extremist. He said:

"Mr. Arafat refused even to take it as a basis for negotiations and turned deliberately to terror. To reward this is like feeding a crocodile—it only increases its appetite."

Mr. Barak's view of Mr. Arafat is as follows:

"Mr. Arafat does not envision a Palestinian state alongside Israel but a Palestinian state instead of Israel, and now he tries to dictate it by dispatching brainwashed human missiles to commit suicide and murder civilians."

That is the moderate voice of Israel speaking, not the extremist.

Several right hon. and hon. Members asked what drives a teenage girl to blow herself up and murder innocent civilians. The suggestion was that it is a form of desperation, caused by the Palestinians' plight. Yet, no one said anything like that about the suicide hijackers of 11 September—when the reasons were truly given: hatred, brainwashing and religious-based fanaticism. If the House applies one standard to Palestinian terrorism and another to the terrorists of 11 September, it will forfeit the right to be taken seriously on this life and death issue.

9.10 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I am grateful to the House for the chance to contribute to this very timely debate. This is a grave period for people in the middle east. Colin Powell's intervention is welcome, but he has much to do before he is seen as even-handed. Ariel Sharon suggested an international peace conference, excluding Yasser Arafat, when he met Powell on Sunday. The US Secretary of State now states that Yasser Arafat would not need to attend such an event, which serves only to undermine his leadership among the Palestinians.

According to a statement by the Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information, Palestinians now identify more strongly than ever with President Arafat. Mr. Powell told reporters that President Arafat

"has the ability to empower people in the Palestinian movement who represent him."

[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]

He added:

"The conference does not necessarily require his personal presence to get started."

It is difficult to imagine a key leader being excluded from genuine peace talks anywhere else in the world. It is even more difficult to picture the fair-minded Secretary Powell agreeing with such an unreasonable demand.

New Israeli calls for peace talks will be empty rhetoric if President Arafat cannot leave his front door in Ramallah. Prime Minister Sharon has also omitted the European Union from prospective delegations to such a conference. Discussions will be extremely short if the Israeli leader wishes to talk only with those who agree with him.

I welcome Mr. Powell's recent engagement with other Arab leaders to avert the conflict widening throughout the middle east. The Lebanese Government have said that they will attempt to restrict attacks to the disputed Shebaa farms. President Lahoud also called on Mr. Powell to view the middle east situation with "objectivity and realism" and not to be influenced by Israel's presentation of events. We must all heed that warning.

In particular, we must exercise extreme caution over yesterday's arrest of Marwan Barghouti, the west bank Fatah leader, a view I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway). Mr. Barghouti denies charges of stoking violence and encouraging the suicide bombers. He must not simply be a scapegoat for Israeli retribution against acts of terrorism. The evidence must be openly presented against him. In the same way, the evidence of the horrendous conditions in Jenin must be presented to the world.

According to *The Independent* today, a monstrous war crime that Israel has tried to cover up for a fortnight has finally been exposed in Jenin refugee camp. The International Committee of the Red Cross has finally been allowed into the west bank refugee camp after the Israeli onslaught. The ICRC has found destruction and a terrible smell in the camp. Israeli tanks and bulldozers have reduced much of it to dust. Workers from the Red Crescent and the Red Cross have begun to treat the injured before bringing out the remaining dead. Their task is enormous. The Palestinians say that hundreds died in Jenin, but Israel denies that. Our Government must join with others to uncover the truth.

The indiscriminate force currently being used by the Israeli army in the west bank against a civilian population is a form of collective punishment. According to Oxfam, there has been systematic targeting of medical personnel, denial of medical care to the injured, and threatened violence against clearly identified ICRC staff, Palestine Red Crescent Society staff and UN staff. Damage to water lines and pumps has left approximately 400,000 people in Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Bethlehem and Tulkarm without access to running water. Almost all hospitals in the west bank are now surrounded by Israeli tanks, which compromise the free and safe movement of staff, patients and emergency vehicles. Hospital generators, electricity and telephone lines and water supplies have been deliberately damaged by Israeli soldiers. United Nations organisations including the UN Development Programme, the UN Fund for Population Activities, the World Health Organisation, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Relief and Works Agency issued the following joint statement on 10 April:

"This is a humanitarian crisis without precedent in its destructive impact on the Palestinian people and its institutions".

The UN resolution accusing Israel of "gross violations" of international law must be acted on. Our partners in the European Union have a pivotal role. I am disappointed, however, that European Foreign Ministers have rejected calls for trade sanctions against Israel. However, I understand the reluctance to act while Colin Powell is in the middle east pushing for peace, for fear of undermining him.

I welcome Germany's decision to suspend its supply of military equipment to Israel and urge our Government to consider a similar gesture. The EU, not America, is Israel's largest trading partner. Under a special agreement between the EU and Israel, the latter enjoys preferential trading under an association treaty. The European Parliament has already voted to suspend this agreement. If there is no sign of real progress following Mr. Powell's intervention, will the Minister assure me that the British Government will consider again the issue of trade with Israel?

Ariel Sharon must recognise that there has to be a political solution, which cannot be imposed by force or by killing innocent men, women and children. Israel has been ignoring or breaking UN resolutions for the last five decades, and still enjoys blind support from the United States of America. The USA must adopt an even-handed approach to deal with the UN resolutions if President Bush wants to bring peace and stability to the region.

9.17 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at this late stage in what has been an extremely interesting debate; in fact, it has been one of the best debates that I have heard in the House. The House has been shown at its best.

With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to move away from the general discussion that has taken place and focus on a single tragedy arising from the situation in the middle east. Before I do so, I should like to make a personal observation: as far as I am concerned, there is no justification for the use of human bombs to kill innocent civilians in the streets of Israel, just as there is no justification for the suicide attacks on the United States of America. Attempts to seek such justifications are unwarranted and wholly wrong. I must also say that there is no justification for the actions of Israeli soldiers in the last 12 days—I speak as an ex-service man. Their actions bring disgrace and dishonour to the uniforms that they wear. They have no right to call themselves soldiers if they carry out such heinous crimes.

In the short time available to me, I want to draw the attention of the House and the country to the desperate plight of four young Welsh children who have been caught up in the terrible horrors that have been taking place in the middle east. The four children of my constituent, Mrs. Eileen Sutton of Barry, have been trapped in a house in Nablus for the past 12 days. They are unable to move, and the house has been occupied by 21 heavily armed Israeli soldiers. The occupants of the house—not just the four children and their immediate

family but other children and adults—have been pushed into one room. These young children—constituents of mine—have been warned not to go near the windows because they might be shot dead if they do. There is no justification or excuse for treating children like that in any war or any situation.

These Welsh children are British citizens and British passport holders. Not only that: they are British wards of court. In other words, the legal guardians of the trapped children are the British Government. Everything humanly possible should be done to move the children immediately and to place them in the safe custody of the British consulate general in Jerusalem.

I have been in touch with my colleagues on the Front Bench, the Foreign Office and the British consul in Jerusalem. We have had regular contact. I also wish to place on record my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). She raised the plight of the children when she was in Israel last week. I thank her for her efforts to get them released into safe custody.

These children were born and brought up in the little town of Barry in the Vale of Glamorgan. Just a few months ago, they went to local schools, clubs, after-school clubs and discos. They enjoyed the life that our children and grandchildren take for granted. However, in just a short space of time, they have found themselves in the most horrendous and despicable situation.

I am aware that such cases involve desperately difficult diplomatic and political considerations. In fact, it has been put to me that moving the children right now might create a spark that could result in an escalation in the violence in Nablus. If that is the thinking, we have got it all wrong. There should be one consideration only: the children are in grave danger and should be moved to safety immediately.

I hope that the fact that I have been able to refer to this desperate case in the debate will mean that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do all in their power to return the children to the safety of their mother at home in Barry, in south Wales. I hope that they will not delay any further. The children are the only British subjects in such a position anywhere in the occupied territories or where the Israelis have moved in and attacked and threatened innocent civilians. These four young innocents do not deserve to find themselves in such a situation. For God's sake and in the name of humanity, get them out of there—and get them out now.

9.24 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Although I sympathise greatly with my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) and I want to see his constituents returned, I should point out that the last time I saw children in Palestine, they were being put into graves.

The important point is that the Israeli state is waging a war on people who, in the main, are innocent. Although some may be taking up arms on the Palestinian side, or committing acts that some have described as atrocities, the reality is that we are facing the butcher of Beirut, who has also become the butcher of Bethlehem. There is a madness to current events there. The Christian bell-ringer at the church in Manger square was shot dead by Israeli troops, and an Armenian monk was shot in the back by Israeli troops and left to die. The bodies of Palestinians remained unburied because their burial in Manger square would probably have turned a shrine to the Christian birth into a shrine to Palestinian martyrs.

As I have only a few minutes, I shall skip many of the points that I wanted to make, some of which have already been made. In my view, the flaw lies in the original Oslo agreement, which was supposed to provide land for peace. It is no wonder that some on the Palestinian side left the negotiations. It became clear that what was on offer was not a Palestinian state and an Israeli state, but land criss-crossed by Israeli roads leading to settlements. Such an arrangement would have fragmented the west bank in such a way that a Palestinian state could never have proved viable.

Most people do not know that the majority of the land in Gaza is still under the control of the Israelis; in fact, Israelis go on holiday there. I have visited Gaza several times and walked on its beach. It is beautiful, but nearby Beach Camp is infested and rat-ridden. Along the coast, however, there are protected zones where the people of the cities of Israel can spend a nice summer holiday, protected by Israeli troops.

In terms of peace, when I was in Beirut, the people looked to Hezbollah to provide spokespeople for the Palestinian diaspora. When my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and I visited Gaza last year, it became clear that people were turning not to the Palestinian Authority, but to Hamas, and that those who had supported the Palestinian Authority were looking to other, more violent methods of extracting a settlement from the Israeli Government.

We must ask where the solution lies. Does it lie in Sharon, who clearly came to office on the back of a promise of peace and security? Jewish friends whom I used to visit in Tel Aviv have left Israel altogether, because they do not believe that Sharon can deliver peace and security. He is displaying not statesmanship but the worst form of militarism. His record—from events in Beirut to his election as Prime Minister—made clear what kind of Prime Minister he would be. He thinks that he can defeat the Palestinian people, and that they will have to accept whatever solution he offers, but that will not happen. He is creating bitterness and feeding future generations with the desire for retribution. I am amazed to hear that he enjoys 67 per cent. of the popular vote in Israel. That is a disaster for Israel, among other nations.

On the question of whether the solution lies with Yasser Arafat, my view is perhaps controversial. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) that Yasser Arafat represents the non-militant, non-Islamic view. However, as a European Union observer at the elections, I share the view of many who wanted the Palestinian Authority to come into being that they are failed and devalued. Arafat is accused of approving of Fatah members who participate in violence, but what other option did he have? It was clear that Hamas, Hezbollah and other fragmented groups that support Islamic jihad were getting popular support. The Palestinian Authority were being valued less and less.

What could Arafat do, given that Israel was killing children? I have not seen martyrs dying with bombs strapped to their chests, but on many occasions I have seen snipers or members of the official Israeli defence force shoot children who were throwing stones at, or shouting at Israeli soldiers when they were killing their

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

brothers and their mothers, and even the nurses and drivers of ambulances who went to try to help those who could be rescued. Have we forgotten the sight of the man perched behind a bollard with his son behind him while the Israeli defence forces shot until they killed that child? Although Arafat has had to take a more militant stand, such events lead me to believe that he is either the rock upon which peace will be settled or the rock upon which the future peace of Israel will be dashed. It would be insane to encourage anything that would allow him to be taken out.

I do not believe that the solution lies with the United States of America. I was in Washington on 11 September. On 10 September when we met State Department officials they had no perspective on Israel and Palestine. It had no middle east policy and did not understand the demographic, geographic or economic factors of the region. Since 11 September, it has had to make up policy on the hoof. I do not believe that they can do that without our help. Do the Government really believe that they can influence the USA so that it takes seriously the one solution on the table—the proposal by the Arab nations which is almost the same as UN resolution 242—because that is the only way forward?

I am disappointed that I do not have more time to speak. This is the first time that I have tried to speak in the Chamber since 13 September and I am disappointed to get the fag end of the debate.

9.31 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): If the hon. Gentleman is at the fag end of debate, I do not know where that puts me.

The debate has been a high point for this Parliament. In the 10 years in which I have been a Member, I have not heard a better one. The six hours of discussion have brought credit to all the participants, of whom there were many—I counted the contributions and I am the 32nd to speak. There were respectable differences, passionately and genuinely put, and division and argument that did not follow traditional party lines. Every contribution was infected by a sense of moral judgment—not to say outrage at times—and by a genuine search for peace, decency and civility in this highly complex issue.

For some, the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is just a local skirmish on which they can turn their back, but they are wrong. They are very wrong on mere grounds of justice and humanitarian decency, but they are doubly wrong because the continuing conflict in the middle east has the potential to spark global conflagration on a massive scale. We, as politicians with opinions and influence, have a duty to grapple with the issue in all its complexity.

I want to echo the good sense spoken by the Foreign Secretary. He gave us three guiding principles that he and I hope all of us believe should govern our approach to the issue. First, there is no monopoly of right and wrong. Secondly, Israelis and Palestinians are going to have to live side by side. Thirdly, no solution can be reached by force. In all those three, the Foreign Secretary was absolutely right and we share them in every respect.

In fact, on this issue perhaps more than any other, it is easy to champion one side. Anyone can easily take up the cudgels for one side against the other, but they soon find that for every argument there is a counter-argument and for every claim there is a counter-claim. They simply get into a tit-for-tat debating battle. We need understanding rather than grandstanding and to appreciate that there is a limited purpose to any antiphony of blame. There is no point being simplistically partisan. We all have to struggle to be even-handed and to bring the sides together. We need to take steps that allow us to see an end to the polarisation that has bedevilled the argument for decades.

It is not necessary to be anti-Israel to be pro-Arab; nor is it necessary to be anti-Arab to be pro-Israel. It is not nonsensical to be pro-both. Indeed, I would contend that if one is to be pro-peace, one has to be pro-both. In the 20 years in which I have travelled the Gulf, and in which I think I have been to every country in the wider middle east, I have been pro-both, and I would do anything to steer the two sides down the path towards peace.

We have to understand history to understand the intensity of opinion which governs this debate, and it is so easy to be selective about history. Perhaps "understand" is not quite the right word. I saw on a wall in Jerusalem the telling sentence, which explains to the beginner in the middle east debate the simple truth:

"If you're not confused, you don't understand."

That confusion arises from the complexity of the issue, because it is complex in its history, in its geography and in the interaction of political powers. There is also the unfathomable complexity of some of the personalities involved.

Looking at the history, and perhaps at the risk of being slightly selective myself, I point out that the Foreign Secretary skirted slightly over the events of 1948, and so much stems from the war of Palestine between April and September that year. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for admitting that—I am obviously not being over-selective.

Of course, one can go back to the Balfour declaration, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) did. In 1948, however, in the aftermath of a war in which Jews had been heinously herded and hounded towards intentional annihilation, their right to a homeland was widely recognised in principle, but the first steps to its inception also caused its subsequent problems. In 1948, the minority population of 600,000 Jews displaced about 1.4 million Palestinians. Perhaps above all it is that expulsion that has festered for over half a century. So now we have two sides, and we have heard the shades of debate today, as we have heard them in many comments on television and elsewhere.

Mrs. Ellman: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that although undoubtedly there were expulsions, it has also been accepted on both sides that many Palestinians fled, believing that they would return as successful invading forces?

Mr. Duncan: That question perfectly illustrates the complexities that we have to unravel. I have to give credit to the Israeli Government, as a democracy, for releasing documents that add to a better understanding of history as academics try to look back to the events that unfolded 50 years ago.

We have two classic, distinctive polar points of view. The Arabs feel that they are second-class citizens; they feel dispossessed and permanently humiliated. They feel

that 4 million Palestinian refugees are condemned to a life in camps. They feel—this is simple but true—that America is Satan. They feel that much of their land is occupied and that the world looks to them with double standards. At the same time, across the divide, the Israelis feel threatened too. They feel insecure, and they think that people want to drive them to the sea. They feel compelled to protect themselves because nobody else will, and they feel that some Arabs do not believe that they have the right to exist as a state.

We have seen all shades of that opinion in today's debate. I want to pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), so I am sorry that she is not here. All of us, while munching our cornflakes, have listened to her broadcasts on Radio 4 from Jenin. I think that they have been remarkable and I look upon what she has done over the past few days with supreme admiration. It takes a lot of courage to tread the rubble of a refugee camp such as Jenin in the middle of a conflict such as the one that we have seen, and it takes courage to look down the barrel of a tank. Perhaps in her absence, I can pay proper tribute by saying that she knocks the spots off Kate Adie.

We have had many contributions, and it is invidious to mention any of them, but I will mention some. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that Israel must behave like a legitimate state. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), speaking as the president of the Conservative Friends of Israel, said that Israel should withdraw, but urged us to remember the Israeli state of mind, which governs so many of its actions. I also draw attention to a remarkable speech by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I cannot mention all the contributions, but what emerged from them is an acknowledgement of the need for a two-state solution in which there is mutual recognition and mutual security for both Israel and a Palestinian state.

What could have emerged more strongly is that there are in this vicious debate ingredients that give glimmers of hope. The essential ingredients of a deal and a settlement are present. In a way, the boundaries between the two states are almost the easiest bit, and recognition that the two states have to live side by side is growing. By and large, there remain only three main elements of a potential settlement: the large, concrete settlements in the west bank, the right of return demanded by the Arabs, and the vexed question of Jerusalem in whatever form is chosen. None the less, the ingredients are present, in a scattered jigsaw that needs to be assembled. The initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah is admirable—the first top-level collective Arab endeavour working towards peace and prepared to establish normal relations with Israel.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin asks the right question: how do we get there? Although one or two voices have been heard today dissenting from this view, much points to the Americans as the people who have to take the initiative if steps towards a ceasefire and further negotiations are to be taken. The USA is the key: it must keep up and prosecute its pressure on Ariel Sharon to withdraw from the west bank. It is American pressure and influence evenly applied on both sides that matters most.

In the minutes remaining to me, I shall focus on a further dimension to this intense debate. From the burning of one small match, an enormous fire can result, and the danger we now face is of a huge conflagration flowing from the Israel-Palestine conflict. The conflict has the capacity to inflame the wider Arab world, and far more besides. It is for understandable reasons that that has only been touched on in today's debate.

Already—without the regional turmoil that an invasion of Iraq might provoke—the entire region is a tinderbox. With 70 per cent. of its population restless Palestinians, Jordan is living on a knife edge. The Hashemite hold on the country is far from firm, and Jordan depends wholly on Iraq for its annual economic bloodstream of £850 million worth of oil. Saudi Arabia is a sort of Faustian pact between the al-Sauds and the clerics. Well in excess of half its population is under 30 and it faces a perilous period of unrest which is barely contained below the surface. Iran is in a state of transition, and critics provoke and offend it into enmity instead of choosing to draw it into bonds of friendship. Egypt—barely a democracy—is finding itself increasingly incapable of controlling the street. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain—for all its recent reforms—and Qatar are far from safe. Even Oman—perhaps the most stable and progressive of all the Gulf states—is wary of the growing mood of resentment.

If the regimes in those countries fall, an explosion of popular fury will push them rapidly into the hands of maniacal clerics whose intolerance and aggression will make the current activities of PLO militarists seem as nothing. It is not an exaggeration to say that the world would be pushed towards massive conflict if that were to happen. A series of regimes in the Gulf thrust into different hands would be far more perilous for the state of Israel. Currently, those regimes feel impotent, and their populations are on the edge of revolt.

The question of Israel and Palestine is crucial to the management of all that danger. For their sake and for the sake of the wider world we must now do all we can to walk down the path [illegible]peace.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) on an excellent speech. I agree wholeheartedly that this has been an excellent, well-attended debate—the most thoughtful that I have heard since coming to this place nearly five years ago. I thank all those who have contributed. I express sympathy to those who did not even become the fag end of the debate—I refer to those who were not called, having waited six and a half hours.

The debate has rightly been dominated by the grave situation in the Palestinian territories and Israel. However, I shall refer first to Iraq, on which the Government have made their position absolutely clear. Military action is not imminent or inevitable. Both my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have made it clear that, if that were to be the case, there would be ample future opportunity for debate in this place. All Britain's efforts at the moment are in the direction of trying to get Iraqi compliance with United Nations resolutions and the return of weapons inspectors.

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

I believe that the House is agreed that the situation in the Holy Land is extremely grave. The spiral of violence is intolerable, and it has the potential to set back the cause of peace by years. The recent policy adopted by the Israeli Government in defiance of world opinion has been wrong, counter-productive and futile. The failure of the Palestinian leadership to curb violence and stop the suicide bombings has made the job of those in Israel who argue for a better policy much more difficult.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members made powerful speeches, giving their analyses of the current situation. They included my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Most of those Members, if not all, described themselves as traditional friends of Israel. However, they all expressed extremely strong concern that while Israel must have its right to security, it has done itself immense damage by its recent behaviour, which has been unacceptable and counter-productive.

Many Members listened in silence to the testimony of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who sadly is no longer in her place. It has been supported by a growing number of United Kingdom press reports. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear this afternoon that if we had our own official reports by now, we would give them to the House. I am pleased to tell the House that our defence attaché in Tel Aviv made a trip to Jenin today with two colleagues and has returned safely. His report states:

"all the available evidence is that the"—

Israeli defence force—

"used disproportionate and excessive force. What we cannot say is how many people in the camp were killed, who they were and how they died. This may take some time to be established."

I hope that I speak for the House in calling this evening on the Israeli Government to allow full and unrestricted access to international charities to the Jenin camp. I wish to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) that we are doing everything that we can to get the children to whom he referred out of Nablus. At present, we have been given no permission by the IDF to go there. However, we have received assurances from the Israelis that the children will not come to any harm.

We have rightly heard from a number of right hon. and hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) and for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) and the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), about the current psychological state of the Israeli people. It was right and proper that we heard from those Members. If we are to solve the situation, we must understand the Israelis' sense of vulnerability. I was pleased that the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk said that she agreed that Israel should take note of international opinion and comply immediately with UN resolution 1402. It was right of all the right hon. and hon. Members to whom I have referred to remind the House of the devastating psychological impact of the campaign of suicide bombings and their counter-productive effect on the hopes for peace.

I noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood said about the disappointment in Israel about the Camp David failure. I do not want to spend too much time dwelling on the past or going into claims or counter-claims about who was to blame for the failure of Camp David. For the remainder of my speech, I wish to try to point out a way forward.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Briefly, as chair of the all-party Britain-Palestine group, I had hoped to contribute to the debate but sadly could not. We have heard an alternative view from Israel in the House today, on which I would appreciate my hon. Friend's comments. Uri Avnery, the noted peace campaigner, was here and made it clear that we do the peace camp in Israel no favours at all if we ease up on our criticism of its abrogation of human rights. I am sure that he would welcome my hon. Friend's speech. It is important to recognise that there is an alternative view in Israel, which we should support.

Mr. Bradshaw: I recognise that.

In his extremely constructive contribution, the shadow Foreign Secretary asked whether there were parallels with Northern Ireland. I agree that there are some parallels, but not others. One parallel that he accepted was the need for political dialogue; there is no simple security solution to the problem of Israel and the Palestinian territories. In the absence of politics, extremists fill the vacuum. There are responsibilities on both sides, which have been clearly spelt out by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and in countless United Nations resolutions, most recently in the unanimous resolution 1402 adopted 10 days ago.

There are also responsibilities on the Arab states. The whole House welcomed the unanimous declaration of the recent Beirut summit in support of the initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and our Prime Minister's recommendation that it should be embraced in a UN resolution.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) asked specifically whether we had taken measures or had had recent conversations to try to dissuade some Governments in the region from supporting rejectionist groups. The answer is yes, we do so regularly. The Foreign Secretary has recently had conversations with his Iranian counterparts, encouraging them to play a more positive role. Colin Powell was no doubt in Syria and Lebanon to deliver similar requests.

Many hon. Members stressed the importance of third-party involvement and, above all, the importance of the engagement of the United States of America. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall, North (David Winnick) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) all stressed the unique ability of the United States to make a difference in the region and its responsibility to engage there. We should all welcome the statement of President Bush last Thursday week on the eve of his weekend summit with the Prime Minister in Crawford. My right hon. Friend the

Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) added sound advice on how best to sustain American engagement and persuade the Americans to fulfil their responsibilities in the region.

We heard an important contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who expressed his growing feeling that the incremental approach of the past had not worked: the old models of Madrid and Oslo were not the way forward. The Government have some sympathy with that, which is why the Foreign Secretary spelt out in his opening speech more clearly than any other recent British Foreign Secretary what a final settlement would look like. He went into considerable detail, which I do not intend to reiterate, about what an Israel secure in its borders, with normal relations with the Arab world would look like, and what a Palestinian state, viable, recognised and respected by Israel, would look like.

That will not be easy, and it will require a number of myths to be debunked. Several of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members have been doing a good job of that in the past few hours. One of those myths is that the right of return will mean in practice the return of all Palestinian refugees to green line Israel. That will not happen. On the Israeli side, such myths include the idea that there can be a viable Palestinian state without east Jerusalem as its capital, and the idea that there can be a peace settlement while the existing Israeli settlements remain in their present number in the occupied territories. The settlements are against international law and they will have to go.

Right hon. and hon. Members made a number of other suggestions for measures and actions. Let me say at the outset that it would be foolish for any politician to rule anything out for ever. What we do not want to do is detract or divert attention from the current important diplomatic efforts, particularly the mission of Secretary of State Powell.

On arms, contrary to what was suggested, the Germans have not implemented an arms embargo. There is no EU consensus for such an embargo. I understand that the answer which the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife thought that he had received from the Foreign Secretary did not arrive in time, so I wish to put it on record that our current policy is that we will no longer take into account the Israeli assurances given to us in November 2000 that they would not use UK-originated equipment in the occupied territories. Those assurances have proved to be unsound. Nothing that could be used for internal repression or external aggression will get an export licence. In the current circumstances, those criteria will apply widely to military equipment destined for Israel.

On sanctions, I do not believe that that is a sensible idea at this stage. It would simply push Israeli public opinion further into the bunker in which it already is, as we heard from hon. Members. We do not want to do anything, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) said, to undermine Colin Powell's mission.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley suggested that we cut off diplomatic relations. I do not think that that would be sensible at this stage. It has not been done by Arab states that have diplomatic relations with Israel. It is vital that we keep those avenues of dialogue open. We may well feel better by suggesting such gestures, but the Government are interested in action that will make a difference on the ground and increase the likelihood of a settlement with justice.

I have endeavoured to respond to the points and questions raised by right hon. and hon. Members during the debate. If hon. Members feel that I have failed to do so, will they please speak to me afterwards? I shall happily write to them.

There is overwhelming agreement in the House that the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories is desperate, but I should like to leave the House with a ray of hope. A number of the ingredients that are essential for a peace settlement are in place in a way that they never have been before. That point was made by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) when he rightly said that minds have moved in the past 10 years.

There is unprecedented international agreement about what peace with justice in Israel and Palestine would look like. Despite the current situation, that is still supported by the majority of Israelis and the majority of Palestinians. It is a vision that unites the Arab world, the United States, Europe, Russia and the United Nations. It is enshrined in the recent United Nations resolutions and in the unanimous declaration of the Arab summit in Beirut. Following President Bush's statement, America is more engaged than it has been before, and Colin Powell's mission is continuing. The signs give us cause for cautious optimism.

The parties in the region—the Israelis and Palestinians and their neighbours—must grasp this opportunity. They must show the courage and the leadership to achieve peace with justice, rather than condemn generations of Palestinians and Israelis to more death, violence and hatred. Britain, as always, stands ready to help.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed without Question put.

LYNNE JONES, *who acted as a Teller in Division No. 211, came to the Table.*

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I have to inform the House that in the Division for leave to bring in a ten-minute Bill this afternoon, we reported that the votes for the Ayes were 163. They were in fact 154.

Mr. Speaker: The House will have heard that correction, and I shall see that the record is corrected.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Mental Health

That the Mental Health Act 1983 (Remedial) Order 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3712), dated 18th November 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 682), dated 14th March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Asylum Accommodation Centre (Bicester)

10.1 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): This is the petition of the residents of the villages of Arncott and Piddington in my constituency, supported by people in neighbouring villages and the town of Bicester. The petitioners object to the proposal by the Home Office to build an accommodation centre for asylum seekers on land vacated by the Ministry of Defence. They are concerned that the proposal to locate an asylum seekers' accommodation centre in Bicester is not in the interests of the asylum seekers themselves and they are alarmed that the centre will overwhelm local communities. The petition has been signed by almost every single resident of the villages of Arncott, Piddington and Blackthorn and is supported by people in neighbouring Bicester. The petition states:

The Petition therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Home Secretary to look for more suitable sites for asylum accommodation centres from the perspective of both asylum seekers and local residents.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Authorities (Libel Actions)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I am grateful to have secured this short debate on a matter that is of considerable importance to many of my constituents in Bedford and Kempstown and to other residents of the borough of Bedford, some of whom are represented by the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), whom I am pleased to see in his place.

The matters that I wish to bring to the attention of the House arise from events that took place within Bedford borough council during and after the counting of the votes at the district council elections in May 2000. I do not wish to dwell on the detail, but it is necessary to outline the context before I come to the substantive issues.

Bedford borough council is a hung council—no party has had overall control for 15 years or so. For the past two years, councillors have failed to elect a leader of the council, which has inevitably led to a situation in which responsibility for decisions is not transparent, there is no clear accountability and little openness, the chief executive has developed a very powerful influence among councillors, and personalities rather than politics have become predominant.

After the declaration of the result for the Brickhill ward in Bedford at the May 2000 elections—a result that delivered a narrow victory for the Conservative candidate over the sitting Liberal Democrat councillor—it was discovered that 86 postal votes had not been opened and had therefore not been counted. The ballot papers were subsequently opened—the following day, I believe—by an officer of the council acting on the prior advice of the council's solicitor. Candidates and agents were not present, but were later told that the informally counted postal votes did not alter the result.

Ten days or so later, a Liberal Democrat councillor suggested to the chief executive and the council's solicitor that the council should, under rule 47 of the local election principal areas rules, ask the county court to order a recount of the ballot papers. The officers agreed to do that. The hearing took place on 23 and 24 May 2000. On both occasions, it was adjourned. At some point later the council discontinued its action.

Immediately after the hearings, the local Conservative party agent issued a news release, claiming maladministration by the borough council for pursuing a misconceived application under rule 47. That procedure is designed for election agents who represent candidates, not returning officers. The content of the news release contributed to the coverage of the Brickhill election count in a local weekly free newspaper called *Bedfordshire on Sunday*.

Three senior council officers—the chief executive, the council's solicitor and the council's employed lawyer—sued the Conservative agent and local Sunday newspapers for defamation. The complaints were about the Conservative party news release and two articles published by *Bedfordshire on Sunday*. The case was heard in the High Court in February before a leading libel judge, Mr. Justice Gray.

The council's solicitor and lawyer lost all their claims. The chief executive lost on two counts and won on two, and was awarded £27,000 damages because the judge ruled that the news release had wrongly alleged political bias on the chief executive's part. The claimants were ordered to pay 80 per cent. of the costs to the defendants. The amount is likely to be £400,000 to £450,000.

The important point is that the complaints were private actions that Bedford borough council supported and maintained from the start. The council's executive committee met on 7 June 2000 and, in private session, received a report from officers advising the committee that the council had to support and maintain the private libel actions under its duty of care to its employees. Councillors apparently considered legal advice to the effect that because the three officers were criticised for actions undertaken in the course of their duties, the council could face legal claims for dereliction of its duty of care if it did not agree to support them.

The all-party committee duly agreed to support the libel actions. It agreed that the costs of the intended claims should be financed from the contingency reserve. Furthermore, on 14 February 2001, the executive committee agreed to take out insurance of £50,000 to cover up to £250,000 costs should the private libel actions prove unsuccessful. Again, the public were excluded from the meeting. In the event, the council did not purchase the policy, and decided to self-insure out of the contingency reserve. The bill, as I said, will exceed £400,000.

On 6 March this year, the executive committee agreed to support and maintain the council's solicitor and lawyer if they were successful in seeking leave to appeal against the judgment. Full council has yet to endorse that position, but if an appeal is made, and if it is unsuccessful, the costs to the public purse in Bedford borough will naturally be substantially higher.

Bedford borough council has agreed to use public money to maintain private libel actions. It has also committed staff time and resources in support for many months. It has justified that under its duty of care to employees.

I am deeply disturbed by the situation, which has serious and wide-ranging implications. The obligations and responsibilities associated with the duty of care do not include maintaining private libel actions initiated by employees. Duty of care, as I understand it, covers matters such as safeguarding health and safety, dealing promptly with grievances, taking reasonable care, and acting in good faith.

I do not believe that any case law suggests that duty of care extends to funding private libel action. I do not believe that an employment tribunal in the land would consider any failure to sponsor such action to be a fundamental breach of the contract of employment. Councils can and do fund prosecutions when employees have been assaulted in the course of their duties, but there appears to be no duty of care to fund libel actions. However, given the contrary position adopted by Bedford borough council, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider for the avoidance of doubt whether the Government's advice to local authorities on such matters should be reviewed.

I turn now to the maintenance by a local authority of libel actions. I strongly oppose that, because the use of public money to suppress public criticism would fundamentally undermine freedom of expression and, therefore, democracy itself. If a Government or a local council disagree with comments made, they have suitable avenues open to them to obtain a remedy without recourse to litigation. The normal and healthy response is to investigate the complaint, debate the issues openly and issue a rebuttal in the media.

Public criticism of an officer or councillor may sometimes be harsh and unfair, but that is an occupational hazard. The more senior the individual in an organisation, the better one would expect that to be understood. If a council considers a particular instance worthy of an investigation and a reasonable response, it has the means to pursue such a course of action; supporting and maintaining a defamation action is clearly beyond reasonable. That being the case, it is perhaps unsurprising that English local authorities have only twice sued for damages, in 1891 and 1972.

In 1993, in the case of Derbyshire county council *v.* Times Newspapers Ltd., the Law Lords held that:

"A local authority did not have the right to maintain an action for damages for defamation, as it would be contrary to the public interest for the organs of Government, whether central or local, to have that right. Not only was there no public interest favouring the right of Government organs to sue for libel but it was of the highest public importance that a governmental body should be open to uninhibited public criticism, and a right to sue for defamation would place an undesirable fetter on freedom of speech."

Lord Keith of Kinkel, expressing his opinion en route to the ruling, made the following observation:

"I regard it as right for this House to lay down that not only is there no public interest favouring the right of organs of Government, whether central or local, to sue for libel, but that it is contrary to the public interest that they should have it."

He also approved of the following statement made in a much earlier South African case:

"I have no doubt that it would involve a serious interference with the free expression of opinion hitherto enjoyed in this country if the wealth of the state, derived from the state's subjects, could be used to launch against those subjects actions for defamation because they have, falsely and unfairly it may be, criticised or condemned the management of the country."

Not maintaining an action for damages surely means not doing so either directly on the local authority's own account, or indirectly, or by proxy by funding its employees to do so. Naturally, individuals enjoy the right to sue for damages, and that includes individual councillors and officers. It is the maintenance of such actions through public funds that is wrong. Bedford borough council has done just that. I believe it is wrong, and many of my constituents believe it to be wrong. They know that there are dozens of better ways of spending their money than through the irresponsible commitment of hundreds of thousands of pounds on legal costs. They know that this whole business represents a diversion of time and energy from the real tasks that should concern the council—those of promoting the borough and running effective services. I could not agree with them more, and I think that the people of the borough are owed an apology by the council. Whatever my constituents may think, however, events have unfolded in the way that they have. Despite the rather strong evidence that the council's actions ought to be ultra vires, there is a need to clarify the situation once and for all.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows that I have already tabled a parliamentary written question on these matters, and I see from his reply that the Government are thinking

[Mr. Patrick Hall]

about local authorities having the power to provide indemnities to councillors and staff. I understand that the Government will want to go through the process properly. I must ask my hon. Friend, however, to give an indication of where he stands, given my immediate concerns and those of my constituents, given that Bedford borough council may, in the next few weeks, confirm its willingness to endorse its executive committee's recommendation that public funds be made available to maintain appeals by two council officials, and given also the wider public interest considerations that I have raised.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me that local authorities should not maintain and support libel actions directly or indirectly. I hope that he will also agree that such actions cannot be in the public interest, that they would undermine freedom of speech in our country, that they form no part of duty of care, and that they must therefore be stopped once and for all.

10.14 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to both the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and the Minister for allowing me a couple of minutes.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Bedford has raised a matter that is of great concern to his constituents and to mine, and I associate myself with what he has said. The whole thing appears to be a classic example of circumstances in which personality is allowed to cloud judgment, notwithstanding the seriousness of the allegations that are made. Words spoken or written in, or shortly after, the heat of an election battle are perhaps not always the wisest. My constituents are appalled that the matter has gone as far as it has, and appalled at the cost.

Bedford borough council is running out of time in which to re-establish credibility with its electorate, as was shown in a recent vote on the possibility of electing a mayor. It is time for the council to put aside the variety of personality issues that have beset it in recent years and damaged its effectiveness. It is time for serious thought about the council's good name, and its ability to serve properly residents who deserve rather better service than they have had in recent years from a council that has been hung and unable to perform its duties effectively. Perhaps this debate will fire a final warning shot over the bows. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) for giving us an opportunity to discuss this subject. The debate is timely: the issue is one that we in Government have been actively considering, albeit, as I shall explain, in a slightly different guise.

I must make it clear that I do not intend to comment on the case itself. As my hon. Friend will appreciate, it is currently before the courts, and I consider it inappropriate to comment in such circumstances. I am, however, happy to comment on the general principle of circumstances in which local authorities can and should indemnify their members and officers, using public funds, for any personal liability arising from actions or decisions made by them in the course of their official duties.

In the past, local authorities have relied on various statutory provisions to provide indemnities—provisions dating back even to the Public Health Act 1875—but doubts have been raised from time to time about the extent to which authorities can rely on those powers. Given the importance that the Government attach to modernising local government and to local authorities working in partnership with other bodies, it is important for those doubts to be removed. That is why, in section 101 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Government took order-making powers to allow the Secretary of State to enable authorities to indemnify their members and officers in respect of personal liabilities. The scope of that provision is deliberately wide, and permits the order made under section 101 to remove any doubts about the circumstances in which authorities can provide indemnities.

The next step is for central Government to consult on how we might give effect to such an order. I will now outline the ideas that we are minded to present in a consultation paper that we intend to issue this summer. We are minded to permit the indemnification of members and officers within certain bounds, but I want to make it clear that we are still considering those issues, within Government and with stakeholders, and that we will not make final decisions until we have received responses to the final consultation paper.

In the making of an order under section 101, the following questions need to be addressed. Which relevant authorities are to be allowed to provide indemnities? Who should authorities be able to indemnify? In what circumstances should indemnities apply? Should any restrictions be placed on authorities' ability to provide indemnities? I will say something about each of those questions.

First, there is the question of which authorities should be able to provide indemnities. Section 101 allows the Secretary of State to enable all relevant authorities in England, and police authorities in Wales, to provide them. Although the range of functions undertaken by the various authorities varies considerably, the Government see no reason to withhold the right to give indemnities from any relevant authority. Parish and town councils are as likely as other authorities to appoint members to serve on outside bodies such as charitable trusts. In such circumstances they need to be able, if they so wish, to indemnify those individuals against personal liabilities in the same way as other authorities.

Secondly, who should authorities be able to indemnify? The 2000 Act allows the Secretary of State to provide that authorities should be able to provide indemnities to some or all of their members and officers.

The Government believe that it should be for authorities themselves to determine which members and officers should be granted indemnities. Accordingly, our consultation will propose that the power should be widely drafted and not limit the class of member or officer to whom indemnities can be given. Instead, the power will permit authorities to grant indemnities to specific individuals, at the discretion of the authority. However, we also believe that the power to grant indemnities out of public funds should be limited to circumstances in which the member or officer acts in an official capacity.

Thirdly, what liabilities should authorities be able to indemnify? The Government believe that authorities should be permitted to indemnify individuals against any personal financial liability that they incur in the service of the authority.

Accordingly, authorities' powers should be wide enough to remove any doubts about their ability to indemnify individuals, including where an individual becomes personally responsible for the debts of a body to which they have been appointed by the authority; or where an individual incurs costs defending himself against legal proceedings brought by a third party—including any in which the member is co-joined with the authority.

Fourthly, should any restrictions be placed on authorities' power to provide indemnities? This is the crux of the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford, and of the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt).

Again, the House will understand that I cannot comment on the detail of the Bedford case. However, I can say something about the Government's views on the principles of the use of public funds to meet costs of legal action for libel.

The Government believe that indemnity at public cost should not be used to allow individuals to avoid all personal responsibility for their actions. Accordingly, we intend to propose that members and officers should be able to rely on indemnities only if the action giving rise to the liability was taken in good faith, and was not unlawful or reckless.

We are therefore minded to propose to prohibit authorities from indemnifying members or officers for the cost of taking legal action for slander or libel. We are content that authorities should be able to provide indemnities to individuals against the costs of defending such actions, but we do not believe that individuals should be funded at public expense to bring proceedings against a third party. That would risk, among other things, an increase in litigation, and it could stifle legitimate public debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford mentioned the comments of judges on that issue.

Of course, I must stress that none of that would prevent someone pursuing legal action for libel in a personal capacity. However, we are also minded to prohibit authorities from indemnifying members or officers in two further situations—when they provide guarantees or letters of comfort to third parties on behalf of the authority, and when they incur costs answering allegations that they have breached codes of conduct.

As a matter of principle, the Government do not believe that public money should be spent by members as part of the process of establishing whether or not they have behaved improperly. Moreover, the procedures to be adopted by the new standards board and adjudication panel should preclude the member from having to be legally represented by affording him or her a full opportunity to make their case without having to undertake the cost of additional legal representation.

Proposals on which the Government will shortly be consulting will give authorities a role to play in the investigation and determination of allegations of misconduct. In such circumstances, if authorities were also faced with having to meet members' legal costs, there would be a potential conflict of interest. Authorities would have a legitimate interest in minimising the potential cost to the authority, and in ensuring that allegations were properly investigated and dealt with. It is possible that, on occasion, those interests might conflict.

These are the ideas that we are likely to put forward in our forthcoming consultation paper. Before going out to consultation, we will discuss the issues further within Government and with the Local Government Association. We will also prepare a draft order so that consultees can see how we intend to give legal effect to our proposals.

In closing, I emphasise again that nothing is set in stone. We will consider carefully the responses that we receive from authorities and other interested stakeholders to our consultation paper, which we expect to issue in the summer. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford and the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire are sent a copy.

After we have considered the responses, we will consider the need for further changes. We will then lay the order before the House for debate under affirmative resolution procedures. I hope that the order, once laid, will provide the clarity concerning indemnities that does not exist at present.

I hope that this information is of some help to my hon. Friend, and thank him again for providing an important opportunity to discuss the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 April 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 24 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Afghanistan

1. **Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): If she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [46040]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. That is the consequence of 23 years of conflict and three years of drought, and the fact that some areas of the country are still inaccessible. The latest estimate by the United Nations and the Afghanistan Interim Administration is that approximately 9 million Afghans, including more than 1 million internally displaced people, will be in need of humanitarian assistance this year.

Mr. Grieve: What extra resources have been made available for United Kingdom humanitarian aid following the earthquake in northern Afghanistan? Can the right hon. Lady tell the House anything about the role that British peacekeeping forces may have had or might have in distributing that?

Clare Short: The UK is providing £60 million this year in humanitarian aid and in starting to bolster the capacity of the Interim Administration. The question is not the availability of resources but reaching the people in greatest need. That is of course the nature of the crisis following an earthquake. The UK is famous for being able to move rapidly, and we deployed into the area in order to provide assistance and help. I am not aware of troops being involved, but I might not be right about that. Many people have lost their homes, and 800 people lost their lives. There is a big effort, in which we are involved, to provide help for those people who, on top of all the other suffering in Afghanistan, have now suffered the consequences of an earthquake.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): What efforts are being made to destroy the poppy fields in Afghanistan? What attempts have been made to compensate the farmers by providing alternative crops?

Clare Short: The implication of my hon. Friend's question is right: there has been a lot of planting of poppy by people who are very poor and have no other means of making a living. Obviously, that engenders criminality and instability in Afghanistan, as well as the exporting of drugs that will endanger neighbouring countries and the rest of the world, including our country. A big effort is being made. The Interim Administration have declared that no poppies should be planted, but the job is both to eradicate the crop and to provide alternative livelihoods for the people. We have learned across the world that, otherwise, people continue planting, because they have no other chance to make a living. We are working very hard to try to provide them with that chance.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The Secretary of State will be aware of numerous schemes to repatriate Afghan refugees. Although we welcome their eventual return, I am sure she would agree that reports of insecurity in Afghanistan, and the lack of housing and of basic provision, seem to indicate that such schemes might be premature. Will she assure the House that repatriation with British aid money will happen only when it is in the best interests of refugees and not because of the political pressure of donors?

Clare Short: We had this argument about Kosovo. It is not for the hon. Lady, me or anyone else to tell Afghan refugees when it is best to go home. We should facilitate their choices, and we see very wise choices—*[Interruption.]* The mass of Afghan refugees are in neighbouring countries—probably about 4 million of them. Families usually send a young male home to see how things are, and some families then go home.

About 180,000 Afghans have decided to return. They deserve help to do so when they make the decision, and facilities and equipment to rebuild their houses. Some Afghans have moved out of the country; it depends on the area, the problems of drought, the earthquake and so on. We will back people's choices and empower them to decide when it is right for them to return home.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): There have been many promises made by Governments, including our own, about the involvement of women in humanitarian aid, but Oxfam notes in its latest paper that

"planning, implementation, and evaluation meetings are attended primarily by men."

Will my right hon. Friend do everything she can to ensure that women become involved in those programmes? Will she pay particular attention in the delivery of those programmes to the special needs of the many widows in Afghanistan?

Clare Short: Yes, indeed; I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking. The situation is not as bad as Oxfam

implies—if that is what it is saying. Girls across the country are returning to school, women are able to teach again and the Women's Ministry, for which my hon. Friend fought so hard, is up and running—although obviously it needs to be strengthened. Only 11 per cent. of the Loya Jirga that is about to established and to decide the future of the country will be women, but that is an unprecedentedly large proportion for Afghanistan.

The World Food Programme, which is providing food for work across the country, targets women as organisers of schemes because they are so reliable and close to people. Of course, Afghanistan has a long way to go, but women there are moving forward and I promise my hon. Friend that we shall do everything we can to back them.

Mrs. Spelman: Is the Secretary of State aware of reports that pledges made by foreign donors of some £1.8 billion to help Afghanistan with reconstruction have, in some cases, failed to materialise? As this is Budget day and the Chamber is so well attended, can she say whether the British pledge made in Tokyo has now been delivered, and what action she is taking to get the unpaid pledges matched with hard cash?

Clare Short: The UK is famous for delivering on its pledges and for delivering fast. Many other countries grandstand promises in the media, but the money does not come through. The other problem is that it is easier to promise money than to get it spent effectively in a failed state. The UK committed £200 million from my budget over five years, so that money has not all been disbursed yet. We have disbursed £60 million this year, and we are well on the way to disbursing all of it. That is above what we have promised for future years. The UK, as ever, acts fast and has fulfilled its commitments, but others are slower. We will of course work to try to ensure that all the money is disbursed as rapidly as possible.

Primary Education

2. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What recent discussions she has had on improving access to primary education in developing countries. [46041]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): One in five children in the world are not in school and 800 million adults are illiterate. The UN millennium assembly committed the world to get all children into primary education by 2015. On current trends, that target will be met in most of Asia, but not in Africa. We are working, through our own programme, UNESCO and the World Bank, to gear up the whole international effort to ensure that the target is met.

Helen Jones: I am sure that the House will acknowledge my right hon. Friend's commitment to resolving that issue, but she will be aware that, on current trends, by 2015 some 75 million children will not be receiving basic education. Only 2 per cent. of the aid budget goes on education. Will my right hon. Friend therefore give a commitment that she will try to persuade the World Bank to address that financing gap in education? As it is clear that those countries that obtain debt relief then spend more on primary education, will she do all she can to encourage our international partners to give greater debt relief to those countries that have proper education plans in place?

Clare Short: I agree with the points that my hon. Friend makes. The point of the millennium targets is not to describe current trends but to increase the international effort. She is right to say that on current trends we will not meet the target, but it is achievable. The biggest problem is in Africa. Part of the problem concerns the commitment of the Governments of developing countries to primary education. In poor countries, elites are powerful and they tend to spend their budgets on education for the elite, not primary education for all. The international community cannot put that right except through international pressure.

My hon. Friend may be interested to learn that we spend 20 per cent. of our own budget on primary education. I shall attend the World Bank meeting this weekend at which this issue will be on the agenda. I assure her that we will make a greater effort.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The right hon. Lady will know that I have just returned from a visit to Sudan with the all-party group. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy.

Dr. Tonge: The Secretary of State will also know that two generations of children in southern Sudan have missed out almost completely on education because of the civil war there. In view of the fact that 80 per cent. of southern Sudan is at peace some or all of the time, will not she reconsider her Department's policy and start investing in the future of southern Sudan by providing primary education projects?

Clare Short: No, the hon. Lady and all who advocate that policy are wrong. It is to pretend that development can take place around an ongoing war that is killing millions, displacing people and destroying an economy. We are trying to improve the humanitarian effort, and that should include education for displaced children, but pretending that development can be promoted around a moving war is to belie the truth.

Sudan is a desperately poor country that can have peace. There is a real call for peace in that country, which became independent in 1956 and has been at war for all but 10 years since. I assure the hon. Lady that we will try to improve the humanitarian effort and the education that goes with it, but the way to provide education for all the children in southern Sudan is to bring the country to peace.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): As another Member who had the privilege of taking part in the visit of the all-party group to Sudan, I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to the peace process, which is alive but needs greater emphasis and greater effort. Hope will bear fruit. Is there not a place for education in a society where basic education might just help people engage further in civil society and in the development of a democratic society for the future, rather than being drawn into armed factions on either side?

Clare Short: Of course there is a place for education for all children in the world, and especially children who

suffer as a consequence of war. The reality in Sudan, and especially southern Sudan, is that people have been displaced. They have lost their land; they have lost everything; they have lost their family members; children are not in touch. It is not the truth to pretend that we can organise sustainable educational systems without resolving the war.

As I have said, we should do everything that we can to ensure that displaced and refugee children have access to education. Pretending that there is peace or that more development round the war is possible is misguided. There is a chance of peace in Sudan, and I know that my hon. Friend agrees. We must try to grab the chance of peace, as well as improving the humanitarian effort in the meantime.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): As the Secretary of State will know, the members of the Select Committee on International Development recently went to Ghana. I think that we were all extremely impressed by the commitment of the Government of Ghana, and of communities, families and teachers to ensuring that there is universal primary education in Ghana. Does the right hon. Lady agree that every penny that is spent on primary education in a country such as Ghana is money well spent? Sometimes we can all become rather depressed by the failures in the international community, but sometimes we should celebrate achievements.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right. All research shows that the most powerful development intervention that can be made in any poor country is ensuring that a generation of children are educated, especially girls. As such a generation grows up, it can transform the prospects of a society in terms of child survival, access to education, health care and incomes. With Ghana's previous Government, we worked hard to try to achieve a commitment to a universal primary education programme, and did not have much success. Under the new Government, these things are looking much more hopeful. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is important to celebrate.

Millennium Development Goals

3. **Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What steps she is taking to build international consensus around the mechanisms and resources needed for the achievement of the millennium development goals. [46042]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We have worked hard since 1997 to get the international system focused on the systematic reduction of poverty. We now have unprecedented international consensus throughout the United Nations system, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the regional development banks and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It is focused on meeting our agreed targets of halving world poverty and improving education and health care for all. On present trends, we shall achieve the halving of world poverty target. That means a billion people lifting themselves out of poverty between 1995 and 2015. However, on present trends, Africa is set to become poorer. We are determined to do better, and we are working throughout the international system to that end.

Roger Casale: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the joint statement issued last month by a group of British and Italian Members of Parliament in preparation for the next G8 summit and in support of the work that she and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer are undertaking to double the international resources available for development world wide? Does she agree that it is now time for parliamentarians, non-governmental organisations, Church groups and other groups in civil society to double and redouble our efforts to build international consensus on development issues, so that we sustain and extend the international action that will be necessary to make globalisation work for the world's poor?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend. The greatest threat to future safety, stability and sustainability in the world is poverty. One in five of humanity are living in absolute poverty. Half of the whole of humanity lives on less than the equivalent of $2 a day income in the United States. We know how to make progress. With greater effort, we could speed up that progress. We need much more consensus in our political systems to the effect that that is a priority and not something for the charity box while mainstream politics is taking place.

We had a great gain at the UN Monterrey conference—an extra $12 billion a year from 2006 towards international development assistance. If we effectively targeted the $50 billion a year that we have now on the poor and on backing reformers, its value would increase by 50 per cent. We are making progress but we could do a lot more. It is a great priority on which I am strongly focused.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Will the right hon. Lady join the Opposition in welcoming the generosity of the United States of America in increasing its aid budget by $5 billion? Will she commit herself to putting continued pressure on her European counterparts to do the same?

Clare Short: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman, who does try, does not seem to listen to the whole story. The US is the meanest donor by far among the OECD countries. In the run-up to the UN conference on financing for development, the European Union committed itself to an extra $20 billion by 2006 and an extra $7 billion a year thereafter. That had some leverage on President Bush.

In the preparations for the meeting, the US had said that aid is useless and capitalism is the answer. I notice a change in the atmospherics from the other side of the House—perhaps Opposition Members are waiting for later. Because President Bush had committed to President Fox of Mexico to go to the conference, and given the international atmosphere and the EU performance, he then committed to finding $5 billion a year extra from 2006. That is important, as it represents a reversal of the decline.

I hope that it will be the precursor of more, so that the US pays its share of the international development effort, as I am sure it should.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what percentage of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's budget is spent on the export of arms?

Clare Short: I am sorry—I do not have the precise answer in front of me. The percentage is quite high. Speaking from memory, I think that it is approaching a third. I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State said that the African countries are getting poorer. One understands some of the problems, but is it not time there was an international consensus to tackle them more effectively than hitherto? The right hon. Lady speaks of some countries grandstanding; we already have an insight into the ways of the United States. Can she name the other countries that grandstand instead of coming to the aid of the underdeveloped countries?

Clare Short: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? I did not say that the United States grandstands; on aid, the US has not bothered to compete. However, there has been a change, and the US is at least joining and trying to make a commitment to increasing its aid. That is welcome. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the prospects for Africa are very serious. At current rates of population growth and economic growth, the continent is set to become steadily poorer, yet 50 per cent. of its population is already abjectly poor.

One of the things that we must do to change the prospects of the continent is resolve some of the conflicts. We are living at a time when the conflicts in Sudan, Congo and Angola are all moving towards a resolution. If those three massively resource-rich countries could be brought to peace, it would transform the prospects of the continent. We have reformers on the continent: Uganda, Mozambique, Ghana and others are achieving the sort of economic growth and improved performance in health care and education that the whole continent needs. We must use the new partnership for African development to achieve that across the continent.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Given my right hon. Friend's strong commitment to the poorest African nations, does she agree that in order to reach the millennium development goals, the issue of debt must be tackled more deeply and more widely, even beyond the HIPC agreement? Will she and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor pursue that view in Washington at the important spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund next week?

Clare Short: I agree with my right hon. Friend. Twenty-six of the 40-odd heavily indebted poor countries have qualified for debt relief. That has leveraged major reform, better economic performance and better public services focused on the poor. However, because world commodity prices are still declining—coffee, cocoa and so on—and oil prices have been rising, many of those countries have not exited from their debt problem, as their earnings from exports have declined. Many of them need extra help. Many of the other countries that have not yet qualified—Sudan, Burma and the Democratic Republic of Congo among them—must be helped towards peace so that they can qualify for their debt relief, but we need more generosity because of the change in world commodity prices.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

4. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry regarding the encouragement of sustainable development in developing countries by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [46043]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): My Department worked closely with the Department of Trade and Industry during the 2000 review of the ECGD. We supported the development of the ECGD's new set of business principles which make clear its commitment to sustainable development.

Mr. Thomas: Does the Secretary of State agree that, if the ECGD can really take on board sustainable development, there is a huge opportunity for it to work with her Department in achieving real development in developing countries, such as the strategy set out for sustainable energy in the World Wide Fund for Nature's international paper? In particular, will she use her good offices to press the DTI to bring forward the ECGD strategy paper on sustainable development?

Clare Short: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman, not just with regard to the ECGD but on international trade and business. The old ways of selfish, corrupt business that did not benefit poor countries and often got them into debt should be put behind us. They need trade and exports and loans so that they can invest in clean water, sanitation and proper energy sources, which will enable them to grow sustainably and improve the lives of their people. I hope that the reforms that are being put in place in the ECGD will make it a leading-edge player, showing that responsible, ethical business can be good for people who are employed in our own country and can promote development for the poorest people. A change is taking place and we need to ensure that it is taken forward.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): When export credit guarantees go wrong, they eventually turn into debt and then to debt relief when they become part of this country's overseas development assistance; so will my right hon. Friend ensure in her discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry that when export credits are first issued to developing countries, the development consequences, including for the poor people in those countries, are considered in case they turn into debt and then into aid?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is fundamentally right. Much of the debt that has been written off for all the heavily indebted poor countries—I think that it is about 50 per cent. across the world—involves our ECGD or equivalent departments in other countries, and that shows bad lending in the past, often with lots of corruption on both sides of the equation. As well as writing off debt to

give countries a chance to go forward with proper economic reform and a better future, we must tighten up on our own export credits and the worldwide use of export credits. That effort is on, but it is difficult. There is a lot of resistance and any help that the House of Commons can give will be gratefully received.

Zimbabwe

5. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): What recent discussions she has had with leaders of sub-Saharan African countries regarding democracy in Zimbabwe. [46044]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Both my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Foreign Secretary are in regular contact with a number of African leaders about the situation in Zimbabwe. The damaging impact on the economy, including severe food shortages, is profoundly worrying in a country where 75 per cent. of the population live in poverty and one in three adults are HIV positive. We continue to provide humanitarian aid.

Mr. Hendry: Does the Minister accept that the election result in Zimbabwe poses serious questions to the viability of the New Partnership for Africa's Development? Is he proposing changes to the scheme in the light of that result? Will he also make it clear in any dealings that he has with leaders of sub-Saharan countries that silence in response to the election result is simply not an option, and that a failure to condemn absolutely the conduct and the result of the election will amount to complicity with Mugabe and his wicked ways?

Hilary Benn: The Southern African Development Community and the Commonwealth, the UK, the European Community and others have made clear their view that the election in Zimbabwe was neither free nor fair. I would not agree that the future credibility of the New Partnership for Africa's Development is under threat. It represents the best hope for the future of sub-Saharan Africa, and its most important element is the commitment of the leaders of sub-Saharan Africa to taking responsibility for dealing with the problems of the continent. We need to support them in that process because it offers the best way forward, not only for Zimbabwe but for the whole continent.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister realise that hon. Members in all parts of the House have relatives and families in Zimbabwe? What is he doing to ensure that UK aid workers in particular are protected from Mugabe's thugs and that UK aid reaches those in need and does not go to Mugabe and his henchmen?

Hilary Benn: The most important thing is to ensure that we work through NGOs, Churches and others to make sure that the humanitarian aid that we are rightly continuing to give gets to the people who need it. When concerns are expressed about interference in the process, we must ensure that they are investigated thoroughly, just as they are being investigated by the World Food Programme in relation to two or three incidents. The people of Zimbabwe are not responsible for the Government they have, which is why they continue to rely on our support and we continue to give it.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [46070] **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. McFall: I welcome the Wanless report, which was published this morning, and the ensuing debate. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best insurance policy for all citizens is a publicly funded NHS that is free at the point of use? Will he strive to maintain and build on the consensus that has existed since 1948 and which saw the NHS as a clear, enduring and practical expression of our values as a country? Does he accept that the Government have to demonstrate that change must be effected on the ground with results? Will he not be put off by the discordant voices that are trying to say that the NHS cannot or will not work? Is not the best thing that can be done for the country that the Leader of the Opposition— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to say that I agree with all that. In fact, I probably agree with what my hon. Friend did not say as well as with what he did say.

As I am sure my hon. Friend understands, the foundation is a strong economy with low inflation, low interest rates and now the lowest unemployment of any major country in the world today. On that basis, we can invest in our public services like the national health service and make the changes that are necessary. The reason why it is important to make the investment in our health care system is that that is indeed the best insurance policy that people in this country can have.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree with the former Labour donor Lord Haskins, who said about the Department of Health's contract for smallpox vaccine:

"I see no reason why a tendering process for these vaccinations should not have been transparent from beginning to end"?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree with those comments. The contract was given entirely in accordance with the normal rules and in a proper way.

Mr. Duncan Smith: These comments follow the Prime Minister's comments yesterday that concerns about speed and protecting national security are the key and that containing this matter behind a secret wall is somehow important. Can he now explain why the United States was

able to protect its own citizens and national security, hold an open procurement process and deploy its vaccine more quickly than we have in the UK?

The Prime Minister: Again, I do not agree. The advice was quite clear that, in line with national security, it was important that the details of the contract were not dealt with through public procurement. However, many companies were asked to tender, and the company that was chosen and recommended by officials was chosen entirely in accordance with the proper rules. This is just the latest smear from a Conservative party that has absolutely nothing whatever to say about the serious issues of the day.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Methinks the Prime Minister protests too much. Does he not understand that hiding behind national security, as he has again done today, simply fuels people's suspicions about his motives? Given that the head of PowderJect has given this Government their largest single donation since the election, should that not have set an alarm bell ringing in Downing street signalling that the procurement process needed to be even more open, not less open? So instead of sending his Cabinet Ministers out like sheep bleating about the sudden need to find state funding for political parties, is not the real solution that we need an open and transparent Government?

The Prime Minister: On the process, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, the permanent secretary to the Department was consulted, and he said that that was indeed the right thing to do for the country and its needs. However, in talking about openness and transparency in funding, let me remind the House that during 18 years of Conservative Government, we had no openness or transparency and nothing was said about funding. The only reason why these allegations can be made is because we have indeed published the names of those who donate to the Labour party.

Let us put the matter to the test. We as a Government, under the law that we introduced, have said exactly who has donated to the Labour party in our time in office. The right hon. Gentleman is now the leader of the Conservative party, so let him go back through the records of 18 years of Conservative Government and publish the names of the donors and the amounts donated, and the countries that they came from. He has that information in Conservative party central office. He wants openness and transparency, and this Government have given it. Let him stand at the Dispatch Box and pledge it for his party.

Q2. [46071] **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): A new breast cancer unit, a new neurology department, a new cardiac centre and new wards at Nottingham City hospital have all been made possible by this Government's record investment in the NHS. Will my right hon. Friend recognise, however, that it is not buildings but staff who make the NHS? Will he look at the pay and conditions of porters, cleaners, nurses and doctors, and see what we can do about recruitment and retention problems in the NHS?

The Prime Minister: What is obvious from any consideration of alternative systems around the world is that we have a capacity problem in the British health care system. We have insufficient doctors, consultants and nurses, and for that reason we are expanding numbers—including, for example, some 14,000 extra nurses in the past year alone. However, we also need to ensure that we open up greater training opportunities for doctors, consultants and nurses, and we are doing that in every area. I believe that it is right to say to people in this country that, if we want to improve our health care system, we have to pay for it. The fairest and best way of doing that is through the national health service, funded in the way we have described.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Can the Prime Minister explain why the Chancellor was able to announce in the pre-general election Budget tax reductions for next year of £3 billion, given that we have been told to expect tax increases in today's Budget? What went wrong in between?

The Prime Minister: What the Chancellor also did in the last comprehensive spending review was to announce the biggest sustained increases in health and education spending that we have had. Indeed, the reason why our education system is now among the top eight in the world is precisely because of the investment. As the British Medical Association and others have said, the reason why real improvements are now happening in the national health service is because of the extra investment.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No one believes that.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says, "No one believes that," but I think that most people prefer to listen to those who work in the health service, rather than to a Conservative party that has a strategy of denigrating and running down the health service at every turn. However, we do of course need to sustain those improvements in this spending settlement, and that is precisely what we want to do.

Mr. Kennedy: I am sure that a lot of people in the country will agree with that last sentiment so far as the Conservatives are concerned. However, is it not a fact that, at the last election, the Liberal Democrats argued for honest and fair taxation and for more investment in the health service? We would welcome that, but does not the Prime Minister regret the fact that he did not have the courage to do the same?

The Prime Minister: It was clearly important to strengthen and stabilise the economy and to achieve the current strong economic situation, and, on that basis, to invest. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman might say that the Liberal Democrats would have invested more. In fact, in 1997 they asked for an extra £500 million for the health service, but in the last Parliament we put in £5 billion.

The trouble with the Liberal Democrats is that they are very good at making spending commitments but less good at controlling numbers. For example, they have recently asked for more money for personal care, teachers, doctors, nurses, police, dental services and more hospital beds. They asked for the abolition of prescription dental and sight charges, the scrapping of all tuition fees and the reintroduction of all student grants. They also asked that benefits be given to all students during the summer

holidays and for an increase in housing benefit; the payment of no-fault compensation, compensation for Gulf war veterans, greater spending on debt aid relief, and the giving of greater subsidies to small and medium-sized farmers. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] Of course they want more—they always want more—and that was just this month's spending commitments. If we are talking about integrity and honesty, to pretend that we can get that much spending out of that 1p of tax is not a very honest way of conducting matters.

Q3. [46072] **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): The national minimum wage is one of our finest achievements so far. Does the Prime Minister agree with me as a fellow Christian socialist that currently low hourly rates are neither ethical nor egalitarian? Does he hope that today's Budget at last meets the nation's needs for progressive policies so that there is a radical redistribution?

The Prime Minister: I can agree that that is important. The minimum wage should be seen alongside other measures such as the working families tax credit, which not only increased people's pay dramatically but provided an incentive to work. There is a reason why we have managed to secure such low unemployment in this country—there are 1,250,000 more jobs—at the same time as introducing a minimum wage, which the Conservative party told us would destroy 1 million jobs. In addition, we did that on the basis of ensuring that we take measures to stimulate business and enterprise. It is the combination of those two achievements together that gives us the economic position that we have today.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): My constituents learned this morning that the Prime Minister spent £28 million on an empty dome that is inaccessible to the public. Does he realise that they would have welcomed just a few of those millions being spent on the provision of national health service dentistry in Market Harborough, where there is none, and on the building of the new hospital, which was supposed to be completed by 2005 but, owing to NHS financial shortages, will not now be completed until well into the next decade?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly say that it is important that we make additional investments in the national health service. I hope, therefore, that he makes it absolutely clear later today that the Conservative party supports the additional sums for the national health service. What is beyond any doubt, however, is that the one group of people who simply cannot criticise health service spending in this country are those who, when in office, underfunded the national health service and do not support the extra investment now.

Q4. [46073] **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the James Paget hospital, which serves my constituency, for more than meeting the targets for reducing waiting times for in-patients and out-patients? With record levels of investment going into that hospital, resulting in more beds, a new accident and emergency unit, new operating theatres and a new maternity unit, does not that show that the best and fairest way to fund the health service is through general taxation, not charges and private insurance, as favoured by the Conservatives?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate all those in my hon. Friend's constituency who have worked so hard in the health service to secure those improvements. However, the position that he describes is replicated in many constituencies up and down the country. Of course we still have a long way to go to make the improvements that we need in the national health service, but as the report by the NHS chief executive showed just a couple of weeks ago, substantial improvements are happening. We need to build on those. The investments over the past few years have yielded results, but they need to be deepened and strengthened until the national health service is once again what people want it to be—the pride of this country and the envy of the world.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): What does the Prime Minister have to say to the nine of my constituents who have had to leave Rothwell House care home in Leighton Buzzard because it cannot afford the new £30,000 lift required by the Care Standards Act 2000 when all the residents can use the existing stair lift quite happily?

The Prime Minister: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that that is precisely why extra investment is required in social care. *[Interruption.]* No, I am sorry, the answer to the problems of social care in this country is not to diminish the standards necessary to provide decent care. The answer is to keep those standards high, to improve them, and to put additional sums of money into social care, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be supporting what the Chancellor says today, rather than opposing it.

Q5. [46074] **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): The Prime Minister will be aware that one of the main obstacles to furthering the middle east peace process is the widespread perception that when outrages such as Jenin happen, the western response seems to be muted, whereas there would be loud condemnation if they happened in any other country. What is he doing to dispel that perception and move the middle east peace process forward?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear throughout that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories. We have also made it clear, however, that the Palestinians should cease their acts of violence and terrorism. Both those things need to happen. Without repeating all the things that I said in the House last week, I say to my hon. Friend that I believe it is essential that we relaunch a genuine political process that binds not only the main two parties to the middle east peace process but the Arab world, the European Union and the wider international community. I hope that such a process can be relaunched soon, because it is the only way. Irrespective of all the things that are happening in the immediate term in Israel and in the Palestinian territories,

it is absolutely obvious that without relaunching a proper political process, there is no prospect of bringing hope or peace to that region.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell the House by how much council tax has increased in Sedgefield this year?

The Prime Minister: The average council tax for people in Sedgefield is round about £740.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Council tax in Sedgefield is up by more than 13 per cent., which is six times the rate of inflation. Band D council tax in the Prime Minister's constituency is now the highest in the country. It is the very highest council tax that anybody is paying. As a council tax payer in Sedgefield, will the Prime Minister now tell us who he blames for this—the Labour council or the terrible Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: First, the right hon. Gentleman talks about band D in relation to Sedgefield. That is a rather typical Conservative thing to do, because only 6 per cent. of the properties in Sedgefield are in band D. If we take 100 per cent. of the properties there, the average council tax is well below many of the high council tax averages that we find in Conservative areas. If the right hon. Gentleman does not want councils to spend this money, perhaps he will tell us what services he wants them to cut.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That is rather typical of the Prime Minister. He did not really want to answer that question. Perhaps he has a vested interest. Simply put, both the Labour council and the Labour Government are to blame. The Labour Government are the ones who have increased the costs to councils, through the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Labour councils cost people more across the board. In Labour council areas, band D council tax is at least £135 more than in Conservative council areas. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why the Liberal Democrats are looking so smug. It is at least £160 more in Liberal Democrat council areas. Does not that show that Labour councils, and their Liberal friends, cost more and deliver less?

The Prime Minister: No, it does not. I pointed out a moment ago that only 6 per cent. of Sedgefield properties are in band D. It is necessary for the right hon. Gentleman to concentrate on that 6 per cent., but perhaps I can concentrate on the other 94 per cent. The average council tax in Sedgefield is actually well below those of many Conservative authorities.

I return to the point that I made a moment ago. We have increased by 20 per cent. the real-terms spending for social services in Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat council areas, whereas it was cut during the last few years of the Conservative Government. If the right hon. Gentleman wants us to provide the extra services that his hon. Friends are calling for, surely he should support us in increasing the investment in social services and in the national health service. Of course, what he wants to do is complain about the council tax on the one hand, and complain about services being depleted on the other, yet he refuses to back the extra investment necessary to build those services up.

Q6. [46075] **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): Although I of course welcome today's news that unemployment has fallen again, my right hon. Friend will be aware that manufacturing still faces problems as regards exchange rates in general and the euro exchange rate in particular. No matter what is done about productivity gains, efficiency gains and new understandings between management and unions, our exporting manufacturers still face a barrier that is sometimes difficult to surmount. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what the Government are doing to help manufacturing in those circumstances?

The Prime Minister: First, it is important that we welcome the fall in unemployment, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for doing so.

Manufacturing industry has been through a particularly difficult time for the reasons that he gives, although there are recent signs of some improvement. The most important thing for manufacturing industry and for the economy as a whole is stability and growth. It is precisely because of the way in which the Chancellor has managed the economy that we have ended up in a situation where this country has effectively weathered the potential economic downturn better than any other country of a similar size in the world. We now have the lowest inflation and the lowest interest rates that we have had for many, many decades. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are talking about recession. Under this Government we have had growth; under them we had the two worst recessions in living memory.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Given the Prime Minister's sudden but touching personal interest in the subject, will he tell the House realistically how long he thinks that Mr. David Beckham would have to wait for an operation on his foot under the national health service?

The Prime Minister: I must say to the hon. Gentleman that if anything indicates the state of the Conservative party today, it is that question.

Q7. [46076] **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd): The Prime Minister will be aware of the £6.5 billion upgrade of the west coast main line and is probably aware of a proposed £6.5 billion new route from Edinburgh to London. Will he ensure that there is fairness in the allocation of scarce resources in transport and therefore support the upgrading of the Crewe to Holyhead line, which is hopefully to be electrified, to ensure that we get the tourists, investors and freight that are so necessary to our north Wales economy?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give my hon. Friend all the commitments that he wants for that individual line, but certainly the additional investment in transport will mean that we can considerably upgrade our rail network in every part of the country. I am afraid that I shall have to delay for some time before being able to make any commitments on his particular line.

Q8. [46077] **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): Were the six Parliamentary Private Secretaries who

yesterday voted against Government education policy, and said that specialist schools should be forced to reduce the proportion of pupils that they can select on ability, right?

The Prime Minister: No, I believe that the position of the Government was right.

Q9. [46078] **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): Last summer, one of my constituents lost her partner in a car crash. The Teachers' Pensions Agency is refusing to pay her a pension because although she lived with her partner for 10 years and they had children together, they were not married. Is my right hon. Friend aware that almost 90 per cent. of private sector pensions would pay out in those circumstances, but less than a third of public sector pensions do so? Will he put pressure on the trustees of our public sector pensions to rectify that clear injustice?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a valuable and important point. I express my sympathy to his constituent for her loss.

The Government have made it clear that we are ready to extend benefits in the event of death to unmarried partners in any schemes where members wish that and are prepared to meet the cost. Obviously there is a limit to how much can be funded by the taxpayer, but we are trying to facilitate it within the circumstances of individual schemes.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Is the Prime Minister aware of the growing concern in Northern Ireland about the thought that prisoners—not prisoners, but terrorists on the run—might be returned under special conditions at a time when nothing is being done to restore the exiles who have been put out of the Province by the IRA?

Is he also aware of the great concern that although the president of Sinn Fein-IRA can hold a commemoration dinner and prepare a memorial for terrorists slain in the campaign, the British Government apparently expect soldiers' relatives to pay £100 for memorials for their soldiers who have been slain?

The Prime Minister: We will come forward with proposals about the so-called on-the-runs at the proper time. I have nothing further to add to what I said about that a moment ago. I understand the position of the relatives of those who lost their lives in the service of the RUC or the armed forces in Northern Ireland. They performed a brave and courageous service and we are well aware of our debt of gratitude to them.

I shall look into the specific point that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) made, but we have tried to make significant financial provision. I understand the sensitivity of the issue at this time in Northern Ireland and we will concern ourselves with all the matters that he raised.

Q10. [46079] **Martin Linton** (Battersea): Will the Prime Minister ensure through the action group on street crime that Operation Safer Streets continues not only for the rest of the year but with the same number of police officers? Figures that were published today show that has already succeeded in reducing street crime by 17 per cent. in Wandsworth in March compared with the same month last year and by 20 per cent. throughout the safer street boroughs. Will he include Wandsworth in the street crime initiative areas that are to pilot the new powers under section 130 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 to detain 12 to 16-year-olds who commit crimes when on bail?

The Prime Minister: I understand that Wandsworth is one of the 10 areas that have been chosen for the initiative. We want to ensure that street crime is comprehensively tackled because although crime overall has fallen, there has been an epidemic of street crime, often linked to mobile phones, by very young offenders. We are trying to ensure that we get the proper measures for the police and the courts to deal with it. My hon. Friend is right to say that we need to ensure that the investment is also there. Perhaps he will be patient about that.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Some Conservative Members would have the Prime Minister go to war with Iraq before the Chancellor can finish his Budget speech; some Labour Members would have Saddam Hussein round for tea and crumpets. What is the Prime Minister's thinking? Will there be a debate on a motion in the House before there is any conflict in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I hope that that question did not take long to prepare. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to describe those who believe that Saddam Hussein presents a genuine threat as warmongers or those with hesitations as friends of Saddam Hussein. There is a serious issue to debate. We have made it clear why we believe that Saddam Hussein poses a threat and that weapons of mass destruction are a serious problem. However, I have also said many times that we will proceed carefully and deliberately, not precipitately, and that we will ensure that the House is properly consulted.

Q11. [46080] **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If the British people want better health services, they know that they will have to pay more through charges, private insurance or taxation. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Wanless report that charges or private insurance would be more expensive for middle-class families than taxes, and would provide poorer services for them and for poor people who could not afford to pay charges or go private?

The Prime Minister: The report that was published this morning is not the only one. There is also the report from the King's Fund and the BMA report, which was published some time ago. All made it clear that they believed that if we accept the need for more resources for health care, the fairest and most efficient method is through the national health service. It is important that those who support alternative systems spell out their costs. The social insurance system of France and Germany, where there are enormous problems because of rising costs, and the American system, whereby people have to pay a large sum of money out of their own pockets and

pay charges without getting the necessary health insurance in many cases, mean a heavy cost on the individual. We are not considering whether we should fund our health care system better; everyone accepts that we need to do that. We must consider the fairest and best method. We believe that it is through the national health service.

Q12. [46081] **Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): On jobs and manufacturing, does the Prime Minister know that Bright Steels, a specialist steel manufacturer in my constituency, recently made 60 workers redundant? That is a large proportion of a small firm's work force. It blames the recession in manufacturing and the proposed import tariffs by the United States on British steel. Does he understand that people in manufacturing in this country will judge the Chancellor's Budget on the support it gives the manufacturing base? Will he continue to press President Bush not to include specialist steels in the proposed import tariffs?

The Prime Minister: Of course I shall continue to make that case very strongly to President Bush. I also say to the hon. Gentleman that I sympathise very much with his constituents who have lost their jobs in being made redundant. However, the problems of manufacturing have been acute over the past number of years because of the very strength of the pound against the euro. What is important is to recognise that, for manufacturing industry and, indeed, all industry in this country, the single best thing we can do is never return to the days of boom and bust, where in the early 1990s—*[Interruption.]* Well, I am glad that Opposition Members shout at that, because it gives me an opportunity to remind the House of what it was like when they were in charge of the economy. We had interest rates of 15 per cent. for a year, interest rates of 10 per cent. for four years, millions of manufacturing jobs were lost and unemployment was over 3 million. Fortunately, with this new Labour Government, those days are long gone.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Budget Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that copies of the Budget resolutions will be available in the Vote Office at the end of the Chancellor's speech.

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Five years ago, this Government's first Budget set out long-term objectives and far-reaching reforms to achieve economic stability and higher employment. And today I can report that, in the last year, Britain has experienced the lowest inflation and the lowest interest rates for 40 years; for the first time for half a century, unemployment in Britain is lower than in America, lower than in Japan and lower than in the rest of Europe; and in the year just ended, Britain had the highest growth of any of our major competitors.

And just as in 1997, we had the strength to set a course, not just for a year, but for a Parliament, so too in this Budget—the first of the Parliament—our task is to address, through reform, three major long-term challenges: the challenge of enterprise, with new incentives to raise investment and to reward entrepreneurship; the challenge of family prosperity for all, with a new child tax credit paid to mothers for all families with incomes up to £58,000; the challenge of renewing our public services, with, for a reformed NHS, a secure long-term financial foundation.

And with those whose priority is fairness recognising the need for enterprise, and those whose priority is enterprise accepting the need for fairness with strong public services, I believe that, just as Britain built in the last Parliament a national consensus for stability and employment, Britain can in this Parliament build a consensus that we should advance enterprise and fairness, and do so together.

I turn first to the economic outlook.

From growth in 2000 of 3½ per cent., the G7 economies as a whole grew by just 1 per cent. in 2001.

World trade, which grew by 12 per cent. in 2000, failed to grow at all in 2001. Manufacturing output fell across the world, falling by 3.6 per cent. in the G7 countries, 4.3 per cent. in America, 7.6 per cent. in Japan and in Britain by 2.3 per cent: it was a decline all round that started in the American information technology and electronics sector, mirrored in Britain by a 45 per cent. fall in semiconductors output and a 54 per cent. fall in telecommunications.

Last autumn, in the wake of 11 September, the world saw a fall in business confidence, declining markets and volatile oil prices—major and simultaneous challenges to the stability and continued growth of the British economy.

In the past, when the world faced a downturn, it was Britain that usually entered weaker and suffered longer with higher unemployment—successive Governments unable to sustain economic growth because they were constrained by already high inflation and high borrowing.

This time, however, from a platform of low inflation and fiscal discipline, both delivered through a new monetary and fiscal framework, we have been able to steer a steady course of stability. The Bank of England has been able to adjust policy at the right time and in the right way, last year cutting interest rates seven times. Supported by a fiscal policy, we have, despite the difficulties, been able to safeguard both stability and growth.

At the last Budget, we forecast that growth in 2001 would be within a range of 2¼ to 2¾ per cent., and we based our public finance projections on 2¼ per cent. I can tell the House that, while Germany grew by only 0.6 per cent., America by 1.2 per cent., the euro area by 1.5 per cent. and Japan contracted by 0.5 per cent., Britain grew by 2.2 per cent.

I have written today to the Governor of the Bank of England stating that, in 2002, we will continue to pursue a symmetrical inflation target of 2.5 per cent.—a target that, because it takes deflation as seriously as inflation, is not only pro-stability but also pro-growth. Monetary policy will continue to be backed by a sound and long-term approach to fiscal policy. Nothing that we do or propose in this Budget will undermine that platform of stability.

At the time of the pre-Budget report, we drew attention to the downside risks to world recovery, not just from the possibility of further terrorist incidents and instability in the oil price, which has since December ranged from $17 to $27 per barrel, but from the durability of the US recovery. I said then that, while it was important to remain vigilant, we were cautiously optimistic.

Increasingly, independent forecasters now expect the world economy to grow faster—the United States to grow by 2.6 per cent., the euro area by 1.3 per cent., Japan to contract by more than 1 per cent., but the G7 to grow by 1.6 per cent. overall. We hold to the cautious optimism of our forecast of November—that, while meeting our inflation target, Britain will achieve growth from 2 to 2½ per cent. this year, rising in 2003 to growth of 3 to 3½ per cent., with growth in 2004 from 2½ to 3 per cent.

Over the last few years, independent forecasters have revised upwards the trend rate of growth of the British economy, with the majority suggesting a range of 2.5 to 2.8 per cent. The International Monetary Fund's forecast is at the upper end of this range. The Treasury now estimates trend growth at 2¾ per cent. but, as before, we will continue to base our public finance forecasts on a more cautious assumption for economic growth—2½ per cent., which the National Audit Office has audited as "reasonable and cautious".

While the British economy has been stable, it can and must be stronger, its growth not only sustained but more balanced. In the last year, as world trade fell, consumer spending and public investment supported growth in the British economy. Now, as world trade turns around and industrial production rises, our forecasts show consumer spending returning closer to trend as we achieve more balanced growth.

We expect in 2002 world trade to grow by 2½ per cent., and in 2003 by 8½ per cent. UK manufacturing output returned to growth in February and, while global risks remain, we expect further rises in the coming months. Business investment is expected to follow, with growth in investment rising in 2003 to between 5½ and 6¼ per cent.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

I now turn to the public finances. Our fiscal rules are set not for a year or even two years, but for the entire economic cycle. And because from 1997 we tightened fiscal policy by 4.5 per cent. of national income, we have been able to reduce debt well below 40 per cent., not just in one year but across the economic cycle.

Thus, while the pre-Budget report showed that tax receipts were £7 billion less last year—and £10 billion less this year—than forecast because of the global economic downturn, the underlying state of our public finances remains strong.

In the year to last April, we repaid £37 billion of debt. In 1997, net debt was 44 per cent. of British national income. Last year, it was down to 30.4 per cent.—in contrast to 41 per cent. in the US, 53 per cent. in the euro area and nearly 60 per cent. in Japan.

As we approach the decisions of this Budget, Britain's debt has been reduced to the lowest level of national income in the G7 countries and the lowest of all our major European competitors. Debt interest payments were running at £29 billion a year when we came to power, with more money paid on debt interest than was spent on all our schools. I can now report that debt interest, which fell to £26 billion in 2000, fell again to £22 billion in 2001 and we expect it to fall again this year to £21 billion—just 2 per cent. of our national income.

So, just as we paid off more debt in one year than all previous Governments paid off in all the previous half century, so this year debt interest payments will take less of our national income than at any time in nearly a century—since the beginning of the first world war.

In the early 1990s, imprudent assumptions about debt and related mistakes in fiscal policy contributed to the boom and bust that did so much damage. So today I propose to reinforce our commitment to stability and sustainable public finances by committing, now and for the future, to publish figures for core debt, prudently adjusting debt for the effects of the economic cycle.

Our approach since 1997 also includes cautious assumptions about equity prices, oil prices, unemployment and VAT receipts. And while some have suggested that, having established a prudent approach in the last Parliament, we no longer need to plan on the same rigorous basis for this Parliament, I can tell the House that, in the coming spending review, we will maintain our cautious assumptions and meet our rules, even on the cautious case.

Indeed, today, we will do more than that.

In the interests of fiscal discipline, I will not only maintain our cautious rules and lock in the tight fiscal stance this year and over the next two years that we set out in the pre-Budget Report, but I will go further and implement—compared with the pre-Budget report—a small tightening of the fiscal stance over the next two years.

After all the measures that I will announce today, the current budget, which was £10.6 billion in surplus last year, is projected to be in surplus this year by £3 billion, and in future years by £7 billion, £9 billion, £7 billion and £9 billion.

Net public borrowing was £1.3 billion last financial year and is projected to be £11 billion this year and, in successive years, £13 billion, £13 billion, £17 billion and £18 billion, as we borrow to invest well within our sustainable investment rule—that debt be at or below 40 per cent. of national income over the cycle.

Debt, which was 30.4 per cent. of national income last year, is projected to be 30.2 per cent. this year, and, in the following financial years, 30.4 per cent., 30.4 per cent., 30.7 per cent. and 31 per cent.

All my budget and public spending decisions will be made within this framework of fiscal discipline.

By keeping a steady and firm hand on our public finances, and by keeping debt and debt interest payments low, we continue to free up more resources for our public services.

And after all the Budget measures that I will announce today, I am able to meet our fiscal rules even on the cautious case and set a new public spending envelope for the years up to 2006, while being able to release an extra £4 billion for public spending next year.

Precise allocations for departmental expenditure limits will be made in the forthcoming spending review, but as we make provision for increases in public spending, we will set three conditions. First, money must be matched with modernisation that will lead to results. Secondly, just as sustained economic growth demands responsibility in setting private sector pay, so a sustained commitment to better public services demands responsibility in setting public sector pay. And thirdly, at all times—now and in the future—we will never compromise our commitment to meet our fiscal rules and disciplines.

The monetary and fiscal figures that I am publishing today also show that we are well within the Maastricht criteria for the euro and, as the House knows, the Treasury is undertaking the preliminary and technical work necessary to allow our assessment of the economic tests.

Our first long-term challenge is, through higher productivity and investment and a stronger national consensus on the importance of enterprise, to build a more prosperous Britain.

Now, as we press ahead with the supply-side reforms to remove barriers to growth—the new competition policy, the new approach to physical planning policy, new rules for work permits, our education reforms—my focus in this Budget is on two further sets of measures that encourage higher levels of innovation and investment, and that help small and growing businesses.

Over recent years, British business investment levels have risen significantly, from just over 10 per cent. of national income to nearly 14 per cent.

And to encourage higher levels of investment we have, in past Budgets, cut corporation tax from 33p to 30p, the lowest in our history.

In this Budget—specifically to help British manufacturers invest in the technologies of the future—I have decided, following consultation, that we will legislate, for large companies, for a new volume-based research and development tax credit. That rate will be set at 25 per cent., and it is a £400 million boost to innovation and research in Britain and to modern manufacturing in our country.

To continue to build a modern corporation tax regime for British firms, operating as they are in a global economy, I will exempt companies from corporation tax on the gain from the sale of substantial shareholdings.

benefiting businesses by £150 million a year. I will modernise the tax treatment of intellectual property, giving further long-term savings to business of £200 million a year.

The UK's current treatment of branch capital means that some profitable foreign companies operating in the UK pay little or no tax on their profits here. So from 1 January, at a revenue gain of £350 million in its first full financial year, I will bring the treatment of capital for UK branches of foreign companies into line with international practice by applying similar corporation tax rules as America, Germany, France and most other major countries.

Small businesses account for half the economy's output and for 55 per cent. of all jobs in the private sector—over 10 million jobs in all. And the small firms of today can be the big firms of the future.

We want to see a more enterprising Britain where, in every region, more small businesses are starting up and where you can work your way up a ladder of opportunity—from employment to self-employment, from micro-business to growing business—with Government on businesses' side, as firms hire for the first time, as they invest, as they seek equity, as they export and as they grow.

A sound economy and low inflation provide the stability that people need to start a new enterprise. This Budget seeks to build from this a culture of entrepreneurship in every community.

In 1997, we cut the small companies tax rate from 23p to 21p. And then in 1998 we cut it again to 20p, and introduced a starting rate of 10p.

I propose in this, the first Budget of the new Parliament, to go further. The small companies tax rate will be cut yet again—from 20p to 19p. And I propose to do this with immediate effect, for this tax year 2002–03.

And to send out the strongest signal about the importance that we attach to small businesses and the creation of wealth I propose to reduce the 10p starting rate of corporation tax—also with immediate effect—from 10p to zero.

Small companies with taxable profits of less than £10,000 will pay no corporation tax.

With the starting rate of tax cut from 10p to zero and the small companies rate down from 23p in 1997 to 19p, this is now the most favourable corporation tax regime for small companies in any of the advanced industrial countries.

The Finance Bill will match this by legislating for a cut in capital gains tax, from this April, to 20 per cent. for business assets held for one year or more.

And for business assets held for more than two years, capital gains tax will be cut to 10 per cent.

In 1997, all transactions were subject to a 40p rate. From this year, three quarters of taxpayers with business assets will pay only a 10p rate, rewarding entrepreneurship and giving Britain overall a capital gains tax regime that is more favourable to enterprise than that of the United States.

Small firms have scarce resources and, having cut corporation and capital gains tax, I now propose to reform the administration of valued added tax for small businesses to abolish a set of regulations.

I start by removing, for thousands of small businesses, the burdensome requirement that has been in place since 1973 when VAT was introduced of having to record the VAT charged on each individual purchase and sale.

So, with immediate effect and for a total of half a million small businesses with turnovers of less than £100,000 a year, I am introducing a new flat-rate calculation for VAT payments. Rather than them filling in forms, we will introduce a flat-rate calculation that will save a typical small business hours of administration every year.

I can announce that, from next April, I plan to extend this scheme further to include almost half VAT-registered firms: in total 700,000 small firms with turnovers of up to £150,000 will be able to save time and form filling by making flat-rate VAT payments.

My second measure concerns automatic fines imposed by Customs and Excise. They are a source of grievance because they are often applied regardless of circumstances. So, for the same 700,000 small businesses, we will abolish automatic fines for late payment.

Thirdly, importers incur £175 million a year in unnecessary costs because they have to make up-front payment of VAT on goods imported into Britain even before they sell them to customers.

To cut those compliance costs and improve cash flow for businesses, I propose a new system—on the detail of which I will consult—under which we will allow approved companies to defer paying VAT on imports until they submit their VAT return.

Fourthly, automatic relief from VAT on bad debts is a persistent request from the small-business community, and until now no Government has [illegible]ded. When a business has to account for VAT on a sale to another company but that company does not pay up, VAT recovery has proved difficult. It is costly, and it is time-consuming. I therefore propose a new rule for bad debt relief to give businesses an automatic entitlement to recover the VAT after six months.

Fifthly, I will offer small companies direct help with administration of their tax and payroll. The Carter report recognised the strong long-term case for small firms bringing their payroll systems online, and the equally strong case for cash help to enable them to do so. So we will set aside £40 million in the first year, and £110 million in the two subsequent years—£420 million in all—to give direct cash help to small firms going online, as we move in stages over the next eight years to universal e-filing.

Last month, we accepted the Competition Commission's recommendations for more competition in banking services—and, in the interim, for free banking services or interest paid on current accounts to small businesses—but we can do more to help not just the start-up firm but the hard-working family business, by creating a level playing field in every respect.

Thousands of employers are unable to recruit the skilled staff they need because training is so poor. Employees, employers and the Government must each accept their responsibilities, and we will finance pilot projects where, in return for Government's providing free access to training courses and support for wage costs, participating firms give staff time off to gain new skills. I can today respond to joint work by the CBI and the TUC

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by announcing an additional £30 million so that more small businesses in our country can now reach "investor in people" standards.

Small businesses are the motor for future growth everywhere, but nowhere more than in high unemployment areas where, starting in our schools curriculum, we must do more to ensure that an enterprise culture can flourish. By supporting new business activities for people and places that prosperity has so far passed by, we will advance enterprise and fairness together. So in 2,000 designated enterprise neighbourhoods we will supplement the small business tax cuts I have just announced with two further tax cuts.

In the pre-Budget report, I implemented the first stage of stamp-duty relief in 2,000 of our high-unemployment areas: the abolition of stamp duty on all home and business property transactions up to £150,000. Now, for commercial transactions, I will seek state aid approval to abolish this limit—and, therefore, stamp duty in these areas—altogether.

And from this month, to match our other measures to regenerate local high streets and urban estates—the 5 per cent. VAT that we have for residential conversions, the 100 per cent. first-year tax allowances for converting vacant space above shops into flats, and the accelerated 150 per cent. tax relief for cleaning up land that is contaminated—we will introduce a new community investment tax credit backed up by a community development venture capital fund that will provide an additional £40 million to invest in our most deprived areas.

There is also no necessary conflict between growing the economy and protecting the environment. There is a huge potential for British firms, small and large, to capture new world markets by investing in environmentally friendly technologies and creating new businesses and jobs as a result. We now propose a series of new incentives for businesses investing in energy efficiency. I can announce that, to boost the use of combined heat and power in all areas of the country, we will exempt all electricity produced by this technology from the climate change levy. Electricity generation from coal methane offers new employment opportunities as well as environmental gains, and this summer it will be exempted also.

I can now extend capital allowances for further investment in green technologies at an enhanced rate of 100 per cent. that will strengthen, not weaken, our economy as we meet our Kyoto targets and make Britain a leader in this vast new global market that is emerging for green technologies. To encourage more environmentally friendly fuels I will, from next year, introduce a fuel duty incentive for sulphur-free fuel. Having already cut fuel duty for projects on hydrogen, biogas and methanol, I am now inviting British business to come forward with further proposals for pilots that would encourage new fuels in our country, and which we would support with fuel duty cuts and exemptions.

I am also announcing a cut of £55 in the licence fee for the least polluting vans, cuts of £30 for the least polluting cars, and cuts of up to £35 for motor cycles. Hauliers from overseas should pay their fair share towards the cost of using our roads, and I propose to go ahead with a road user charge for lorries that is distance-based, with offsetting tax cuts for the UK haulage industry. The Financial Secretary will consult with the industry on the precise details of the scheme.

North sea oil is vital to Britain. For North sea oil, my aim is to deliver a tax regime that promotes long-term investment while giving a fair return to the British people, so the Finance Bill will legislate for two changes. To raise revenues, I will introduce a supplementary charge at a rate of 10 per cent. on North sea oil profits. At the same time, to support new investment, I will raise first year capital allowances from 25 per cent. to a full 100 per cent. and, subject to consultation, we will set a date for abolishing in its entirety the royalty on North sea oil, so we can create a stable long-term framework into the next Parliament for the next stage of the development of the North sea.

While in each Budget I have proposed the abolition of one tax, in this Budget—in addition to abolishing North sea royalties—I propose for consideration extending the successful betting and pools tax regime to bingo, to tax only the profits and not the players, so that I can abolish the tax paid by millions of bingo players in this country.

To encourage one group of small businesses, the nation's small breweries—often village pubs, some two centuries old—I have decided that the duty paid on their own beer will be halved. This is a cut equal to 14p off each pint, to be implemented for village pubs and small breweries by this summer—in time for the World cup. It will also be available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

From 28 April, premium package coolers which contain spirits not wine will be taxed not as low-alcohol wines, but as they should always have been, at the same rate as spirits.

To ensure fairness for taxpayers and businesses, we will act to close tax loopholes and be vigilant against tax avoidance. I have decided to act, with immediate effect, on the avoidance of stamp duty on property, to put an end to three artificial schemes for VAT avoidance, and I am reviewing the complex rules on residence and domicile.

At the very core of creating a more enterprising and fairer Britain is our policy of moving people from welfare into work, and this morning's unemployment figures confirm that, since 1997, there are now 1.5 million more people in work in our country, giving Britain the best unemployment figures for 25 years. In the mid-1980s, 350,000 young people aged 18 to 24 had been unemployed for more than a year. Today, the figure is just 4,700.

Having weathered the world downturn of the last year, Britain is moving closer to our goal of full employment than for a generation. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and I are agreed that we must not relax, but accelerate our efforts in pursuit of that goal.

Starting two weeks from now, in six, and by December in 20, of Britain's high-unemployment areas, the introduction of the StepUp scheme will oblige the long-term unemployed to accept a guaranteed job which will offer, instead of the dole, secure waged employment. I can announce also that we will, in London and selected cities, match this new regime by introducing mandatory work preparation courses for the long-term unemployed.

Many who have come on to the unemployment register recently have a history of not being able to hold down jobs, so starting in pilot areas, unemployed people who

are recurrently in and out of work will now come within the same rights and responsibilities of the new deal. In return for new obligations, there will be new opportunities to ensure that work will pay significantly more than benefits.

Building on the increase in the minimum wage from October, working families with children will now have a guaranteed minimum income of £237 a week, more than £6 an hour for a 35-hour week—£97 more than income support, and substantially more even when all benefits are taken into account.

Lone parents working 16 hours will be guaranteed £179 a week, as well as help with child care. Working full-time, they will be guaranteed £237 a week, making work pay £70 a week more than income support.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will shortly announce the details of a national campaign jointly with employers, lone parent organisations and Jobcentre Plus to make single parents aware of the jobs on offer, the higher income now possible and the child care help available, backed up by a new mentoring scheme for lone parents. A single person with a disability moving into work of 35 hours will be guaranteed £194 a week, £22 a week more than today.

I want also to announce the details of the next reform to make work pay: to extend the benefits of the working families tax credit, currently received by 1.3 million families in this country, 450,000 more than received family credit.

For the first time, single persons and couples aged 25 or over without children will be eligible for in-work support that makes jobs pay. We know the problems that particularly those over 50 face not just in getting work but in the doubts they express about whether it is worth their while working. The working tax credit now tackles this problem. Couples with wages of less than £280 a week, or £14,000 a year, and single persons with wages of less than £200 a week, or £10,500 a year, stand to gain from the new credit.

For a couple with no children, full-time work will pay not just the minimum rate of £130 a week under the minimum wage but £53 more than that at £183 a week. For a single person, work will pay at least £154 a week. So, in return for the responsibility to take up the opportunities that are available, the working tax credit now fulfils our promise that we will make work pay.

I turn now to pensions. Last November, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and I set out the new financial measures to ensure pensioners have dignity in retirement. No matter what the rate of current inflation, the basic state pension will increase by at least £100 a year every year, and this year it is rising by even more than that: £3 a week for single pensioners, £4.80 for couples.

From next year, 5 million pensioners stand to gain in addition from the pension credit by on average £400 a year more per household: that is £8 a week extra. For the poorest single pensioner, extra help will guarantee a minimum income of £98.15 this year and at least £100 next year.

For pensioners who have occupational pensions, small earnings or savings and who pay tax, I am also able to do more with my announcements today. The age-related personal allowance will be raised in 2003–04 far faster than inflation. An elderly taxpayer will be able to set the first £6,610 of their income against tax, and the first £6,740 for those aged 75 or more. As a result of this rise in personal allowance, 170,000 pensioners will no longer be liable to pay income tax. As we maintain the free television licences for all pensioners aged 75 and over, the winter fuel allowance will be paid this year at £200 and in every year of this Parliament. With the minimum income guarantee, the new pension credit and the new pensioner tax allowances, the average pensioner household is now £1,150 better off even after inflation than in 1997.

Following this period when we have been so powerfully reminded of the enduring contribution of public service by our older generation, we are determined to give more opportunities for community service, especially among young people. Later this year, the Home Secretary and I will publish a joint discussion document on fiscal and other changes we can make to promote volunteering and community service.

Gift aid now provides a 28 per cent. addition to every donation by taxpayers to recognised charities, and that is designed to encourage more giving. I can announce that taxpayers will be able to carry back tax relief on their donations to the previous year and, from 2004, taxpayers filing a return will be able to direct the Inland Revenue, which will send any refund to a charity of the taxpayer's choice.

Amateur sports clubs are the mainstay of local sports in our country and they are the pride of every strong community. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I are determined to do all we can to support sport throughout the whole country, so, backdated to 1 April this year, there will be new tax reliefs, the details of which are published today, to enable amateur sports clubs to reduce tax bills to gain additional benefit from donations that are made by local supporters. To boost local sports further, we will match that tax relief with an extra £20 million for renovation and improvement of local sports club facilities.

This Budget is about building a Britain of greater enterprise and greater fairness, and nothing is more important to an enterprising, fairer Britain than that, through education and through support for the family, we invest in the potential of every single child in our country.

A family friendly tax and benefit system should be founded, as Beveridge wrote in his 1942 report, on the principles that nothing should be done to remove from parents the responsibility of maintaining their children, and that it is in the national interest to help all parents to discharge their responsibility properly. But for years there was no recognition in the tax system even of the existence of children or of the sheer costs of bringing them up, and our tax and benefit system had ceased to reflect our values.

This Budget applies the Beveridge principles to the realities and needs of modern family life. Today, many families rely on two incomes and most women work. Some of the greatest pressures that parents face were almost unknown to Beveridge's time: the loss of income because one parent ceases employment and is at home or works part-time after the birth of a child, and the costs of child care when the mother goes out to work.

A tax and benefit system that puts families first in the modern world would recognise not just the family as the bedrock of society and the rights and responsibilities of

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parents, but the very real pressures that parents face right up the income scale. It would materially help them balance the needs of work and family, and it would be generous enough to ensure for each child a good start in life.

To create a truly family friendly tax system, we must integrate tax and benefits. Instead of the old argument between those who favoured only universal benefits and those who supported narrow means-testing, our reform ensures one seamless system that supports all families through universal child benefit, recognises the costs of raising children that middle-income as well as lower-income families face, and gives most to those who need it most—those on the lowest incomes.

I have decided that, in line with universal child benefit, all of this support will be paid to the main carer, normally the mother—the best way to support families, to get money directly to the children and to tackle child poverty. To support that, I will make one of the biggest single investments in children and families since the welfare state was formed in the 1940s.

I propose £2.5 billion of extra support for families—a family tax cut that will help nearly 6 million families. As a result, the direct tax burden on a family on average earnings with two children will be below 20 per cent.—lower than it was in any previous year since 1979. I can now give the details.

Because the tax system should recognise all the everyday pressures on middle as well as lower-income families when bringing up children, the new child credit will be available right up the income scale for families with incomes of £58,000 or below, and for the first year of a child's life, families earning up to £66,000 will receive some help.

With our maternity reforms, including the rise in maternity benefits to £100 in April 2003 and the extension of maternity pay to 28 weeks, families will receive up to £2,000 extra to help cover the costs of the first year of a child's life. Because the test is now overall family income, the income of one-earner families is treated in the same way as two-earner families, and 90 per cent. of families will benefit from the new system.

In recognising the pressures on families, I have decided on additional help for child care as part of the new system. To deal with a particular grievance of parents who work irregular hours or have disabled children, I have decided that support for child care costs should include help with approved child care in one's own home. Under the new tax credit system, a family on £35,000 a year with two children could receive child care help of as much as £50 a week.

In return for that, we will also do everything to ensure parental responsibilities to children are met. Where there are lone parents under 18 who cannot live with their family, the policy is that, instead of independent tenancies, they will have supported housing that combines accommodation with counselling and help with child care. In the minority of cases where a parenting order has to be imposed, checks will be made to ensure that, as well as proper supervision, parents are meeting their children's basic practical needs. With these changes, I can now set a rate for the new child credit which, introduced in April next year, will give proper recognition of the costs of raising a child.

For all families with overall incomes of £50,000 or less, the child tax credit with child benefit will be £1,400 a year—or £26.50 a week—for the first child. This compares to just £11.05 in 1997. For those in the £50,000 to £58,000 range, minimum support is £800 a year, maximum support is £1,400.

Our changes will mean that, from next April, mothers who wish to leave work and be with their children at home, but have found it financially difficult to do so will now find it financially easier. For single-earner families, more help is now available and for those on incomes between £43,000 and £58,000 help is now available for the first time—an essential part of a more family friendly tax and benefit system.

And for 2 million of the poorest families in this country, child support—which was just £28 a week in 1997—will now be £54.25. That is for the first child, and it is a near doubling of support since then. Support for a two-child family will be £92.75. And because the child credit must ensure that the poorest families share in rising prosperity, our policy will be to raise these child rates at least in line with earnings for the rest of the Parliament.

As we pursue our goals, all families will receive more support for bringing up their children. Families who need it most will receive most help when it is most needed. This is a policy for fairness to families throughout our country.

I turn now to our public services. With debt and debt interest payments down, it has been possible, even with lower than expected corporate revenues, to maintain our three-year spending plans for hospitals, schools, transport and public services, and to respond to the challenges of foot and mouth in rural areas and, since 11 September, to meet the challenges at home and abroad while still meeting our fiscal rules and disciplines.

Since 11 September, we have made provision of £50 million for domestic security responsibilities and, over the last year, £950 million for defence. We will continue to meet our responsibilities internationally and to the armed services of this country. In the last year, an additional £120 million has been allocated for the work that the Secretary of State for International Development does in providing emergency aid.

This summer we will set spending plans for every Department until 2006 and, in the coming spending review, education will receive the priority to deliver further substantial improvements, not just in our schools but also in our universities and colleges. Having raised the share of education in our national income during the last Parliament, we are pledged to increase significantly the share of national income devoted to education over the course of this Parliament.

In advance of the announcements in the spending review, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is announcing today that, for this year, additional payments for investment will be made direct to every school in the country and every head teacher. For a typical school, total direct payments to secondary head teachers will rise from £98,000 last year to £114,000 this year. And payments to a typical primary school will rise from £33,700 last year to £39,300 this year—money that can be spent on the school's priorities, by the school and by the head teacher and the staff themselves.

Overall levels of crime have fallen in the last five years, according to both the police recorded crime statistics and the British crime survey. But there is a serious problem

with levels of street crime and associated offences of violence. No kind of crime, and no level of crime, is acceptable. And it is not acceptable that repeat offenders are continually bailed or, when convicted, not given appropriate sentences through lack of prison places and secure accommodation for juveniles.

For street crime, policing and counter-terrorism, £100 million more has been drawn down from the criminal justice reserve, and another £180 million on top of that is being allocated this year, including £110 million extra from the reserve.

I now turn to the NHS. The fundamental long-term choice that our generation must make is whether the national consensus that existed for the last half century for an NHS freely accessible to all is to be renewed for the years ahead. What we decide will not only determine the condition of our public services but define the character of our country.

The report by Derek Wanless states that the NHS needs, in support of reform and modernisation, a long-term sustainable financial framework, and it sets out the financial needs for the next two decades, starting with a five-year period of high and sustained growth and, once we have tackled decades of underinvestment, moving to lower rates of growth—4.4 to 5.6 per cent, then in the next five years 2.8 to 4 per cent., and then in the final five years 2.4 to 3.5 per cent. a year in real terms—for the three five-year periods after 2008.

The NHS 10-year reform plan proposed the local devolution of power and, in time, 75 per cent. of NHS budgets, to primary care trusts; new national standards for treating cancer, heart and other diseases; a modern system for evaluating new drugs; a commission for health improvement, reporting on performance; proposed new contracts for consultants, family doctors and an agenda for change for nurses and other staff; and in partnership with the private sector, 71 major hospital developments are either completed or are now being planned and built.

Reform and investment will bring booked appointments also for operations and are reducing maximum waiting times in stages from 18 months, then to 15, then to 12 and then six and three months. I said at the time of the pre-Budget report that the pre-condition of new resources was reform. And, in furtherance of the NHS plan, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will announce tomorrow for England the following: new financial incentives for hospital performance; greater freedom for high-performing hospitals and trusts; powers and resources devolved to front-line staff in primary care trusts; reform of social services care for the elderly; and a series of measures increasing choice for patients.

In order to make sure that money invested yields the best results, for the first time in the history of the NHS the Health Secretary will enshrine in statute independent audit, independent inspection, and independent scrutiny of patient complaints—with a duty to account and report to the public on money spent and standards achieved.

In considering reforms I have also considered the hypothecation of revenues to the NHS. But I have concluded that it would make the public services subject to the ups and downs of the economic cycle and unpredictable changes in revenues. And it might achieve the opposite of what its supporters and the NHS needs: a sound long-term and sustainable stream of funding.

It is right, however, to show where money is spent and the results achieved. In future an annual report to Parliament, prepared by the new independent auditor, will account for the money allocated to the NHS, where it has been spent and what the results of the expenditure have been. This will be accompanied by local reports stating, for each local community, the link between money spent and results attained.

Everybody agrees—indeed, there is an all-party consensus—that in the years to come we, as a nation, will have to spend more on health care and the question is not whether we have to pay more but how we pay more. While we believe that the best provision is through general taxation, the alternatives are social insurance, private insurance, or charging where people would still pay but pay directly. There is no free way of increasing health service spending and the question for Britain today is whether a case has been made for moving to paying through social insurance, private insurance or charging.

The Budget and the review's documents published today contain very detailed information on alternative systems of financing: funding by private insurance where, in the case of the USA, family premiums average around £100 a week and are set to rise next year on average by £13 a week, and because of its cost it is a system that insures only some of the people for some of their care; funding by social insurance whose narrower base for contributions means—in France, for example—the typical employer pays £60 a week; and charging for clinical services which also means patients paying rising bills for individual operations and treatments—basing our health care system on medical charges would, in my view, mean the sick paying more for being sick.

There is another consideration as we look to the long term. With advanced technology and life-saving drugs, the cost of treating one individual falling ill can today run into tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of pounds. Because none of us knows when costs could overwhelm our family budgets—if we had to pay privately—we seek to pool risks and, more than ever, it is important to have health coverage with the minimum of ifs, buts and small print, and exclusions from that insurance.

So it is the Government's view not just that the NHS system of funding is the most equitable, but that a reformed NHS, by offering the most comprehensive insurance policy to meet the rising costs of medical advances, can give British people the greater security they want. Although meeting the challenges and costs of future health care does cost money, it is my hope that we can renew a shared national consensus around an NHS freely accessible at the point of need, paid for from taxation, not for its own sake but for the purpose of delivering for British people a better public service. It is therefore my duty to set out what we, as a nation, need to pay in tax to fund, for the long term, the health service that we want.

Since 1997, by cutting debt, unemployment and waste, I have transferred £7 billion a year to the NHS and public services and I can announce that, in the year 2002–03, I am able to transfer on top of that an additional £1 billion through cutting debt and unemployment.

Prudent management and economic stability and growth have also made it possible to spend an additional £5 billion more each year on the NHS. Rising costs of technology and rising expectations mean that, if we are to

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put the NHS on a sustainable foundation for the long term, we as a nation will need to invest more than that. I know that as Chancellor I have not just to assure the British people that everything has been done to ensure prudent finances, but to ensure proper value for money, and to show that any tax paid is linked to the benefits received, and that it is fair.

Having agreed NHS reforms, including a new audit system that will link the money paid to benefits received, and having also resolved after deliberation to exempt the elderly and vulnerable, I have decided that, for the year 2003–04, there will be a freeze of the non-pensioner income tax personal allowance and national insurance thresholds at £4,615.

From April next year, there will be an additional 1 per cent. national insurance contribution from employers, employees and the self-employed on all earnings above £4,615. All other national insurance and income tax allowances will be indexed in line with inflation. Save for this 1 per cent. contribution, the ceiling of £30,420 remains in place and will be indexed in line with inflation to £30,940. But I believe it is right that when everyone—employees and employers—benefits from the insurance provided by the national health service, everyone who can should make a fair contribution.

The two tax changes that I have announced will mean that a full-time earner on median income of £21,400 a year—£410 a week—will pay £3.70 a week: those on higher incomes will pay more, those on lower income less. Those on 150 per cent. of median income—£32,100—will pay £5.75 a week. Those on 50 per cent. of median income—that is, £10,700—will pay £1.65 a week.

Employers will contribute a similar amount per employee. Families with children will pay less than that because of the introduction at a cost of £2.5 billion of the child tax credit. For single-earner families from £35,000 to £50,000, currently excluded from the maximum children's tax credit, the 1 per cent. on national insurance will be reduced, or more than eliminated, because they as families with children receive up to £10 a week extra. After taking national insurance increases into account, a single-earner family on £21,400 with two children will be £3.90 a week better off. Taking national insurance and the child tax credit together, half of Britain's families with children will be better off as a result of the tax and benefit changes in the Budget.

To budget effectively for our long-term spending plans, including our major commitments to the NHS, I have also to make major decisions about other taxes. I have to make this year's decision on duties on beer, spirits and wine: I have decided to freeze them. My decision on cigarettes is, for public health reasons, to go ahead with the annual inflation increase at a cost of 6p per packet of 20.

Today all estates below £242,000 are not subject to inheritance tax. From today I am exempting all estates below £250,000, and 96 per cent. of estates will pay no tax.

I have also to make a decision for this year for fuel duties. I said in the 2000 pre-Budget report that I would respond to rises in oil prices and, given the high and volatile oil price, I have decided to freeze fuel duties this year.

I have also to make a decision on licences for cars, vans and lorries, and I will freeze them too.

The overall effect of the tax and other decisions I have made today is to raise net revenues by £6.1 billion in 2003–04, £7.6 billion in 2004–05 and £8.3 billion in 2005–06.

I am now able to set the envelope for public spending commitments for the years to 2006. I propose to raise current public spending from £390 billion this year to £420 billion next year, to £444 billion in 2004–05 and £471 billion in 2005–06.

I propose to raise our historically low levels of net public investment, which were at only 0.6 per cent. of national income in 1997, to 2 per cent. by 2005–06.

Because of the modernisation programme we have agreed in health and social services, I am able to announce that resources will follow reform. Social services have been, for too long, a neglected part of the caring services, and to finance better care for the elderly and to reduce pressures on the NHS, I propose to raise the rate of real-terms growth of social services to 6 per cent. a year.

Details will be given tomorrow on this and other changes by the Secretary of State for Health. Separate announcements will come for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In the last 20 years real-terms rises in UK health spending have averaged 3.6 per cent. a year. I propose to raise UK national health spending by twice as much every year, on average by 7.4 per cent. in real terms each year—an annual cash rise to the NHS of 10 per cent.

But to put our health service on a secure long-term and sustainable footing, and to give the NHS the long-term security it needs, I propose—within our rules—not just a three-year financial settlement but a five-year settlement.

With year-on-year rises, UK health spending will grow from this year from £65.4 billion to £72.1 billion, to £79.3 billion, to £87.2 billion, to £95.9 billion, and then to £105.6 billion in 2007–08—even after inflation, a 43 per cent. rise over five years, and, since 1997, a real-terms doubling in national health service spending.

With the scale of long-term reform to be advanced tomorrow by the Secretary of State for Health matching the scale of long-term investment agreed today, we now have the best chance in a generation to secure our NHS, not just for a year or two but for the long term.

UK health spending will rise from 6.7 per cent. of national income in 1997 and 7.7 per cent. this year to 8.7 per cent. by 2005–06 and to 9.4 per cent. by 2007–08—rises year on year well into the next Parliament.

I have always said that our prudence was for a purpose. Last year we invested £2,370 for the average household in the NHS. By 2007–08 we will be investing £4,060 per household—after inflation, a 48 per cent. real-terms increase.

We have made our choice. This is a Budget to make our NHS the best insurance policy in the world. The NHS is a British ideal, free at the point of need, for everyone, in every part of Britain. Fairness and enterprise together.

I commend this Budget to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order No. 51, the first motion, entitled "Provisional Collection of Taxes", must be decided without debate.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Rates of tobacco products duty (motion No. 2);

(b) Vehicle excise duty (cars registered on or after 1st March 2001)(motion No. 14);

(c) Vehicle excise duty (motorcycles) (motion No. 15)—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 51 (Ways and means motions), and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall now call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion entitled "Amendment of the Law". It is on that motion that the debate will take place today and on succeeding days. The remaining motions will not be put until the end of the Budget debate next week, and they will then be decided without debate.

Budget Resolutions

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

(1) That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

(3) Paragraph (2) above does not exclude the making of amendments with respect to value added tax providing for relief on the acquisition from another member State of any goods in relation to which, if they were imported from a place outside the member States, relief would be given by an order under section 37 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

4.31 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I begin by congratulating the Chancellor on delivering his Budget in his usual manner? As ever, what he omitted to tell the House is as instructive as his statement.

I must start by welcoming one announcement: his taking up of a Conservative proposal that he has rubbished over the past two years on a Brit disc for commercial transport. We are always willing to welcome a sinner that repenteth, even if it is at the eleventh hour.

However, there is a real issue here and things in the Red Book that he did not mention. First, this country is now running a deficit for the first time in four years. *[Interruption.]* Well, Labour Members have not read the Red Book; there is no question but that they do not know what they are talking about. The Chancellor did not mention that public investment dropped by £1 billion last year compared with his estimate at the time of the pre-Budget report. He promised a lot about manufacturing and said that it would return to growth, but he did not say that manufacturing output is forecast in the Red Book to contract this year—it states that

"manufacturing productivity has fallen back"

so those were empty comments from the Chancellor. Neither did he mention that, as the Red Book shows, Britain's export performance is falling behind yet again. Whereas in the Red Book world trade is set to grow by 2.25 per cent. this year, the Treasury figures show Britain's exports rising by only 1.75 per cent.

The Chancellor did not bother to tell us any of that. That is why we will have to look very carefully at his proposals for corporation and capital gains tax, and his new research and development credit.

Unlike the markets, the Chancellor's past record is a very good guide to his performance. This is the Chancellor who has turned small print into a fine art. Everyone on the Opposition Benches, and I hope, on the other side of the House, remembers his IR35 tax on the

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

self-employed, which he never announced, and his abolition of the married couples allowance, in respect of which he failed to tell anyone that there would be a year when all married couples received no tax relief at all. It is amazing to hear him criticise the tax system for not recognising children, when he was the one who abolished the last such recognition in earlier Budgets. We will study this Red Book very carefully. *[Interruption.]* One thing we do know is that the Chancellor—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It is customary that the Leader of the Opposition's reply to the Budget statement is heard with the same respectful silence as that which is given to the Chancellor.

Mr. Duncan Smith: After today's Budget, they are scared stiff about what will be reported in tomorrow's papers.

One thing that we learned from the Chancellor today is that he has already broken one major election promise by putting up national insurance, which is a tax on income. He has previously said:

"National insurance is a tax on ordinary families."

Only 10 months ago, during the election, he and the Prime Minister assured the country that they were not going to raise national insurance. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes they did. At the last election, he denied as smears the charge that he would raise national insurance, but today he has raised £6 billion a year by adding 1 per cent. to national insurance for every employee and employer in Britain. This Government said that they would not raise income taxes at all—they do not like being reminded of that, but it is the truth—but everyone knows that this is a tax on income. The Chancellor has added a penny in the pound to income tax, and he has broken his promise to the British people.

The Chancellor also claims today to have reduced corporation tax, but in fact his increase in national insurance contributions for employers is equivalent to a rise of 3 per cent. in corporation tax. That dwarfs everything else that he has previously done. Now, someone on average earnings will be £15 worse off every month, a nurse-consultant earning £34,000 will be £24 worse off every month, and a police inspector earning £37,000 will be £27 worse off every month. So much for the Chancellor's great help for all those employed in the public services who are trying hard. Frankly, after this no one will ever believe another word that he says.

To listen to the Chancellor, one would think that this is the first time he has ever raised taxes. In fact, he has spent the past five years and six Budgets raising taxes, yet all the time public services are getting worse. He has simply opened people's wallets, while closing his own mind to change and reform. British people and British businesses are already paying £100 billion more a year in tax than they were in 1997, when Labour took over. Each of his first five Budgets raised taxes, save one. That was—surprise, surprise—the Budget before the last election. I wonder why?

Every man, woman and child in this country is paying £1,600 more in tax since the Chancellor delivered his first Budget. He thought nothing of taxing pension savings by £25 billion, and he has hobbled British business with £6 billion a year in extra taxes. Of course, the Labour party does not like hearing about the extra tax on pension savings because it is opposed to savings on pensions and always has been.

Today's measures for business are very small compensation. They are like taking £10 from someone's wallet, giving a pound back and saying, "You should be grateful." Grateful for what? What do people have to show for all these tax increases? The Chancellor says that he needs to tax more and to spend more to make public services better, but violent crime and street crime are reaching epidemic proportions. Teacher vacancies doubled last year and truancy is rising. The trains have descended into chaos. Welfare bills are increasing faster than money is going into schools and hospitals, and they will continue to do so even after today. Perhaps the Prime Minister does not remember his promise to cut the bills of social failure to pay for rises in health and education spending. He has not cut them.

All that is bad enough, but the saddest and most acute failure is the state of our national health service. In the past five years, the Chancellor has increased NHS spending by almost a third. so where has all the money gone? Waiting lists are rising, accident and emergency waits have grown longer and hospital beds are blocked because care home beds have been lost. Regardless of what he announced today, in terms of that loss the real problem is, as we have heard, the extra regulation that he has imposed on care homes.

The odds of surviving cancer in Britain are among the worst in Europe. Worst of all, the Government's failure is forcing patients to go to other countries for treatment. Their health service is letting people down, especially the elderly and the vulnerable.

Last year, as a result of the Chancellor's mismanagement, 250,000 patients had to pay for their operations out of their own pockets. More people than ever before have had to do that under this Government. People should not have to use their life savings—*[Interruption.]* No, they should not have to use their life savings to save their own lives, regardless of what the Chancellor says. We had hoped for a little humility and, better still, a more imaginative approach to the problems of the NHS, but today his Budget missed that opportunity.

All the right hon. Gentleman is offering is more of the same—more talk, more tax—but that will not save the NHS from failure. He failed to recognise that although Scotland spends as much as Australia and Holland on health and that Wales and Northern Ireland spend as much as France, the treatment of patients here is far worse. Waiting times are increasing and all the Chancellor can suggest is more tax and no change.

Britain is further away from the ideals of the NHS than at any other time in the history of the health service. The NHS should, as we all agree, offer people the best treatment, regardless of their ability to pay. The Chancellor's NHS, however, does not do that. It is a two-tier service, and more people pay for their treatment than ever before.

No other advanced country runs its health service the way we do. If the Chancellor had bothered to visit some other countries, he might have seen that for himself. Germany has no national waiting list and Danish patients have a legal right to treatment within four weeks of seeing

their general practitioner. The Chancellor cannot be bothered to go to such countries; we have, and he should read what we have written about the matter.

Britain needs to spend more on the health service, but it is not enough to spend money to keep the NHS running the way it is today. By raising all the money that it will ever need simply from higher and higher taxes will not give this country the standard it has a right to expect. The NHS needs change as much as it needs money. All the people who work in the health service know that and they have told the Chancellor that. The public know that and the Conservative party knows that. The only person who does not know that is the Chancellor.

The right hon. Gentleman has closed his mind to the idea that he could learn anything from those beyond the channel tunnel. He commissioned Derek Wanless—oh yes, the Wanless report—to conduct a study of future health care and the financing of health plans, but he had already told him what to say. The Chancellor has finally seen fit to publish that report today, on precisely the same day that he announces his conclusions. He said, "We must have a national debate on the NHS." Apparently, that opened at 9.30 this morning and closed at 3.30 this afternoon. Perhaps he can tell us whether that debate extended as far as 10 Downing street, which I doubt; or did it exist only in the mirror of his home at 11 Downing street?

There is no third way, only one way—the Chancellor's way—and today we know what that amounts to: more talk, more taxes and more failure. He not only refuses to take lessons from abroad about how to make public services better, but refuses to acknowledge that competitor nations are lowering their taxes at a time when he is raising ours. That is why Budget day is the only day on which Labour MPs really smile, because it lets them do the only thing they enjoy—raising taxes.

Some people will like the Chancellor's Budget, but they are all sitting on the Labour Benches. We can see them loving every minute of it. Countless millions of British people will end up paying for it by using public services that are getting worse and by paying higher taxes. He is planning to spend public money faster than the nation can earn it over the next four years. The fact is that not only has he raised taxes in his first five Budgets and again today, but now taxes will go up next year, the year after that and the year after that. The truth is simple: the sun goes down, the tide goes out, and Labour raises taxes. British people deserve much better. They deserve better than the increase of nearly £300 in council tax that the Chancellor has imposed on them. They deserve far better than his proposals, which add up to more talk, more tax and more failure.

The Chancellor's record speaks more eloquently than his rhetoric ever can. We always know where we are with one of his Budgets. He never listens and he never learns. He centralises everything. Civil servants, administrators and public service workers know that the way to get on is to follow orders from Whitehall rather than to trust their own judgment. That is why they are demoralised and leaving in droves. That is why so much of the money that has been taken in tax over the past five years never gets to where it is meant to go. That is why billions of pounds are wasted and left unspent each year. Through his public service agreements, the Chancellor tries to be the head teacher of every school, the manager of every hospital and the desk sergeant in every police station.

Through his complicated tax credits, the Chancellor wants to tell every family how to live their lives. More complication is proposed today. Many children will not get any of his tax credit because of the complicated forms that he insists on making them fill out. That is a further waste of their time.

The Chancellor thinks that life would be so much better if we all lived our lives like he does. That is why his whole agenda of reform begins and ends at his office. As early as March 1998 he promised:

"Investment and reform go hand in hand."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1097.]

But he did not reform; he centralised. In March 2000, he said that

"more resources must mean more reform and modernisation".

There is no reform, only centralisation. At the time of his pre-Budget report last November, he said:

"There will not be one penny more until we get changes to let us make reforms."

And today we have had his great soundbite "enterprise and fairness". But no one believes him any more. No one will ever believe him, because saying the words does not make them true.

The Chancellor has centralised our services and closed his mind to all ideas except his own. He will not let anybody else try a different formula or idea. "Investment and reform" has just become old-style tax and spend once more, and, one way or another, everyone in the country will pay the price. They are paying for more talk, more tax and more failure. Even after his announcements today, the corporate tax burden on British business—something that he did not want to tell us about—is among the highest of our industrial competitors, which threatens jobs.

More complicated tax structures are putting up taxes at the very moment when other countries in Europe are reducing theirs. Over the last five years, Britain's ability to compete in the world has slumped, as we will find in the Red Book. What the Chancellor did not say is that our productivity growth used to be faster than that of the United States; now it is slower. Five years after Labour came to power, the USA is overtaking us again.

UK businesses groan under more and more regulations, to the point at which some spend as much as one and a half working days each week filling in forms. What the Chancellor also did not tell us—among myriad other things—is that our share of world exports has fallen. Not only has our balance of trade been in deficit every month for the last four years, but it has actually been widening in 2001.

Over the past five years, this Chancellor has also punished people as they try to prepare for their retirement. He did not want to tell us too much about what he has done, but Conservative Members thought he had a cheek to talk today about occupational pensions, when he is the one who raided them with a tax of £5 billion a year. More than a third of our largest companies have closed their final salary schemes to new members, thanks to the measures that he introduced.

The stakeholder pension is also a mess. Only one in 10 of those whom the Chancellor targeted has taken it up. Millions will therefore be disappointed that he has failed to abolish the annuities rule. They will have absolutely no flexibility in retirement and they will be punished twice.

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

The Chancellor also failed to inform us that the Red Book shows that family income put aside for savings has collapsed since 1997 from 9.5 per cent. to a projected 3.75 per cent. in 2002. Savings are collapsing and people's futures are being destroyed by a Chancellor who does not care. Next year, two out of every five families in Britain will depend on means-tested benefits.

More talk and more tax will not prepare this country for the challenges that lie ahead. Today people are more worried about their prospects for retirement than they have ever been before.

The Chancellor would have us believe that raising taxes is the same as reforming public services. If that is so, why have the Government both raised taxes and reduced the quality of our public services? Our taxes continue to rise, and he is undoing the things on which business success is built. The money to pay for quality public services depends on successful business. Not only will his course of action not work, but it is ultimately self-defeating. In his hands, "investment and reform" has become Labour-speak for old-style tax and spend.

So what is new Labour for? When the history of this Government is written, the dominant theme will be the unprecedented opportunities that they wasted. They had it all: the best economic legacy ever left by a predecessor; massive Commons majorities; the trust of the British people; the promise of reform; and a mandate for change. Yet in the space of five years and six Budgets, they have frittered it all away.

If the Chancellor had listened to the people, if he had visited other countries and if he had opened his mind to change, as we have, this could have been a very different Budget—one that offered genuine hope to the millions who rely on the NHS and need it to improve. Instead, his closed mind and refusal to change have condemned the British people to second-class public services. They deserve better.

4.53 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I begin by congratulating the Chancellor— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would like to pause for a moment. Will right hon. and hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly?

Mr. Kennedy: I begin by congratulating the Chancellor on his characteristically lucid and commendably brisk presentation of his Budget statement, in contrast to the speech that we just heard. I say unequivocally on behalf of Liberal Democrat Members that there is a great deal in the Budget to welcome, and that we should say so. There is a clarity about its proposals. I was not sure where, if anywhere, the clarity lay in relation to the Conservative party's positioning on these matters.

As we said during Prime Minister's Question Time earlier, we have long argued for increased investment in the health service and in public services generally. It would therefore be churlish not to welcome the progress that has been made. The Chancellor is investing in services that urgently need it; that is a genuine breakthrough. However, we can point out that the Liberal Democrats made the case for that approach in two general election campaigns. We made honest and transparent tax proposals—contrary to the Prime Minister's teasing earlier.

Many authoritative voices in the country, leaving aside those that are party political, say that if some of the investment had been raised honestly since 1997, and the funding had been going in for five years, some of the problems that the Chancellor mentioned today would have been ameliorated much earlier.

Let us be truthful. Of course, the increase in funding for the health service will be welcome, but for many patients it is up to five years too late. Five years of sustained investment would have been better than two years of spin and double and treble counting, following two to three years of sticking to Conservative spending constraints.

The Chancellor said that there was "no free way" of investing in the health service. That reminded me of a phrase that many Liberal Democrat candidates used every hour of the day, every day of the week during the general election campaign last year: "You can't get something for nothing."

Although we welcome the convert to the cause, I have searched in vain for Labour party proposals in the general election campaign for the taxation increases. I examined the Labour manifesto, but no. I watched the launch of the Labour manifesto. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I watched the television interviews with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I looked at the election rallies. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I watched the Labour party election broadcasts. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I looked at the morning press conferences. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] By Jove, they kept it quiet.

The debate on funding for the health service cannot end with the Chancellor's statement this afternoon. He has expressed his professional and intellectual misgivings about specific earmarked taxation for the health service. I believe that that debate should be revisited across the party political spectrum. We cannot take this afternoon's statement as the last word on the matter. I hope that the Conservative party will also embrace the debate, although judging by Conservative Members' current utterances, they seem psychologically incapable of making such a worthwhile contribution to a big national debate.

If we assume that the money will at last go to the health service, what should the priorities be? We need to examine the detail of the statement of the Secretary of State for Health, but the priorities should be set by doctors and nurses. The Chancellor has made a welcome suggestion that he will ensure that the money and the decision making reach local level. Given the Administration's five-year track record, that will take a shift in the culture and mindset of those in and around Whitehall, both elected politicians and their much-vaunted political advisers. We will keep a close eye on that. We need more power locally and more devolution of budgets to go with it.

The response of the leader of the Conservative party was deeply ironic. We got to know each other when the right hon. Gentleman was first elected and we spent many a long night debating the Maastricht treaty. Now he

suggests that the Government should go round continental Europe to appreciate how well things are done there. If it had been left to him at the time of the Maastricht process, we would not even be part of the European Union, never mind learning anything from it. We need resources, and the training and recruitment for the doctors and nurses whom we urgently need should start now.

On the social services side of the equation, we also need urgent priority to be given to the haemorrhaging in the residential care homes sector. There is not a Member of any party who cannot cite chapter and verse the problems locally: the lack of funding locally; the insufficient provision locally; and the accompanying human misery for families. Dealing with those problems must be an absolute policy priority.

On health, there is the preventive agenda. I wrote down what the leader of the Conservatives said and, again, they seem to be arguing that there is no point in spending all this money because it will fail. Theirs is a calculated agenda for failure for the national health service, despite the extra funding, and the right hon. Gentleman cites Scotland in that respect. He and I are both Scots. I am not always the best advertisement in lifestyle terms, but we must both acknowledge that the structures of health care delivery in Scotland are not the only providers of discouraging indices—the lifestyle of many Scots cannot be divorced from those. Although we can blame the Chancellor for many things, we cannot necessarily blame him for that reality, as he well knows. *[Interruption.]* All right, we have been too generous. If in doubt, blame the Chancellor. The Prime Minister does it all the time.

There was one crucial issue on which the Chancellor chose not to dwell. He made only a teasing reference to the euro, rather than displaying leadership on it. As he well knows, the Liberal Democrats have long argued that it is high time we set a proper timetable for getting this country, post-referendum, into the single European currency. The reason why we must do so is precisely that to which the Chancellor and, indeed, the Conservative leader referred—the weakness of the manufacturing base caused by the strength of the pound.

One day we have got to win a referendum, but if we at least lay down clear guidelines and a timetable, that in itself, with the Government expressing an aspiration, would do much to reduce the value of sterling in the interim and stop the haemorrhaging of jobs right across the manufacturing sector.

We are very disappointed with the failure to show leadership and the conflicting smoke signals that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister all too often give out on that issue, but the Conservatives cannot with any intellectual or political rigour decry the decline in our manufacturing base while saying that they will positively deny the people a referendum and not join the euro at all. On that basis and policy prescription, the Conservatives cannot offer anything approaching a solution to the problems that have so badly afflicted the manufacturing sector.

There are modest, but what appear to be welcome, changes for the small business sector, although the burden of bureaucracy on so many of our small businesses remains excessive. Once we have studied in more detail the proposals put before us by the Chancellor, we must see whether more can be done to advance the argument still further in the interests of the small business community.

The Chancellor referred to pensions. Many of those who are expert in the field agree that his credits, his innovations and his developments Budget by Budget have produced a fiendishly complicated system. He has added to that complication again today, although the support that he is suggesting may in itself be welcome. Many pensioners find that, because of the sheer complexity, they do not access or take up the help that could otherwise be at their disposal. We shall have to look with great care at what has been suggested this afternoon, because it seems to add further complication to the system.

Had the Chancellor announced, for most pensioners, an extra £5 on the basic pension for the over-75s and an extra £10 for those over 80, that would have been fairer, more effective and less complicated. It would have done more to help those most in need, particularly at the higher end of the age spectrum.

This would have been a really good Budget five years ago. That does not stop it being, in many respects, a welcome Budget now, but the Government have lost a lot of credibility and opportunity in the intervening five years. There have been too many broken promises, too many misleading targets, too much double or treble counting and too much spin, and not enough delivery and investment where the public really wanted it.

Let us welcome what we have so far. This is an extremely significant moment in the history of the last five years of British politics, because we now have a clear recognition by the Government that there should be a more transparent, honest and fairly funded approach to tax policy so that people can see that their priorities are being served as a result. A clear ideological divide has now opened up in British politics between the Government and the Liberal Democrats on one side, and the incoherence of the Conservatives on the other. If there is one issue on which we find ourselves in agreement across the Floor of the House, it is this. The Chancellor talks about Beveridge. It was a Liberal set of ideas, principles and values, which a Labour Government proceeded to implement, that gave us the basis of the welfare state and the health service. We are seeing something similar happening with some of the Chancellor's announcements today. Those of us who do not have the in-built advantages enjoyed by both the other parties in this place and outside it—some of us who were none the less willing, over several elections, to tell the story as we saw it—are right today to claim some of the credit for the progress now being achieved.

5.7 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): May I start by congratulating the Chancellor on a truly remarkable Budget? His announcements on the national health service, although widely trailed, are none the less breathtaking in their scope and vision. Talk of opportunities wasted is a travesty of the truth. In what must have been the dullest and most inept response to a Budget made in this place for many years, the Leader of the Opposition never really got to grips with the detail, generality and politics of this extremely important Budget.

The Chancellor and the Government deserve our congratulations on their management of macro-economic policy. It is the best report that the House has heard in many years, particularly given the downturn in world trade that has been with us for a considerable time.

[Mr. Ken Purchase]

The Chancellor referred to the difficulties, particularly in the high-tech sector in the United States, which then thread their way through the world.

Inflation is the lowest that we can recall; interest rates are now converging—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will not be pleased to hear—with European rates; unemployment is now becoming manageable and making a serious contribution, in that we no longer have to meet considerable unemployment benefits; growth is outstripping that of the G7 generally; and we have stability that has not been matched for a long time.

The Chancellor tells us that growth in the G7 was 1 per cent. World trade has been down and manufacturing worldwide is down, and that is the background to the remarkable figures that the Chancellor has presented to us today. On his predictions of 2.25 per cent. to 2.75 per cent. growth, he reports 2.2 per cent. actual growth, against the doom and gloom in all the financial papers.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does my hon. Friend agree that it was simplistic in the extreme for the leader of the Liberal Democrats to link the undoubted difficulties of the manufacturing sector to the value of the pound when the great proportion of its problems have been caused by worldwide recession?

Mr. Purchase: My hon. Friend may know my position on the question of the euro, and I shall not fall for that silly little trap that he has set for me.

Let me continue in the same vein. The predictions of the financial press, which was filled with doom and gloom, have been exceeded. The Chancellor has been pessimistic and cautious in his predictions, but, none the less, to report actual growth of 2.2 per cent. in this circumstance is truly remarkable. The current forecast for the G7 is 1.6 per cent., and, for the UK, 2.5 per cent., which, again, is cautious. Given the most recent figures from America, where hope of a recovery is rising—with a genuine baseline from which to work and to develop the American economy, notwithstanding its disgraceful decision to increase and raise tariff barriers against steel products—there seems a real possibility that the American economy will pick up. Just as it is true that if America sneezes the world catches a cold, equally, if America is feeling well, the rest of us feel a darned sight better, too. That seems to give real hope.

The return of growth to the manufacturing sector is a most important signal. As someone representing a west midlands seat, I witnessed and was part of the horror of the 1980s, when, in a very short time, 400,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. It has been an increasing worry that, under my party's Government and their policies, which have been more sensitive to manufacturing than those pursued by the early Conservative Government in the 1980s, the manufacturing sector has still been haemorrhaging jobs. It is therefore welcome to see a sign that manufacturing is returning to growth. It must be said that everything that we hope for in public services is clearly predicated on improving our performance in terms of what we can export abroad and how we pay our way. An improving manufacturing output—I mean output, not just productivity—is at the root of being able to finance the improvements that we desperately want.

Many of the fiscal results that the Chancellor was telling us were well trailed and well understood, but they are worth repeating to congratulate the Chancellor on his performance. Debt has been reduced massively. Tax receipts are down at the same time, unfortunately, but an underlying strength in our economy has meant that we have continued to deal effectively with the mountain of debt with which this country has been burdened for many years.

In fact, £21 billion of debt has been repaid, bringing the proportion down from 44 per cent. to 31 per cent. of national income. Interest payments are down to £22 billion and, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, that leaves room for improvement in our public services without the need for corresponding increases in taxation. A surplus is predicted, not a deficit, and debt as a percentage of total national income is expected to remain stable. That is worth noting. The Chancellor has presented a set of figures that, in the present circumstances of world trade and economic conditions, amounts to a truly remarkable report.

I turn now to supply-side measures. I have a continuing concern about education. There is no doubt that investment has gone into education, and that our primary schools have improved, according to the measures that were set for them. However, my concern is that we place too much emphasis on the training element of school life, at the expense of education.

It remains my belief that our first and most important duty to the generation of young people in our charge is to ensure that their education—in the English language and in literature, in the sciences and mathematics—is first class. What my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced today in respect of instilling more enterprise in schools' ideas needs careful thought, especially with regard to delivery. Teachers already complain—rightly, and with some justification—that there is little room left in the curriculum for yet more new measures, especially when those measures do not directly improve our young people's educational standards. That is especially important in connection with the generation now in secondary schools.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor stated that 55 per cent. of all jobs—10 million jobs in total—are now in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector. Corporation tax is to be reduced by 1 per cent., and that is a very welcome measure.

Last week, I met a number of clothing manufacturers in my constituency of Wolverhampton. They accept that useful measures have been taken, but they complain that the requirements on employers to implement social legislation are a considerable burden. They claim that meeting those requirements takes them away from producing economically and efficiently, and they are looking for a reduction in that administrative burden.

However, I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has met those complaints, at least in part, with the new measures that he has announced, and especially with the changes in respect of VAT. The VAT regime has been a nightmare for small companies, especially for those without administrative back up. In such cases, the employer—usually the owner of the company—has to deal with all the administration of tax and VAT, and often has to burn the midnight oil to get the returns in on time.

People in that situation will be pleased that the charges for late returns are to be dropped, but the simplification of the VAT regime will be widely welcomed by small companies. My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on his response to the problems experienced by many small companies.

The new tax credits available for investment in research and development by large companies are clearly to be welcomed. There is no question in my mind but that the beginning of the end for British manufacturing was evident in the 1960s and 1970s—and certainly in the 1980s—when investment in research and development and blue-skies research plummeted.

Our universities were stripped of any incentive to carry on with the vital work of research and development. As a result, there were fewer of the inventions that need to be made before innovations and developed products can be brought to market. In the absence of new ideas, British industry as a whole was failing to compete. As investment in research fell away, we became unable—except in a very few instances—to claim that we had world-class companies.

That is now starting to change. The British have always been good at innovation—at invention, rather. I should not have got those two words mixed up, should I? The British have been very good at invention, but have failed to bring their products to market. Now, however, we are seeing the process involved in innovation more clearly, which will enable us to compete on a much stronger basis in world markets.

It worries me that the British share of export markets is falling, however slightly it may be falling. Imports must be paid for by exports. We can fill a gap with national wealth for a time, but ultimately imports must be balanced by exports, and exporting must be the nation's forte.

I want to say something about the health service in particular. It is surely right that it is receiving record investment, and also right that the Chancellor recognises that attracting and retaining staff is a critical—if not the most critical—element of a good strong health service.

I have experience of my own health authority, and I served on health boards and other such bodies in various capacities for nearly 30 years. I believe that, given the pace of change demanded by health service workers, targets must be set with current working practices very much in mind. People need a period of calm, a period of stability, a period during which they can deal with the enormous changes that we have asked them to make over the past few years. That will help them to settle into a better routine, and to understand their jobs better. It will help us to retain vital staff, and will ultimately attract more people into the health professions.

I hope that the same message, about the provision of time in which people can settle down, will be conveyed to those in education, particularly further education. Good lecturers are leaving because the rate of change, and the amount of intervention in teaching practices, has become more than they can cope with. They feel that they are failing their students by having to deal with so much administration rather than dealing directly with teaching. I think that we are now learning the lessons—we must, if we are to improve our public services.

I applaud the Chancellor's decision to deal with stamp duty. I congratulate him on opting for what I consider to be a far better way of flattening and cooling the hottest parts of the property market than a general increase in interest rates, which would hurt those on the first and second rungs of the housing ladder. I also welcome the lowering of small firms' corporation tax to zero for the first £10,000 of profit, which will be very helpful.

Let me now say something about the working families tax credit, and the general principle of tax credits for those in work. I was among the sternest critics of the 1970–74 Heath Government when they introduced family income supplement. I felt that, in general, it would be seen as a substitute for low pay and would encourage employers to keep workers on low pay, knowing that the state would step in and act as a wage payer. I am still concerned about our system of tax credits. Employers are tending to rely on state intervention to make up wages that should really be paid for by efficient, effective, economic working—smart working, rather than old-fashioned working. The advent of the minimum wage and this week's welcome increase have taken the edge off my reservations, but having nailed our colours to the mast of tax credits, which are generally welcome, we should keep our eye on them.

Overall, this is as good a Budget as the House and I have heard for many years, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor deserves congratulations from us all.

5.25 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register.

I am glad that Government Members like the Budget. We are told that it is billed as an honest Budget, because the present Chancellor for the first time openly confesses to raising taxes. Of course, Labour Members should have liked all his previous Budgets too, because they have all been about raising tax after tax. More than £100 billion of extra taxation is being raised this year compared with the starting point five years ago—that is about £2,000 annually from every man, woman and child in the country. That is a colossal sum.

Quite a bit of that money has gone into public services, but the public are asking how so much money can be taken away from them to so little effect. My constituents ask why there are no more policemen on the beat—indeed, they think that there are fewer now than there were five years ago. They ask why waiting times and waiting lists for the local hospital are often more difficult to negotiate and longer than they were five years ago, and why there are not more beds open in the local hospital. In fact, there are fewer beds open in the local hospital. My constituents ask why local schools find it difficult to recruit and retain teachers, and why teaching morale is so low. The problem is not only all the instructions and directives from the Department for Education and Skills, but one of money, especially in areas such as mine.

The mystery that the British public want resolved is how so much money can be taken off them in Budget after Budget to so little effect. During this year's lengthy Budget debate, we must explore whether any better results might conceivably arise from the forthcoming big surge in spending than have arisen from the colossal increases in taxes and spending of the past five years.

One reason why there has been so little benefit from so much increased spending is the Government's choice of priorities. Had the money been spent on more nurses, doctors, teachers and policemen in my constituency and others, we might have been a little happier; instead, those

[Mr. John Redwood]

do not appear to be the priorities that apply when the Budget measures announced are implemented. We read the headline announcements of various extra sums of money, but then we see the money being spent on other things.

The health service has had to announce that there are now more administrators in the NHS than there are beds serving patients. In the education service, more circulars than ever before are being sent out by the Department for Education and Skills, but they do not appear to be resolving problems of teacher morale and pay in hotspots throughout the country.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am surprised to hear the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to raising taxes to spend on the health service. Does he remember writing that the NHS was

"a bureaucratic monster that cannot be tamed",

and that the principle of charging should be extended to

"create a national health insurance scheme separate from the tax system."?

Are those still his views and are they accurately reflected within the shadow Cabinet?

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted to be reminded of some sensible remarks I made some years ago. If he has been following the debate, the hon. Gentleman will know that my current view and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench is that we must review the whole question because there must be both a better way to spend the considerable sums of public money now committed to the NHS, and a better way to channel in more money from outside.

We think that a great deal of private money can be brought into health care in general by backing choice and giving people more opportunities. We think that health service money could be much better spent by devolving power and authority to those in hospitals and doctors' surgeries who daily have to make difficult decisions when dealing with patients than by spending so much on the army of administrators, many of whom stand well back from the action in the surgery or hospital ward. We therefore need reform. The reforms proposed by Her Majesty's Government will not be nearly big enough to deal with the problem. Indeed, I would go further and say that, from what we have heard today, the problem will be exacerbated.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: If I can make my point, I will give way. The problem will be exacerbated by the Chancellor's proposals, which may be fleshed out a little tomorrow by the Secretary of State for Health.

We are told that the main reform will be a new army of auditors ticking bits of paper and inspecting forms to see whether every penny and every pound that the doctor or nurse is spending is well spent. I dread to think what the health service will look like if, on top of the 200,000-odd administrators we already have, and all the internal and external auditors, we have a beefed-up audit function, perhaps intervening day by day or hour by hour. That would not be a productive way of spending the money. I suspect that it could even get in the way of patient care. The Government should learn to back off a little, to decentralise a bit, to start to trust some of the people who are running the service. If they do not trust the people running the service, they should get rid of them and appoint people whom they do trust.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Has my right hon. Friend ever met a nurse, doctor or consultant who said that what their hospital needed was more auditors?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. He is correct. Cuts are sometimes made at the end of the year, even under this Government, because they discover that their hospitals do not have enough money. The cuts always seem to be in patient care. They never seem to be in paper clips, bits of paper and administration, which is perhaps where they should look.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the audit process is necessary to establish whether we can get value for money? His party peddles the mythology that the health service and other services are getting worse. Is it not necessary to show the facts, instead of living off the anecdotes that he puts over?

Mr. Redwood: I have not been giving anecdotes but describing the day-by-day experience of my constituents as patients, or friends or relatives of patients, and, more importantly, the experience of the nurses and doctors who work under great pressure at the local hospital and the local surgery, who tell me that the problem is a shortage of nurses, doctors and bed spaces, not a shortage of auditors, administrators, paper clips and bits of paper.

Of course, there needs to be audit. I had assumed after five years of a Labour Government that satisfactory audit arrangements were in place. Indeed, I thought that the Conservatives had left satisfactory audit arrangements in place. If they are not satisfactory, they should be revised and changed, but I warn the Government against a massive expansion of the audit function in the belief that that will automatically improve the service on which the money is spent. The reason why money is being badly spent is because the system is top-heavy. It still has too much bureaucracy, too many administrators—more than when the Conservatives left office by quite a large margin. The Government need to allow more local control by a few good managers in each locality.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Can we take it therefore that the right hon. Gentleman now regrets the implementation of the internal market, which his Government introduced, which was responsible for a huge mushrooming of unnecessary government, and which this Government have abolished?

Mr. Redwood: I liked the idea of GP fundholding. One of the good things about it was that we introduced it in a permissive way. We did not say to every GP on day one, "You must be GP fundholders." We said, "If you would like it, this is extra freedom you can use." We discovered after quiet beginnings, with an awful lot of opposition from Labour, that a lot of GPs signed up and found that it was extremely good for them and their patients. It is a

great pity that many of the freedoms that GPs enjoyed have been taken away. They have been put under a much bigger bureaucracy in the new primary care trusts that are emerging.

The hon. Gentleman should not hate choice so much. I want the NHS to offer far more choice to the people who need to use it: we the taxpayers, the patients or potential patients. It would make so much difference to the NHS if people had real choice about which doctor, surgery or consultant they went to, when and where they could have their operation, and proper advice and help about the range of options available.

Because the system is so short of medical and clinical capacity, and because it is so centrally driven by Ministers and their bureaucratic supporters, we do not have that choice and freedom, which I am sure my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would love to extend to people. It may emerge in one form or another from the policy review that is under way in the Conservative party.

One of the things that this country needs is a big injection of choice, enterprise and private capital into a range of public services. That can be even better illustrated in transport than in health. This Government have proposed a much delayed and over-inflated plan to invest—they call it investment, although a lot of it is spending and not true investment—£180 billion over 10 years in the transport industries. They have of course left out the main way of getting around the country—by motor vehicle—because that is handled by the private sector and there will be massive investment in that industry as people conclude that, given difficulties on parts of the transport system in which there is much more public involvement or public investment, the car is the best way to travel.

Within that £180 billion, the Government are aiming only for some £55 billion of private capital. That is a tiny sum compared with, say, the £180 billion that the British public are likely to spend on new cars alone over the same period. It is a poverty of expectations, but probably realistic, or even a little optimistic, given the way in which the Government are handling the transport industries.

Insisting on putting the main rail-owning company into administration will put people off producing private investment for the rail industry. Insisting on going through four or five years of rows with the Mayor of London and terribly convoluted studies on how we might get private capital into the tube, and coming up in the end with a scheme that lumbers the taxpayer with enormous risks while raising only about £4 billion of private capital, will make it a struggle even to get £55 billion of private capital over 10 years for all the transport industries.

If the Government were prepared to be a little more open and to secure proper private involvement, with some choice and freedom, in the railway and tube system, we could secure many more billions of pounds of capital investment without the same requirement on the taxpayer—estimated in the 10-year plan at more than £120 billion, and likely to spiral well above that given the way in which the Government bungle their handling of the transport industries.

The Government's public spending plans have already been gravely damaged by putting Railtrack into administration. A few hundred million pounds would probably have got the Government through the financing problem that Railtrack brought to their attention, but they decided to put that profitable company into administration. As a result, we have a bill for several billion pounds, and we still have not got to the end of the matter, as we do not know when Railtrack will come out of administration.

This Budget should have addressed that central problem, but we know that the Chancellor is at loggerheads with the Transport Secretary. He must be deeply embarrassed by the damage that the Transport Secretary has done to relationships with the private sector, the City of London and the people who are likely to produce the investment. We know that the Chancellor has had to keep quiet about that massive area of public-private investment, which is crucial to our country's future. Given how his colleague the Transport Secretary has handled the transport industries, the Chancellor has had to be pessimistic about how much strain the private sector can take.

I urge the Government to put that right and to revisit all their transport plans with a view to aiming for, say, £100 billion of private investment. That is a perfectly realistic target if all the main companies involved are in the private sector, and they are seen to be fairly regulated—not over-regulated—and to have some support and sympathy from a Government who realise that private companies are the best way to get the trains on the move again, the tube sorted out and the transport industries operating much more smoothly.

It is noticeable that where an industry is largely unencumbered by Government ownership or specific Government involvement—the private motor vehicle industry, the vans, cars and lorries—there is massive investment. No one has to debate in this place how we would make good the investment shortfall in that industry. We do not have day-long debates on how we can deal with lorry, car or van shortages for local enterprises. Yet owing to regulation—and, now, public ownership of the main Railtrack enterprise—we must debate how to deal with the shortage of freight wagons and track for them to run on.

The Government should understand the history of the railways. All capital for the rail network in the 19th century was raised in the private markets. The rail industry expanded massively throughout the 19th century, and into the 20th century, on the back of private capital. As soon as it faced serious opposition from the motor vehicle, the Government took it under regulatory control and subsequently nationalised it, and then it was all downhill to the point when it was privatised. There was a massive slide in its use and share of the market, and there have been great difficulties in financing and investing in it. As soon as it was privatised, the trends reversed. We saw a 25 per cent. growth in passenger usage and a 30 per cent. increase in freight. We saw the beginnings of a big investment revival and then the Government, out of pig-headed ideology, decided that that was not allowed. They now have a big black hole in the middle of their Budget plans.

The Budget should address the central point that if we want, as we surely do, much more investment in health, transport and several other areas where the public sector dominates or has a big influence, we need to relax the controls more. We need to be more inviting to the private sector and allow it to play a bigger part. The difference in health spending between this country and other advanced countries is far more marked in the amount of private money spent than in the amount of public money spent.

[Mr. Redwood]

I am the first to defend the proposition that if people are ill and need free care, that is their right under the pledge of the NHS. They, or other people, pay enough in tax, and I would not wish to take that right away from anybody. If people need care, it should be available free at the point of use. However, why stop people using their own money if they want different types of care to be made available and why not give them some encouragement for that? The Labour party is immensely hostile to the idea that people might wish to spend more of their own money in that way, and to any scheme that might promote or encourage that, albeit at a considerably lower cost to the taxpayer than if those people required all their care to be provided by a completely publicly financed system.

Mr. Tom Harris: The right hon. Gentleman sets great store by the need to increase private investment in the NHS. Can he not welcome, in a bipartisan spirit, the huge increase that the Chancellor has announced for the NHS in the next five years, which represents a 100 per cent. increase since 1997? Surely his party would welcome that. Will he take this opportunity to commit his party to matching that increase?

Mr. Redwood: I do not welcome sums of money: I welcome results. If, in three or four years' time, there are no waiting lists in my constituency, the local hospital has many more beds and the nurses and doctors tell me that they have a more realistic work load, I am a big enough man to acknowledge that improvement. I might take the precaution of doing so the day after the election rather than the day before, because I am also a politician, but I would not mislead anyone about it. If that is delivered, everyone in my party would feel great about it, but my worry is that it will not happen. We have had five years of promises and it is always jam tomorrow. All we actually get is a traffic jam, not the benefits of better health services or transport.

I will wait. I will welcome results, but not the spending of huge sums of money in itself. I certainly do not welcome the tax increases that it necessitates. If all the money goes on auditors and paper clips, I will not welcome it at all, and the Government have some serious questions to answer about where the money will go and how quickly they can spend the money wisely by recruiting the nurses and doctors and building the bed spaces and wards that are so clearly needed in many parts of the country.

The big issue in the Budget is tax, tax and tax. After five years of huge tax increases, we get the whopper tax increase. It is the tax increase that is so big that not even this Chancellor thinks that he can get away with it without telling people. It is the first tax increase that he has not attempted to introduce by stealth.

The Chancellor's record on tax increases shows that he began by deciding to tax savings, prudence and old age. He put a massive tax increase on pension funds. When we objected to that, we were told by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that because the stock market was rising, it would not hurt anybody and nobody would notice it. The stock market was making magic money and the Chancellor wanted to take a bit, while leaving people mysteriously better off. In the past two years, the stock market's performance has been very bad, and people's pension funds have fallen in value year by year. The Chancellor did not apologise or say that his argument no longer applied so he was going to take the tax off the pension funds—even if he could not go so far as to rebate the money that he should not have taken in the first place.

That cruel tax on old age, prudence and savings is now doing real damage to people's pension prospects. The Labour party gets angry because companies are closing down final salary schemes, but they are too expensive and do not have enough money left in them. One of the biggest culprits is the robber Chancellor who has taken quite a bit of the money out.

The next big tax from the Chancellor was the huge telecom windfall tax, from the so-called auction of licences, which was another tax that was meant to go unnoticed and inflict no pain on anyone. It cost £22 billion for the mobile phone companies to stay in business. The auction was cleverly designed and I give full credit to the Chancellor and his advisers, who worked out a perfect system under which not enough licences were on offer so the phone companies had to make crazy bids. Of course, disaster followed. The Chancellor now refers to the collapse in the telecom and high-tech industries, but he does not say sorry. He does not admit that taking £22 billion out of the industry had a bad impact.

Mr. Hendrick: The spectrum that was sold is a finite resource. It was not a form of taxation. A finite resource has to be sold, not given away for free. The state of high-tech and telecom companies is a reflection of America sneezing and industries across the developed world catching a cold, not the sale of the spectrum to British telecom companies.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman does not understand the magnitude of the sum of £22 billion. It was a prosperous leading industry, but that is a colossal sum of money. The German Government followed the British example and took another £28 billion, making £50 billion of tax. It was a tax. The companies were using the airways free of charge, but the Government saw an easy opportunity to raise some money. Now, of course, the Government do not want to admit that they were part of the cause of the collapse of that industry. I do not claim that the Government were the sole cause, but the hon. Gentleman must concede that taking £22 billion out of the industry had a serious impact. It dried up the cash flows and meant that the companies had to keep prices higher. They could not pay wages, recruit extra staff or expand the networks as quickly as they would have liked. That was the Chancellor's second tax that did a lot of damage.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The right hon. Gentleman is giving away his whole argument. He argues in favour of more private intervention in the health market, but then he says that when auctions were used as a largely market-driven answer to how to allocate a scarce resource—the spectrum—that somehow became a tax. He is confused.

Mr. Redwood: I am not confused. The spectrum was available freely until the Labour Government designed a system that was bound to lead to a supertax, because of the bidding rules and the number of licences on offer. If the Government had offered a realistic number of

licences, the prices paid in the auction would have been more sensible and affordable. The Chancellor had no understanding of how much damage such a colossal price would do even to a relatively successful industry, which the telecom industry had been until that point.

I come to the Chancellor's third tax. He decided that it would be a good idea, under the cover of greenery, to impose far more taxes on motorists, especially on fuel. He brought the haulage industry to its knees, major bankruptcies were threatened and some haulage companies even decided to give up on Britain and set up on the continent where the tax regimes were more benign. The damage that tax caused got through to the Chancellor, because it led to a mass protest, and—up to a point—he apologised and announced that he would make some reductions in duty after all. He has continued that apology in the Budget by announcing that there will be no immediate further increase in the tax.

I am glad that the Chancellor has learned from that case, but why does he now think it a good idea to impose a tax on jobs? He has tried everything else. He has wrecked the pension funds and the motorists.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Has the right hon. Gentleman spotted that yet again the Chancellor is talking the right talk about charging foreign lorries to use our roads? But page 125 of the Red Book shows that such charging will not happen for several years to come. The promise has been made since the protests.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right. The right hon. Gentleman, as a high-taxing Chancellor, could have put equal or higher taxes on foreign competition. He did not even do that to help the domestic haulage industry, which made the protests even more intense.

The Chancellor has tried to wreck several industries. He has been successful in helping to do enormous damage to telecoms, to haulage and to people's savings for pensions. Now, he has decided to tax jobs. That is especially disappointing because he made his reputation in Opposition in campaigning against every job loss that was ever announced under a Conservative Government. Now that we have him in power, he seems to ignore the thousands of redundancies that take place week by week in manufacturing industry under his stewardship of the economy. He is taking the incredible risk of placing an even greater burden upon employers and employees by raising the cost of employment.

I am sure that there are quite a few successful and prosperous parts of the economy that will be able to pay the bill. They will not enjoy paying it but they will manage. However, there will be a serious impact on marginal parts of the economy. The most likely area to be badly damaged is relatively labour intensive and often quite low-wage parts of the economy in manufacturing. That is the area that is most at risk already from all the other Government policies of high tax and high regulation and the current exchange rate. It will now face an additional imposition from the Chancellor. For a Chancellor who has always rightly said that he wants more jobs, more enterprise and more prosperity, it is a great pity that he has now decided to raise so much money in the form of a tax on jobs and enterprise.

There are some clever ideas in the Budget to produce modest relief at the margins for business in response to business lobbying. I agree with these ideas and I am pleased that the Chancellor has introduced them. However, they are swamped by the massive tax on jobs. It is no good for the business community if it receives little pieces of relief here, there and everywhere if it has to pay for them three or four times over because of a massive tax on jobs, which I fear we have.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the Red Book, after boasting of the recovery in employment, forecasts that the improvement will not continue?

Mr. Redwood: That is a valuable point. I hope that the forecast is wrong, but it is wise of the Chancellor to be cautious. He is placing a considerable imposition upon jobs and job generation.

What would have been a better Budget? It would have been one that recognised the huge contribution that private investment and private money could make to our public services. It would be one that mended fences with the private sector, especially in transport, rather than preserving them in their broken form. It would have been a Budget that contained some humility about what had been achieved so far with large increases in taxation and spending, and one that contained more careful thinking about how we might secure the real improvements that we need in a crucial area such as health.

The Chancellor has gone ahead with the eye-catching headlines on large sums without thinking about how he can find nurses, doctors and other important care workers who so obviously need to be recruited. As a result, we may see more of the same—that is tax and waste—that has characterised the Government's first five years.

5.54 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I do not recognise anything that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was talking about. I have been in this place since 1987, and I was on the Opposition Benches when the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet. We then had 3 million unemployed; inflation was in double digits and we had what have been referred to as three booms and busts. They were deep economic troughs. That is the history of the right hon. Gentleman when he was a practitioner in government. He is a clever man, but there is a meanness of spirit in every political utterance that he makes. He offered not one good comment on anything that the Government have done—*[Interruption.]* Apart from that, he is fine—there is always some good in everyone.

Let us consider what the Government have achieved. We have the lowest unemployment for more than 20 years; since 1997, an extra 1.5 million have been in employment. We have the lowest rate of inflation for 20 or 30 years. For the first time, we are paying back more of our debt than any other British Government since the second world war, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said. There must be something good about what the Government have done.

[Mr. John McFall]

I would like the right hon. Member for Wokingham to intervene to say that a teeny little thing that the Government have done is good; he refuses to do so.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my speech. I said that I thought that some business tax reliefs were welcome, but that it was a great pity that business had to pay for them several times over.

Mr. McFall: That is a right hand and a left hand answer. It seems that there were some good things but they were taken away quickly. Let us pass on that issue.

I judge the Budget on four themes. The first is economic stability, the second is fairness, the third is strengthening public services and the fourth is our presence on the international stage.

Let us take economic stability first. We have that stability because we learned lessons from the past decades. I have mentioned the Tory record in the 1980s and 1990s. Labour Governments had records in the 1960s and 1970s. It could be said that we had jam straight away with Labour Governments, but bread and water for the ensuing few years.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in 1997 that that approach would have to be changed. His brave act, against all the odds, was to give the Bank of England independence. Monetary issues have been taken away from politicians and placed with economists. As Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, I know that Sir Eddie George and his colleagues on the Monetary Policy Committee are accountable to the Chancellor and Parliament through our Committee. That is much healthier than having monthly meetings between a Chancellor and a Governor of the Bank of England.

There is independence for the Bank of England, and a symmetrical inflation target has been set, which has been a guiding principle in the economy. The MPC has met that target consistently since 1997.

I was in Brussels yesterday for a meeting of the European Parliament's chairpersons' budget committee. We are not in the eurozone, but our monetary and fiscal policy framework is delivering towards the stability and growth pact that the EU is setting down. It is striking that we have low and stable inflation compared with many other European countries. We have the fastest growth in the G8. If we go into Europe, after a referendum, we will be well placed; I shall not go into that debate in more detail.

The MPC is well placed to respond quickly to risks to the symmetrical inflation target. We have a sound model with the Bank of England, which I would not like to see jeopardised. We must be careful in the run-up to the referendum in Europe to ensure that the lessons that we have learned in the United Kingdom are taken on board by the rest of Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has adhered to his fiscal policy. Indeed, he announced today a tightening of that policy by a few billion pounds. The code for fiscal stability has ensured that. In the next few months, the Treasury Select Committee will undertake an inquiry into Europe and fiscal policy to evaluate the lessons that can be learned from the monetary and fiscal framework that was established in 1997, and how that can be affected by our entry, or otherwise, into Europe.

There are five characteristics of fiscal stability: transparency, stability, responsibility, fairness and efficiency. These serve us well in the medium and long term. They ensure that spending and tax impact fairly. That is a big issue, especially when it crosses generations. Currently, we have a pensions problem. The problem is not unique to the United Kingdom. Germany, Italy and other countries have enormous problems in that regard. It is important to treat today's pensioners fairly, but we must also treat tomorrow's adults and pensioners fairly. There is an inter-generational aspect to the problem. The framework established by the Chancellor contains a long-term element and will serve present and future generations well.

We must recognise that a large savings gap exists. Various figures have been bandied about and the sum of £27 billion has been mentioned. That means that each individual should be saving an extra 9 to 18 per cent. for his or her pension provision. As a Government, we have a responsibility to ensure that people do that. I am a little concerned about stakeholder pensions. Although the Government say that there has been a good take-up, employers are responsible for making the scheme available to employees, not for ensuring that pensions are taken up, so there are a number of empty schemes, as they are called.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), as Chairman of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, knows much more about the matter than I do, but I recognise that it is a major issue. I would suggest to the Chancellor that if the voluntary method is not working, he should consider the compulsory route. I see the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire indicating his approval.

On economic stability, it is important that we stand by the fiscal rules laid down by the Chancellor. The golden rule is to borrow only to invest over the economic cycle. The second rule is to ensure sustainable investment and make sure that our net debt is well below 40 per cent. over the economic cycle. I am pleased to see today that the Chancellor has fulfilled that.

The second element that I mentioned was fairness. I noted the Chancellor's remarks that he would review the rules for residents and domiciles, and I am a little disappointed. There are glaring examples of individuals who live in the country but pay no British tax. That conflicts directly with the fairness agenda of the Labour party. I ask the Chancellor to examine the issue carefully. Last week *The Guardian* highlighted the case of an individual worth billions upon billions of pounds, yet there were little or no net tax receipts to the Inland Revenue. It would be helpful if the Chancellor's review were speeded up.

I am pleased by the Chancellor's approach to small businesses. As he said, they are responsible for 50 per cent. of output, and we must assist the nurturing of small businesses. In my constituency, when I was elected in 1987, there were a number of large firms. Those were the norm in the 1950s and 1960s. Now, most large firms have departed and the future is for small firms. Particularly in disadvantaged areas, such as mine, it is important that the

maximum help is given to small businesses. I welcome the Chancellor's measures on VAT, corporation tax and research and development.

On research and development, the tax credit announced a few weeks ago for large firms is extremely welcome. We experience a phenomenon known as the branch economy, where we have inward investment and companies coming in, but the brain of the company is located elsewhere. A research and development tax credit could help to ensure the stability of such companies in particular areas and the long-term affiliation with those areas.

Reducing red tape and compliance costs for small businesses and exempting some from stamp duty must be welcomed. Competitiveness was mentioned by the Chancellor in passing. The Competition Commission's report on banks was published a few weeks ago. Small businesses feel greatly disadvantaged in that regard. In the next few weeks my Committee will be inviting the banks to tell us what they have done post-Cruickshank to ensure that small businesses get a fair deal. I would say that to date a level playing field has not been established and an awful lot of work remains to be done.

Competition and productivity go hand in hand. The productivity targets that we have set since 1997 have in many cases not been realised. Productivity levels in our country are still disappointing compared with the rest of Europe and especially compared with America. A study of productivity undertaken by McKinsey in America concluded that the driving force for improved productivity was competition. We can learn from that. We must support small businesses through the Competition Commission's proposals. I and my Committee will be doing that.

In accordance with the fairness agenda, we must support families and build a fairer society. I agreed with the Chancellor 100 per cent. when he spoke of the importance of making work pay. The measures introduced by the Chancellor—the child tax credit, the child allowances and the working tax credits for those with and without children—are extremely important. The more people that we get to work, the better for the individuals, communities and society. From April 2003 the working tax credit will guarantee a minimum income of £183 a week for a single-earner couple without children working full-time on the minimum wage, and £237 a week for a family with one earner working full-time on the minimum wage. That is a big increase which is very much to be welcomed.

There has been some criticism from outside bodies, not least the Institute for Fiscal Studies, that tax credits are a disincentive to savings. I hope that the Chancellor will look into the matter. As long as he is providing satisfactory levels of minimum income, some people may not consider it necessary to save. The Government should consider whether their measures create a barrier to savings.

The third issue of the Budget is the strengthening of the public services. The Chancellor and the Prime Minister recognise that a debate on the subject is needed. A number of hon. Members to whom I have spoken since the Chancellor announced his Budget called his statement very brave. In this Budget, what you see is what you get. The Chancellor said explicitly that if we want a good health service, we must pay for it.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): It has been paid for, but it has got worse.

Mr. McFall: The reason why the health service and other public services are not as good as they should be is that we have had decades and decades of underfunding. The present Chancellor is brave enough to recognise that and say that if we are to have high-quality public services, we must pay for them.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham, like his colleagues, said that he did not agree with the way that the Chancellor was going, but together with most people in this country, I do not know where the Conservative party is going. I have been on platform after platform with Conservatives, from shadow Secretaries of State down, and what do they tell me? They are studying the matter. We are not studying it. We are implementing a new proposal. The extra £4 billion to be provided this year will be very welcome.

My guiding principle is that if we want a health service, we must have one that is for all of the people all of the time. From what I can gather, the Conservatives are looking at other forms, which will be for some of the people some of the time, or for some of the people all of the time, but never for all of the people all of the time. I stick by the maxim that the NHS should be for all of the people all of the time. The Government will be able to challenge all the other proposals that have been put forward and win the ensuing debate, and that is important.

Let me reflect on the figures announced by the Chancellor today. There is to be a 7.4 per cent. average annual real-terms growth in UK NHS spending for five years, putting the NHS on a sustainable long-term financial footing, and a rise in NHS cash spending per household from £2,370 in 2001–02 to £4,060 in 2007–08, a 48 per cent. real-terms increase and a doubling for every household. Who in this Chamber would not welcome that?

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The hon. Gentleman makes a serious and sensible speech, with much of which I agree, but we must be careful not to increase people's expectations of the spend. The increases are welcome, but the King's Fund has been at pains to say that if politicians are going around rightly saying that the money is coming, the expectations will increase faster than the rate at which the money comes, and there is a problem about that.

Mr. McFall: I always agree with my friend and that really worries me. I shall not fall out with him now, because I agree once again. My next point was that the resources that we are putting in must ensure delivery on the ground. At the last election, many people voted for a Labour Government on condition that we would get things right. We said that we had had four years, it had been tough, but we had the proposals in place, and we asked for another term to get it right.

Mr. Tom Harris: My hon. Friend said that the Conservatives would not tell him their plans for the health

[Mr. Tom Harris]

service. Perhaps I can enlighten him, because the shadow Secretary of State for Health has talked about a four-phase plan, the first phase of which is to break the link between the NHS and health care, and the second phase of which is to convince the people that the NHS will not work and cannot work, and will eventually result in self-pay by NHS patients.

Mr. McFall: I was coming on to that.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire referred to the King's Fund. It stated that the NHS has been overwhelmed with well-meaning policy directives, investment targets and structural changes. In many ways that has been the problem. I agree with the hon. Gentleman. First, because of departmental underspends we must find the knack of teaching the civil service how to spend money, and, secondly, we must aim for decentralisation, so that there is no central command. The hon. Gentleman is right and I welcome the Chancellor's announcement today, but it will be a big job to get things right during the next four or five years.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman not see that for people to have to pay £4,000 instead of £2,300 is not an inviting prospect? They want to know what they will have for the money, not how much extra they will have to pay. For example, can he tell us when people in my constituency will not have to wait for a hip replacement operation when they need one? That would be interesting to know.

Mr. McFall: I have never been to the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I am happy to acknowledge that there has been a problem with waiting lists. However, the Chancellor acknowledges the problems and is putting in place a structure whereby huge changes can be effected. That is the reality of the situation. I well remember the manifold problems under the right hon. Gentleman's Government. The internal market was a disaster and it took the Labour Government their first four years to correct that. The debate in the NHS will go on and will reverberate over the next few years.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) said, the shadow Secretary of State for Health has four themes and the big issue behind them is to convince people that the NHS cannot and will not work. What a cynical ploy. That adds up to playing about with people's lives. That will not work and we must counter that argument head on. I am delighted that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and his colleagues will join us in doing that.

I come now to the international stage and the important work of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development. I applaud the Chancellor's Marshall plan speech in Ottawa and his proposal that the international community should provide an extra £50 billion a year. I also applaud the 2015 targets that were agreed. Already, in Uganda, the Government have doubled primary school enrolment and cut class sizes.

However, in other areas we have not been so successful and we must engage in the great debate in the IMF and the World Bank about the future of aid and development. The Treasury Committee was in Washington in January when we met representatives of the IMF and the World Bank. The United States proposes that we give countries grants not loans. Development agency representatives spoke to us on that subject, but we should not get hung up on the issue of loans as opposed to grants. In many ways I agree with the United States that we must have effective change on the ground, but the plan on which we should concentrate is developing a long-term approach to investment in developing countries. That is the big issue to which the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development should turn their minds.

I see one of my colleagues on the Treasury Committee in the Chamber and we have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the IMF and the World Bank. In the next few months, we will have the opportunity of questioning Horst Köhler, the managing director of the IMF, on that issue. However, we must remember that those institutions combined have annual expenditure of more than $30 billion. We have a seat at that table and it is important that we should put our point of view across.

One of the big surprises for me in the past four or five years has been how much interest ordinary people have in the subject of writing off international debt. In my constituency I communicate reasonably regularly with about 2,000 people who have written to me on the subject and want to be kept informed. That is a cross-party issue. The work of the Select Committee on International Development and others on that has been good and I look forward to continuing that work with them.

However, the big issue facing the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development is trade. We should be considering using trade as a force for poverty reduction. The rich countries spend $1 billion every day on agriculture subsidies and the resulting surpluses are dumped on world markets, undermining the livelihoods of millions of small farmers in poor countries. When developing countries export to rich countries they face tariff barriers four times higher than those encountered by rich countries.

Those barriers cost the poorer countries $100 billion a year—twice as much as they receive in aid. We are giving with one hand and viciously taking away with the other. The rules of the World Trade Organisation on intellectual property, investment and services which protect the interests of rich countries must be looked at again and I ask the Chancellor to take that matter up when he meets his colleagues in the international forum. Most of us who have travelled abroad in the poorer countries realise that many of them have one commodity that keeps them going, but that the international community has failed to address the problem of low and unstable commodity prices that have consigned millions of people to poverty. For example, coffee prices have fallen by 70 per cent. since 1997, costing exporters in developing countries $8 billion in lost foreign exchange earnings. We must tackle trade if we are to bring everyone into the global economy.

I shall finish on that issue. It is always said that we have a global economy, but I contend that we do not, as half the people in the world are excluded. Half of them live on less than $2 a day, and a quarter cannot have a glass of clean water. Every minute, a woman dies during childbirth in developing countries. That is the reality that

we face. If we are to tackle the issue of globalisation and bring people into the global economy, we must start with the other half of the world population.

We must also recognise that globalisation and terrorism are linked. As ex-president Bill Clinton said in his Dimbleby lecture last year, we can look forward to our children growing up and growing old—say, to 90 years of age—but we do not want them to grow up behind barbed wire. Globalisation has taken the walls down, which means that there will be less security if we do not collectively pursue proper policies. That is our big responsibility, which is why I welcome the Chancellor's statement and urge him to maintain a stable economy, give us high-quality public services, provide fairness to families and increase employment in this country. I urge him to ensure that our voice on the international stage is recognised and that we as a country do a lot for the other half who are not included in the globalisation process.

6.22 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). At first, I struggled to find anything with which I agreed, but as he got going I started to find common cause on one or two points.

I agreed especially with what the hon. Gentleman said about the Washington institutions, both of which are in a mess. The World Bank is in a dreadful mess, with a huge bureaucracy out of the control of the shareholders, or even senior staff. That is why, as he knows, I believe that there is scope for an Anglo-American parliamentary initiative. Congress knows better than us what a mess those institutions are in and has been looking for allies for a long time to secure fundamental reform, to cut out waste and to ensure that the institutions use more effectively the huge resources that are available to them. I have suggested an initiative in which two committees of the respective Parliaments come together and issue joint proposals. The involvement of America and Britain, possibly with allies from continental Europe, would make a dramatic impact in an area in which there is now great popular interest, not merely among the balaclava-clad brigade but among much more reasonable people who are trying to think how best to deploy resources in the institutions. So there is something on which I can agree with the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) could find anything in the Budget with which he agreed. I can certainly find some things with which I agree, although on the whole, for reasons about which hon. Members will hear in a moment, I think that the Budget is very concerning. I support the reduced small company corporation tax rate; the ending of automatic fines for late payment of VAT and the ending of the requirement for small businesses to write down every VAT transaction in order to reclaim; VAT relief on bad debts; and the backdating of tax relief on charitable giving. I also support the direct payments that are being made to schools, although I am not sure whether the Government have thought through the long-term implications of bypassing local education authorities and increasing such sums—an approach that betokens a profound transformation of the way we fund education. We need to think through the structures more carefully. Incidentally, I welcomed some years ago the granting of independence to the Bank of England. Indeed, I would have liked the Chancellor to go further in those reforms.

So, there are some things that the Chancellor has done with which I agree, but I do not think this is a good Budget, although it could become a crucial Budget in the political landscape of Britain. I want to explain why in the remainder of my speech.

Budgets should ultimately be about improving and sustaining the long-term economic performance of the country. Everything should be subordinate to that end, even when we are firefighting in an economic crisis. Distributive aims, including getting money to the poor, are not an alternative policy, because if long-term economic performance is not sustained, there will be no money to distribute.

The background against which all Labour Budgets have so far been announced is the crucial fact that after 19 Conservative Budgets, Britain had been turned from a basket-case economy into one of the leading economies of the world. Every step that the Conservatives took on that road was opposed by Labour. It opposed tax reduction and reform, privatisation, almost all deregulation and the removal of most protection in the economy. The whole lot was opposed. By the early 1990s, even when Britain was in a severe recession, caused partly by a global cyclical downturn and partly by policy mistakes, the British people wanted to stick with those policies and voted the Tories back; they voted to stick with the new economic consensus.

The 1992 shadow Budget was Labour's last great effort to challenge that market-based consensus and get back to tax and spend. It did not succeed in breaking the consensus, but broke itself. That shadow Budget, with its commitment to tax and especially to national insurance contribution rises—not that dissimilar to the Budget proposals announced today—was the main reason why Labour was defeated so decisively in the subsequent election, which took place a few weeks after its announcement. It was at that moment that new Labour was conceived in the minds of the current Chancellor and Prime Minister.

Mr. Hendrick: What happened at that time was very different, as there was a proposal to lift the ceiling on national insurance. The hon. Gentleman will know from today's statement that that ceiling has not been lifted.

Mr. Tyrie: The Chancellor has raised national insurance contributions, and several rises in NICs have been introduced by Labour in its other Budgets. Is the hon. Gentleman saying now that he has found another way to raise a bit of money from national insurance contributions and that that is all right? Is he implying that if he had made such proposals in 1992, they would have looked any better to the electorate? I very much doubt it. The fact is that it was those commitments to rises in national insurance contributions that broke Labour in 1992 and led to the creation of new Labour.

Rob Marris: The hon. Gentleman talks about the political and economic situation in 1992. Does he think that it is better to tax and spend or to do what happened between 1992 and 1997, when the national debt doubled: flog off the family silver, borrow lots of money and spend?

Mr. Tyrie: Those comments will lead me into a digression, but I shall try to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point. He suggested that the Conservatives got out of their difficulties in 1992 merely by racking up debt. In fact, they took very tough decisions to bring order back into the public finances in extremely difficult circumstances. As I said, those circumstances were created not only by the global economic downswing—other countries had similar problems—but by policy mistakes, mainly in monetary policy. I agreed that those mistakes were made.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the overall debt record; indeed, the Chancellor uses sleight of hand whenever he makes such points. In fact, if he looks at the figures for 1980–1995—they do not vary much from those for 1979–1997—he will see that Britain was the only country of any significance that succeeded in reducing its debt as a proportion of GDP. Every other country experienced a sharp increase in debt as a proportion of GDP: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United States, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands—the lot. One way or another, all were hit by the same kind of crisis, and all racked up debt. Contrary to the impression that the Chancellor gives, we were the only country that coped successfully without racking up debt. Of course, he has been able to reduce debt because the economy is sufficiently strong to enable tax revenues to pour in. Combined with the windfall to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham referred, that has allowed him to bring down the debt burden.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not prolong this part of the debate. Otherwise, I will not get around to making the speech that I want to make.

As I was saying, Labour was defeated in 1992 because it said that it would tamper with national insurance contributions. It was elected in 1997 after committing itself to adopting the new economic consensus lock, stock and barrel—even to the extent of accepting Conservative spending plans Department by Department. Until it did so, the country was simply not prepared to trust it with power. The big question now, which will reverberate for the rest of this Parliament, is the extent to which this Budget breaks with that consensus.

Beyond the Chancellor's customary rhetorical fog, I detect that not new Labour but the whole Labour party—including the "borrow, tax and spend" Labour party of yesteryear—is behind this Budget. Perhaps I might illustrate the point with a few words on each of those elements.

On borrowing, the figures might not look too bad, but careful inspection of the Red Book shows that off-balance sheet finance is growing every year. As page 229 shows, if off-balance sheet finance already made is added to planned off-balance sheet finance, we arrive at a figure of £44 billion. According to old accounting principles, in the 1980s and 1990s such expenditure would have scored in the year in which it was incurred. The private finance initiative and public-private partnership are creating huge bills for taxpayers to pay in years to come. Of course, that off-balance sheet finance would have been in the bottom line for borrowing. Borrowing is understated in the Red Book.

In any case, borrowing should be all right at this point in the cycle. In fact, it is not that bad, but even so borrowing of £25 billion is proposed over the next two years, and the situation is certainly worse than the figures suggest. Exactly how bad it is I cannot tell, and I do not think that anybody can be sure. I doubt whether anyone in the House—even the Economic Secretary—really has a grip on the numbers in the Red Book. Even as someone who at one time tried to help draft parts of a Red Book, I find it incomprehensible. Changes to definitions of the accounts are mesmerising, and it is impossible to work out what is going on without a degree in Balls-Brown economics.

To ensure clarity, we desperately need to sort out these numbers. We need a fiscal policy committee, independent of the Government, akin to a small version of the congressional budget office. Such a committee, for which I have called for a long time, needs only a dozen people or fewer. Their job should be to draw up truly independent and authoritative accounts, to vet the Government's accounts, to create agreed definitions and to scrutinise the forecast in depth.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does my hon. Friend think that we should adjourn each year's Budget debate for a couple of days, to enable us to study the Red Book? Trying to have a public debate is ludicrous when the Government obscure so much bad news by hiding it away in the Red Book.

Mr. Tyrie: Parliamentary scrutiny of the Budget is in need of wider reform, and my hon. Friend's idea, which has much to commend it, should perhaps form part of that reform. In the 48 hours after a Budget, the Treasury Committee should engage actively and intensively with it and produce a report in language that parliamentarians can understand, so that they can judge the Budget for themselves. Unfortunately, that is not the way that things are done. I am not even sure that an instant response should be made to a chancellorial statement, which should be treated as a statement. In fact, it is not a statement, even though it is described as such. People should be able to cross-examine the Chancellor on the spot and we should then have a 48-hour delay, after which the debate should begin. I do not feel that strongly about the matter, however, and many might say that that would be a shocking innovation for a process that has been going for some time.

The Government and the Chancellor claim that they are vetting the numbers to which I was referring: after all, they are giving them to the National Audit Office. However, that is little more than baloney. The NAO itself put it on record that it takes little more than a cursory look at the assumptions. It said that, in total, it spends £20,000 on the job. When I asked the Bundesbank what it spends to vet assumptions in the German Government's accounts, it said that the resource cost amounts to between £1 million and £2 million. Of course, huge resources are spent on vetting draft American budgets by the congressional budget office. So we should remember that, in saying today that the NAO has concluded that the audited assumptions are reasonable and cautious, the Chancellor said virtually nothing at all.

So much for borrowing and the bottom line, but what of tax and spend? Here, evidence of a change in policy seems overwhelming, with a move away from the

previous five Budgets and the economic consensus of the 1980s and 1990s, and towards an earlier position. Taxes are up by 2.5 per cent. of GDP, excluding questionable items such as the working families tax credit, which should be reclassified. Page 216 of the Red Book seems to suggest, at least, that the Government are going to concede ground on how it should be classified. Over the equivalent period in the last two cycles, the Conservative Government managed to reduce the tax burden. Of course, reducing the tax burden is partly a cyclical phenomenon: the Labour Government are putting it up by 2.5 per cent. during an upswing, but we managed to get it down. That is a significant change; in statistical terms, it is quite dramatic.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make a little more progress. Perhaps he can intervene a little later.

Five years ago, people thought that, under Labour, taxes and the tax burden might at least be stable. They did not hope for tax cuts, but they thought they would not get tax rises. That was when they were listening to new Labour. The Prime Minister told us time and again that he had no plans to raise taxes.

A little over three and a half years ago—just before a Labour party conference—he suggested in an interview that he wanted to get taxes down, not up. That was definitely new Labour speaking, but I do not think that new Labour was speaking today.

Before 1997, the whole of Labour's policy—of which the Chancellor and the Prime Minister were key architects—involved shedding the electoral millstone of a commitment to high taxation and spending. In the Chancellor's earlier Budgets, when taxes came they came by stealth, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham pointed out. However, this budget is brazen about tax rises. That is certainly not new Labour speaking, but old Labour.

Spending has risen very sharply under Labour—from £341 billion in cash terms to a projected £470 billion in 2005-06. That is a huge increase of £130 billion. Spending is rising so fast that the Government cannot get rid of the money, hence the underspend. Even where it is being spent, much is being wasted in so many areas.

Let me give an example. What happened to the £280 million spent on cancer care in the so-called NHS cancer plan? We have a Select Committee report on that. In evidence to the Committee, Professor McVie said:

"I think there is still some mystery about where some of the money is and whether the cheque got lost in the post or whether it has been absorbed like creosote into the fence post of the administration of the health service".

He went on:

"I would have thought that seven-eighths of the resource has not yet got out there".

The problem is that it is the same story in many other aspects of public spending. Much attention is paid to getting out announcements on increases in spending, but little care is given to thinking how best to deploy and use that money.

When the Conservatives increased NHS spending by 6 per cent. in real terms for several years—something that is often forgotten—they allied those increases to radical changes in the structure of the NHS. As a result, there were huge productivity gains, measurable in output terms and available as public statistics. I am prepared to wager that we will see little in the way of productivity gains over the next few years from the new spending increases. I am sure that if we keep a constant series going—I would not mind betting that the Government are trying to find a way to end that series—we will still see a fall in productivity.

So far I have talked about financial policy—getting monetary and fiscal policy right. However, the supply side is at the heart of improving economic performance, and new Labour has never taken on board that part of what is required to make an economy successful.

Jim Knight: I question the premise of the hon. Gentleman's argument about breaking the consensus. I put it to him that the Conservatives cut spending dramatically, leaving the Labour Government to inherit an under-resourced and under-invested health system. The Conservative party now seems to agree that we need to increase spending on health, but thinks that the money needs to come from people's pockets in a different way. That is what the debate is now about. If the hon. Gentleman wants to go back to the 1990s, we can talk about boom and bust and the 22 tax rises. Let us instead move the debate on and discuss how to rebuild and reinvest in our NHS.

Mr. Tyrie: The hon. Gentleman attempts to make an honourable intervention, but he does not know many of the facts. The NHS saw a real-terms increase of 3.2 per cent. a year on average throughout the time of Conservative government. Health spending grew faster than the increase in gross domestic product for the same period, which was nearly 2.8 per cent. In other words, the NHS absorbed a steadily increasing share of GDP throughout an 18-year period, which is a long time. The hon. Gentleman is wrong about what went on.

The question before us is whether Labour has learned the lesson that increased taxation can easily and dramatically reduce economic performance. That is the heart of the matter. Has it learned that spending alone does not solve problems? Like spending in a business, it is the quality of the investment that counts. That is what determines whether extra spending is translated into better and more services.

Let me return to supply-side reform—I have been slowed down by intelligent distractions from various quarters. Supply-side reform is at the heart of improved economic performance and Labour has never had its heart in that. The plain fact is that the economy is being clogged up with intervention and subsidy everywhere. Over the past five years, subsidies have come from all quarters. There have been subsidies for the coal industry, the airbus, the car industry, for films and much else. There has been a massive increase in regulations on the utilities, financial services and employment bureaux. There is a new body of regulations for everything.

The public sector has been given the same treatment. Hon. Members only have to go to their local schools and ask about the increase in regulations to know that. Indeed, the same story is given by those who run primary schools. I was going to spare the House an anecdote about a school in my constituency, but I am beginning to enjoy myself. A school with an experienced headmaster got no fewer

[Mr. Tyrie]

than six questionnaires, each of which he said would take him several hours to complete. They were sent by central Government via the local education authority and came with a note saying, "Congratulations. You've been chosen at random to help us find out more about how to improve the education system." He was sick of filling in forms and worked out that it would take him many man hours to complete them, so he pinned them together and wrote back saying, "Congratulations. You have been chosen at random to receive these unanswered. What I want to do is get on with some teaching." I have every sympathy with him.

The structure of the tax system is crucial to an efficient economy. A huge number of distortions has been put into the system. The hard work of nearly 20 years of simplifying the tax system has been put into reverse. Hon. Members should not take my word for it—the British Chambers of Commerce said a while ago about capital gains tax:

"The CGT system is now so complex as to be almost unworkable. Many businesses say they and their accountants are just unable to work out their CGT liabilities."

That is not a satisfactory state of affairs, but so it goes on. It is the interference with, and distortion of, the millions of micro-economic decisions throughout the economy that will ultimately reduce the economic performance in this country. That is what is so pernicious.

On tax above all else the Chancellor has explicitly abandoned the crucial plank of something to which the public thought Labour was committed. They thought that Labour had learned its lessons on tax and they believed the Prime Minister when he said that he had no intention of increasing taxes. Today, however, the Chancellor made it clear that he is prepared to raise tax, and by large amounts.

New Labour came into existence out of the decision by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister in opposition to abandon tax and spend, but the Chancellor has now put up national insurance contributions, the very tax commitment that sank them exactly 10 years ago. It is almost 10 years to the day since Labour's 1992 election defeat.

It looks as if the Chancellor may have taken the word "new" out of new Labour. It is for that reason above all others that the Budget could come to be seen as a turning point in British politics. This day may come to be perceived as the one when Labour broke with the consensus of the 1980s and the 1990s. It may be the day when new Labour returned again to being just the Labour party.

6.48 pm

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): The Chancellor referred to the three main challenges that he was aiming to address in the Budget. The first was boosting enterprise, the second was securing family prosperity and the third was improving public services. The enterprise objective was rightly set first. It is, after all, the foundation for achieving progress on the others, and it is on that aspect that I shall focus my comments.

We have spent much time on the Treasury Committee and elsewhere considering the productivity challenge that the British economy faces, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who chairs the Committee, mentioned that in his contribution. There certainly is a challenge for our country in terms of the productivity gap. There is also something of a paradox because many of the things that need to be in place to secure a productive economy are already in place in the British economy. We have, for example, a high level of employment. Indeed, that has risen even further since 1997 and now stands at an historic high.

We have a relatively flexible labour market, which is another important precondition for productivity. Our economy is very successful at attracting inward investment—indeed, it is the most attractive centre for such investment in the whole of the European Union. All those important preconditions for productivity are present—they have improved further since 1997—yet there is still a productivity gap between our economy and those of our major competitors.

The important question for us to address in this Budget, as in all Budgets, is what we are going to do to help to close that productivity gap and so boost the prosperity of our economy. The first essential element to have in place is economic stability. Without that, any amount of measures targeted specifically at increasing productivity simply will not do the trick. Economic stability is crucial to business confidence, critical to secure investment and important to secure enterprise.

The fundamentals for economic stability are clearly in place. We put a key one in place when we came into office by giving the Bank of England its operational independence. That has delivered low, stable interest rates, which play a crucial role in delivering a stable economy.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman spoke of a paradox. Does not the real paradox involve wanting to stimulate enterprise in the way that he describes—he mentioned inward investment—while at the same time wanting to interfere and to regulate? I shall give him one example, which was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie): the ever more complex tax system. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the tax system for small and medium-sized enterprise in this country will be simpler or more complicated as a result of this Budget?

Mr. Plaskitt: The performance of the small and medium-sized business sector speaks for itself, and answers the hon. Gentleman's question. Shortly, I shall cite some surveys that show exactly how the small and medium-sized enterprise sector is performing in our economy, compared to the economies of our main competitors. Those surveys paint a very encouraging picture of the British economy. That simply would not be so if the hon. Gentleman's accusation that the sector was overburdened with regulations were true. I will return to that point shortly.

Jim Knight: Prior to being elected, I was the manager of a small business in Wiltshire. I know that the 2,000 small businesses in my constituency will be delighted with the changes in VAT in the Budget. The flat rate for VAT for businesses whose turnover is currently less than £100,000—extending to 750,000 in April—is tremendous news for our small businesses.

Mr. Plaskitt: My hon. Friend is right. That proposal will be widely welcomed. As a point of contrast, and to

pick up the point made by the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), we could have a debate about the scale of regulation in particular areas, but it all pales into insignificance when we recall the cost to businesses of the 15 per cent. interest rates that they had to endure when the Conservatives were in government.

Mr. Hayes: I appreciate the experience of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) in these matters. I was the director of what became a medium-sized business—clearly it was a more successful company than that of the hon. Gentleman—so I have some experience of these matters as well. Speaking of things paling into insignificance, the changes announced today that were positive for small and medium-sized enterprises are greatly outweighed by the increased national insurance contributions that employers in that sector will have to pay as a result of the Budget.

Mr. Plaskitt: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is reflecting sufficiently on the reasons for the national insurance contributions being increased. Is he really saying that there is no return whatever for any business—small, medium or large—from a greatly improved national health service? There most certainly is, and it is perfectly right and proper that businesses can contribute to that just as much as individuals can.

I was in the process of listing the fundamentals that need to be in place to tackle the productivity agenda, and I mentioned monetary policy. Interestingly, there is now very little argument in the House about the positive contribution that has resulted from introducing the independence of the Bank of England, although there was at the time of its introduction. Fiscal discipline has also played a key part, and continues to do so. This has been reinforced by the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor today. Low rates of business tax also play an important part, and a combination of all these factors has resulted in an end to the boom and bust cycle. That cycle did more harm to business stability than anything else.

The British economy has now had nearly 10 years without a single quarter showing negative growth. We need to go an awfully long way back into history to find circumstances such as these. The Chancellor's forecasts announced today suggest at least another four years of these economic conditions. This is a platform of stability that British business has not enjoyed for a generation.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Tyrie *rose—*

Mr. Plaskitt: The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) stood first, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman see the irony of Labour Members urging the private sector to greater productivity when it is their Government's policy to ensure that there is a massive decline in the political classes by saying that MPs cannot do the job and that we need all sorts of other elected people all round the country to do part of the job for us? Does he also see that lower productivity—or lower output per person—is sometimes desirable, because it is the Government's policy to have much shorter working hours for doctors, which will naturally lead to much lower productivity in the health service, rather than producing better working conditions?

Mr. Plaskitt: I would willingly take any point that the right hon. Gentleman made on productivity if his party had had a record, when in office, of being able to turn the magic key on productivity. In all of its 18 years, however, it did not. The right hon. Gentleman should have a little more patience with our measures, and show more understanding of what is resulting from our efforts, given that lamentable record.

Mr. Tyrie *rose—*

Mr. Plaskitt: Because the hon. Gentleman serves on the Treasury Committee, I will give way to him, then I want to make some headway.

Mr. Tyrie: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He said that we had now had 10 years of steady upswing. Does he not therefore concede that the foundations for what he has described as the end of the boom and bust cycle must have been laid some time during the early 1990s or earlier?

Mr. Plaskitt: No, that does not follow. Many of the other factors that were present at the end of the first four or five years of growth, in 1997 when his Government left office, were threatening the continuation of that growth. Rising inflation and the very high level of debt alone suggested that that growth might well have come to an end unless important measures were implemented, such as those that we introduced when we came into office. There is therefore an error in the hon. Gentleman's logic.

The conditions that I have outlined were necessary to secure an increase in productivity, but they were not in themselves sufficient. It is therefore right that we should do more to promote enterprise, to improve the skill base of the economy and to promote investment and innovation. I was pleased to hear that my right hon. Friend had something to say about all those important areas in his statement. The Budget needs to be judged in part—probably in substantial part—on the basis of the contribution that it makes to those objectives.

I understand, because of the obvious concentration on it, that most of the debate about the Budget may well revolve around the national health service. That is entirely understandable. In acknowledging that, I would like to point out that we should not overlook the question of productivity in relation to the NHS. Productivity is just as important there as it is in other parts of the economy. I would encourage Members to read the section of the Wanless report that debates the issue of productivity in the national health service—it is paragraph 5.31, if Members want to have a look at it. It shows the impact of achieving our health service objectives in terms of getting the productivity question right.

Wanless has as his central case a projection that health spending will rise to 11.1 per cent. of gross domestic product by 2022. He points out, however, that if health service productivity is 1 per cent. per annum worse than his forecast, spending would have to rise to 13.1 per cent. of GDP in 2022 to achieve the same health service output.

[Mr. Plaskitt]

Conversely, if productivity in the health service is 1 per cent. per annum better than his central case, the same health service output will be achieved with spending having to rise only to 9.4 per cent. of GDP. In other words, over a 20-year period a 1 per cent. fluctuation up or down in productivity inside that important public service amounts to a 3.7 per cent. of GDP differential—at today's prices, £35 billion, all resting on getting the productivity equation right inside the NHS. If that is true of the NHS, one can imagine how true it is of the whole economy, including the private sector. Small alterations and improvements in productivity performance can have a huge impact on the economy's overall performance. It is therefore right to make enterprise the first priority and to do what we can to promote it.

Small companies are very important in this context. There are about 5,000 in my constituency alone, and nationally they contribute about 45 per cent. of total output. The number of small businesses has grown every year over the past five years, and there are now 40,000 more than in 1997. The Government have already taken several measures to help small businesses, including the reductions in small business corporation tax introduced in recent years, the shortening of the capital gains tax asset taper and the introduction of the Small Business Service.

In 2000, when the Economist Intelligence Unit surveyed the 60 largest economies in the world to assess how good they were as a place to do business, the United Kingdom economy came second. Another survey by the Fraser Institute ranks the UK second overall in terms of business freedom. I urge Conservative Members, who are fond of raising concerns about so-called over-regulation, to ponder the conclusions of those surveys. The Fraser Institute puts the UK economy third out of the world's 22 largest in terms of its use of markets and first in terms of property rights. All those factors are vital in delivering improved productivity. Such findings belie the charges that are made with monotonous regularity about an over-regulated business sector.

Given that those are important targets to aim for, my right hon. Friend's Budget contains some very welcome measures, including the extension of the research and development tax credit, further exemptions on capital gains tax, intellectual property recognition, further reductions in corporation tax, especially targeted at the small business sector—the basic rate goes down from 20 per cent. to 19 per cent. and the starting rate goes down all the way to zero—the simplification of VAT and help with payroll. All those measures will be warmly welcomed by small businesses in my constituency and throughout the country.

To make further progress on productivity, it is vital to do something about the skill base in the economy. It is a knowledge-driven economy; increasingly, the ability of people in work to perform effectively is the determinant in improving productivity.

I welcome the further announcements on education investment, which is a capital investment in tomorrow's economy. We have made good progress in primary and secondary schools on literacy, numeracy and increased standards, but a big challenge remains as regards the existing work force. The report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reminds us that the UK has a higher proportion of low-skilled workers than any of our major competitors. Reskilling those currently in work plays an important part in developing the skill base that we should not overlook. I therefore welcome the measures to increase the scope for learning provision for employees by giving financial support to employers who release members of staff to take up training opportunities. It will be interesting to see the outcome of the employer training pilots in different parts of the country. They could make a significant contribution to increasing the skill base in the economy.

The whole question of investment is crucially linked to meeting the productivity challenge. The UK has a history of under-investment, although that is improving. In 1997, investment as a share of gross domestic product was 17.2 per cent. It is now about 19 per cent., so it is moving in the right direction, but it must go further if we are to meet the productivity challenge. Much has already been done to help to stimulate investment, including the research and development credits for small business—now extended—the planning reforms, which were particularly welcome in areas in need of regeneration, the stamp duty exemptions and the single pot funding for the regional development agencies that was introduced earlier this month.

It is important to deal with the innovation gap. A paper by the Institute for Fiscal Studies largely attributes the UK's productivity gap to the greater levels of innovation secured by our competitors. Promoting research and innovation is vital to meeting the productivity challenge. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend announce additional investment in universities and colleges, because they are often crucial centres for securing innovation, which flows out into industry and is taken up and turned into investment, in turn boosting productivity. It is therefore vital for the Government to invest in the research base in our universities.

I sound a note of warning to the Treasury about that, and I shall listen with care when the detailed announcement is made. How evenly spread will the additional money be? There has been a tendency to concentrate additional investment for university research on the top 20 or so universities, which, although they are the top universities for academic attainment, are not always the most appropriately placed geographically for spinning off innovation into industry. I enter a plea for colleges and universities in the west midlands, many of which—including Coventry university and, in my constituency, Warwickshire college—have developed strong links with the automotive industry. They have a considerable record on innovation that has been picked up by that industry and used to help it to promote its products and win markets, to the benefit of the whole economy. Nevertheless, they, and others like them, find that their research funding is declining. I hope that that process can be reversed. Will the Minister take that on board and talk to his colleagues about how the welcome increase in overall funding for innovation will be spread around? We will get a better return on it if it is directed towards educational centres that have already established proven, close links with manufacturing industry in particular.

Of course, higher taxes were announced in today's Budget—higher levels of national insurance to fund the national health service—but set against that is the contribution made by the sound fundamentals of the economy, which play a much more significant part than the increase in one tax. Total spending on the NHS, which

is currently £65 billion a year, is scheduled to rise to £105 billion by 2007. A rise of that scale would be nowhere near possible if we had not put in place the sound fundamentals of the economy. Most of that additional investment is delivered by the strong performance of the economy, not by the one particular tax increase that was announced today. It is only possible and can only continue if we go on putting the enterprise objective first.

The Budget does that. It helps us to meet the productivity challenge and thereby to deliver greater fairness. Enterprise and fairness have gone hand in hand under previous Labour Budgets since 1997. Together they have taken a further step forwards today, and that should be broadly welcomed.

7.9 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I have entered my various interests in the Register of Members' Interests. I suspect that the Budget will be remembered as the bingo Budget; the Chancellor probably hopes that it will mean, "No. 10, Tony's den." However, it will require more than fiddling around with bingo prizes and reducing tax on beer in time for the World cup to persuade the country that the Chancellor has its best interests at heart.

Let us consider the Chancellor's intentions for small brewers. They are a classic example of giving the impression of helping a specific sector on Budget day when the small print shows that it is not being helped. The Hook Norton brewery is based in my constituency. It is an excellent, small, independent family brewery. I predict that the Budget proposals for brewers will not help it at all.

I suspect that the Chancellor told his policy advisers to go away and think the unthinkable for the Budget. Indeed, for many small and medium-sized businesses, the Budget is unthinkable not least because of the substantial extra tax burdens that they will have to bear. I shall examine with interest the unemployment figures in the constituencies of Labour Members who spoke in the debate. It will be interesting to watch unemployment increase there year after year through the impact of the burdens on business.

The problem is not so much what the Chancellor does as what he persistently fails to do. He said repeatedly that he supported an enterprise economy. I was struck by recent statements from the Treasury and Downing street. Last month, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, the Chancellor claimed that he would act

"by encouraging people not just to make the most of their opportunities in education and employment but helping start businesses and being on the side of people as they strive to become self-employed or create a business".

To whom was the Chancellor referring? I am afraid that his affirmation does not chime with the experience of most business people in north Oxfordshire. Indeed, they are struggling with mounting piles of red tape and ever more detailed micro-regulation of their companies.

I recently conducted a survey of every small and medium-sized business in my constituency. Almost all businesses complained to me about the excessive amounts of red tape that they have to tackle. Almost all believed that their businesses would be better off without the Treasury's burdensome intrusiveness. I commend to hon. Members three comments by business men in the Cherwell valley.

A well known international food manufacturer and an important local employer commented that

"red tape impacts on every employee. Approximately 5 to 10 per cent. of work time is spent on red tape."

No wonder our competitiveness is falling behind that of other countries in the European Union and elsewhere.

Another employer finds the forest of bureaucracy so daunting that he asserted:

"If I tried to understand all the legislation it would take all my time. I therefore ignore it all and run my business in a professional, fair and honest way and hope that we work within the law".

How can the Chancellor claim after today's Budget that the Government are encouraging enterprise? The comments of another director of a small business in my constituency show the stranglehold and constraint of red tape. He said:

"at least two thirds of my time is wasted dealing with this. Without it I could be a much bigger company, generating significantly more taxable revenue".

Surely that is the sort of entrepreneur that the Government claim they are out to encourage: a good, caring employer.

I have cited the comments of employers from the Cherwell valley and north Oxfordshire, one of the most successful economic areas in the United Kingdom. If employers and businesses in my constituency are experiencing such difficulties, what must it be like in other parts of the country where there are greater problems for industry?

Notwithstanding the simplification of VAT forms for small businesses that the Chancellor announced, a massive void gapes between the fact of running businesses under the Government and the fantasy of the Chancellor's wild claims of help for employers.

Although I welcome the incentives that the Chancellor announced for employers who allow employees time off for training, they will sound hollow to many employers and people involved in training when they reflect on the experience of individual learning accounts. We have been here before, and not long ago. Individual learning accounts were scrapped because they were so successful and the Treasury discovered that they were costing more than they thought.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: No. I want to make progress and many hon. Members wish to speak.

The Chancellor presents a load of gimmicks, which resemble baubles on a Christmas tree. He hopes that they will appear attractive, but also that they will not be used or that they will prove so complicated that no one will work out how to use them a few days after the Budget statement. I suspect that they are intended to look good only in one of those little boxes in a newspaper. Like the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt), they give the impression that the Government are doing something. The hon. Gentleman's local newspaper will be able to say that the Government are doing something for Warwick university. It is not clear what they will do for universities, but that will not matter in a week because the right Budget headline and soundbite have been obtained.

One has only to glance at the latest growth rates for the UK to realise how sorely stimulus for business is needed. I understand that when the Chancellor took over at the

[Tony Baldry]

Treasury, overall growth in the UK was, at 3 per cent., second only to that of America. It was twice that of the eurozone's slightly dismal 1.5 per cent. It has now fallen by a significant 0.5 per cent. The UK has failed to keep up with America and the average growth of prosperous Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. We have even been overtaken by that notorious shire horse of an economy, France.

The gulf that has grown between financial services and the manufacturing sector is especially worrying for businesses in north Oxfordshire and elsewhere in the country. Financial services have prospered better under the Chancellor's Budgets than manufacturing, but neither has prospered much.

Little in today's Budget will alter the decline in manufacturing industry. That is especially worrying for all businesses in the Cherwell valley and elsewhere for two reasons. First, it proves what they already know: not all parts of the UK economy have been doing well. Despite the Chancellor's mantra of no more boom and bust, there has been bust in manufacturing.

The Government produce their Red Book only on the day of the Budget. It is a pity that we do not have time to study it for longer. However, those who have had the opportunity to give it the most cursory glance know that the Government's Budget forecast makes it clear that even they expect manufacturing output to continue to contract and exports to continue to fall. We are a global trading nation; we have traditionally exported more per head of population than any other country in the world with the recent exception of Japan. If UK exports continue to decline, that is bad news for employment and all our constituencies, but especially for marginal seats represented by Labour Members. Those hon. Members may find that their seats become more marginal as a consequence of the Budget, which does not contain significant initiatives to redress the decline properly.

The second and more significant reason for manufacturing industry's poor performance under the Chancellor is that manufacturing businesses have too often borne the brunt of the Treasury's increasing burden of tax and bureaucracy.

May I give a simple example? One of the larger employers in my constituency is General Foods, which makes Maxwell House coffee. Over the years, it has probably invested millions of pounds in making its plant energy efficient. Notwithstanding that, it is still hit by the climate change levy, which is simply a tax on business and competitiveness.

We must read the small print, but the Chancellor announced that there will be help for those who invest in energy efficiency equipment. However, he must know that most major energy users have already invested substantially in such equipment. The policy sounds good, but take-up will be minimal because businesses such as General Foods have already invested in energy efficiency. Again, the contribution to their competitiveness is meaningless.

A recent *Sunday Business* article points out that legislation relating simply to taxation runs to more than 6,000 printed pages, and I sense that the north Oxfordshire business community is deeply concerned that financial services will suffer under the same burden of bureaucracy as manufacturing. I ask the House to consider a letter from a financial services director, which responds to my pre-Budget survey by saying that

"the entire financial services industry is about to suffer further regulation . . . this action is going to cause massive upheaval, with vast sums of money being wasted for regulation's sake. This action will inevitably cause more confusion for the consumer . . . at a time when the Government is meant to be encouraging free trade and the expansion of small businesses, this legislation is totally contradictory."

Again, the difference between the fact of running a business and Government fantasy is striking.

Independent forecasters such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies have said that productivity is down, investment is down and competitiveness is down. Thus, consider three other concerns of the Cherwell valley business community: corporation tax and capital gains tax, petrol tax, and stamp duty and national insurance contributions. I shall deal briefly with them, as they were dealt with by the Chancellor.

Candidly, corporation tax and capital gains tax have not recovered from the decisions taken by the Chancellor in previous Budgets, and clearly businesses needed a significant cut in both in this Budget. On the face of it, employers got that, but we see that it is not all that it seems if we look more closely. I am particularly concerned that the tapered system for capital gains tax introduced by the Treasury, rather than encouraging enterprise as intended, has stifled it with yet another convoluted and complicated tax system. So, while I welcome today's capital gains tax cut, the complicated resource-sapping system remains.

On corporation tax, advance corporation tax is perhaps the most recent concern, as the Government ended the tax credit system in a previous Budget. Clearly, the effect is "profound", as the *Financial Times* observed:

"For a start, the hit to pension funds will be serious . . . those with personal or deferred contribution pensions will have to accept lower pensions or contribute more".

The Budget has not adequately addressed employers' pension problems, and I shall return to what I believe is a genuinely straightforward part solution to that serious difficulty. It strikes me that the issue of tax on business is becoming one of lack of balance.

The Chancellor also said that he is doing something for research and development. Again, we must read the small print closely. On research and development tax relief and an approach by Treasury advisers, I ask the House to consider the fact that one company—a significant investor in research and development—said that

"the sad and almost tragic reality is . . . none had realised the financial implications . . . and realised that 17 per cent. of the credit would go to one company and 60 per cent. to the top ten".

Had the advisers done so,

"they may almost certainly have given a different response".

In a few weeks or perhaps months, it will be interesting to see who has benefited from what the Chancellor said today about research and development benefits. Interestingly, he referred to larger companies, but I suspect that they do not need assistance. Often, fledgling, growing companies need research and development tax help.

On petrol tax, the Chancellor's approach is cynical. The Budget freezes fuel duty, but we know that the Exchequer will maintain revenues from the tax because of rising oil

prices. The plain fact is that petrol tax is disproportionate to that in eurozone countries, so it is perhaps no surprise that our growth is declining compared with theirs.

Stamp duty, which the Chancellor has removed in deprived areas, is effectively a mobility tax. Constituencies such as mine are desperately trying to attract key people to work in the public services—nurses, police officers and teachers—but stamp duty is simply a further tax that deters them from moving to such areas, where house prices are high. Therefore, the tax that must be paid on buying a house is also high, so it is perverse of the Chancellor to remove stamp duty from economic black spots. He should consider reducing or removing stamp duty in areas such as mine, because those who want to come and work in key sectors of the economy are finding that very difficult.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that reducing stamp duty in constituencies such as his would increase house price inflation and make moving there even more difficult?

Tony Baldry: No, not at all. Stamp duty is simply a tax on mobility. It deters people from moving and is, in many ways, ludicrous and anachronistic. Frankly, if I were an officer in Thames Valley police wanting to move to Banbury or a nurse wanting to move to Oxford to work at the John Radcliffe, I would not be particularly happy that people in some parts of the country are being let off stamp duty while I would have to pay a hefty sum. As days go by, Labour Members will begin to regret the inclusion of such divisive measures in the Budget.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that in constituencies such as North Durham, where it is difficult to get certain sites developed, abolishing stamp duty will allow development that would not otherwise take place? Therefore, abolition will help to regenerate the economy of such areas.

Tony Baldry: For a number of years, I was a Minister at the Department of the Environment, and I had responsibility for the construction industry for four years. I am bound to say that I cannot recall a single occasion on which someone in the construction industry said to me, "We are not going to develop areas such as Durham, the north-east and elsewhere unless you remove or reduce stamp duty." That just did not happen.

It was widely predicted and widely trailed that national insurance contributions would rise. We now know that they will rise by at least 1 per cent.—a tax hike. It is difficult to calculate by how much tax will increase as a consequence of the Budget, so we must look to page 14 of the Red Book. Through some swift maths, my rough and ready calculation is that the tax burden will increase by £8 billion in the financial year 2004–05 alone. That will not come out of thin air; it will be a burden of taxation on individuals and businesses.

Mr. Plaskitt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: Yes, but for the last time.

Mr. Plaskitt: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the tax burden, has he also noted on page 218 of the Red Book a table showing total current receipts to the Government at 40.1 per cent. of GDP this year, but at 40.2 per cent. in 2004–05?

Tony Baldry: As one of my hon. Friends said earlier in the debate, the only time the Labour party is really happy is on Budget day, because it can put taxes up. The hon. Gentleman clearly does not appreciate that taxes have to be paid for by someone—by businesses and individuals. Perhaps tomorrow he will appreciate that an £8 billion tax hike in a single year must be paid for, and will come out of the pockets of individuals and businesses in his constituency and in mine.

That leads me to the second comment by the Prime Minister that I found striking in the build-up to the Budget, when he asserted that we could not have world-class schools and hospitals unless we were prepared to pay for them. I suspect that over the next year we shall find that the real problem of the Budget is that the delayed and disfigured tax hikes will not provide a clear and delineable view of which taxes are spent where and when on public services, even with an annual report to Parliament. It will take some time for that money to get through to public services. People will expect public services to improve and I am sure that next winter I shall still be receiving as many letters from constituents in Banbury, Bicester and the villages of north Oxfordshire expressing concerns about cancelled operations, waiting lists and inefficiencies in the NHS. Those problems are not the fault of NHS staff, but next year people will feel even more frustrated because they will be paying more in tax but still not getting a better service.

Today's Budget raises taxation substantially, and much of the burden of that taxation will fall on businesses. Such taxes make businesses less competitive and less able to create jobs. No wonder the Prime Minister was so keen, at Prime Minister's questions, to trumpet the fall in unemployment. He knows—indeed, the Red Book tells us—that the Government now expect unemployment to increase. Never in the history of this country has the state taking more, taxing more, spending substantially more and controlling more led to greater individual and collective wealth and happiness.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie): the Budget is a turning point that—let me return to my earlier analogy of a bingo Budget—in due course will mean that No. 10 is longer Tony's den.

7.33 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I welcome the Budget. As the Chancellor said, it has been drawn up in an environment of the lowest inflation and interest rates that this country has seen for 40 years. For families and home owners in my constituency, in Preston, Walton-le-Dale and Bamber Bridge, it is a tremendous boost.

Unemployment in this country is lower than in the rest of Europe, Japan and the United States. While there have been some job losses in manufacturing in my constituency, those jobs are being replaced by new jobs, and millions of pounds are flowing into it.

The Budget has shown that Labour is the party of enterprise. I am the first Labour Member in Lancashire to be an honorary vice-president of the central and west Lancashire chamber of commerce. I am as proud of that as I am to be a member of the GMB trade union.

[Mr. Mark Hendrick]

Labour is also the party of fairness, and today's Budget is one for the public services. Millions of people throughout the country will benefit as we generate an economy that brings prosperity to the country as a whole.

The decision to give the Bank of England independence on interest rates was bold and courageous. As the Chancellor said, since then, there have been seven cuts in interest rates. Let us contrast that bold move with the recent statement by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who said:

"We think it was a big mistake. We opposed it at the time. We said no good would come of it."

The facts speak for themselves: interest rates are at their lowest for many years.

Many people believed that the events of 11 September and the war against terrorism would cause a great deal of economic instability, not only in the United States but throughout the developed and developing world. What we have seen since then is a testament to the management of our economy by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Worries about future growth and stability have already all but disappeared. The world economy will grow, but stewardship of our economy has shown that it will grow more in the UK than elsewhere. In the past year, we have seen growth of 2 to 2.5 per cent. and we expect growth of 3 to 3.5 per cent. next year and 2 to 2.5 per cent. the following year. Those healthy low-inflation growth rates are consistent with a stable economy.

As someone with my eye firmly on the conditions for joining the euro—I look forward to a referendum in this country—I am pleased to see that debt is now considerably less than 40 per cent. of GDP. Given that debt stands at 30.4 per cent. of GDP and that the Government have repaid some £37 billion of debt, we are in a tremendous position and will be the envy of many of our European partners. I was struck by the concern of the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) about exports. I share that concern but believe that if we joined the euro, we would win considerably more exports and see an even greater recovery in manufacturing.

The Chancellor announced £4 billion extra in public expenditure. That will help Preston, which is a new, proud city that is central to the provision of public services for the whole of Lancashire. Its first-class hospital will benefit from increased NHS funding, and it has some first-class schools and an excellent police force. Preston is looking to the future. However, that money will need to be matched with expenditure on modernisation and reform. Despite the good provision of services in Preston and the rest of Lancashire, there is no room for complacency. We must have modernisation and reform to make those services even better, and I look forward to seeing that in my constituency.

Business investment has increased from 10 per cent. of GDP to 12 per cent. That shows business confidence, and confidence in the Government's handling of the economy. Corporation tax has gone down from 33 to 30 per cent. Research and development tax credits will bring some £400 million extra to our R and D companies. As a former scientist and engineer, I recognise the importance of R and D to the development of new products, trade and economic growth. My constituency has people employed in aerospace, nuclear power, software and computing, and the country's eighth largest university, which spends millions on research and development. The proposal is very welcome.

My constituency also has many small businesses, and their tax rate has gone from 23 per cent. down to 21 per cent., 21 per cent. down to 20 per cent., and, now, down to 19 per cent. As the Chancellor mentioned, the starting rate is now not 10 per cent. but 0 per cent. Capital gains tax has also been cut. I am sure that small firms in Preston, Walton-le-Dale and Bamber Bridge will all welcome that.

I was surprised to hear comments from Opposition Members about red tape when, today, the Chancellor has again made proposals for simplifying VAT that will benefit all businesses. The flat rate will not just be for companies with turnovers of less than £100,000 but for those with turnovers of less than £150,000. The flat-rate system will greatly reduce the amount of form filling, and the deferred VAT payments will significantly reduce the complexity of making VAT claims. Firms are to be encouraged to go online—e-finance, which is known in Lancashire as "ee ba gum" finance—to which I am sure firms in my constituency look forward. The introduction of 2,000 identified enterprise areas, which will receive 0 per cent. stamp duty status, will be a tremendous boost. There are still many areas up and down this country, which were and still are industrial areas, that need investment.

I also welcome credits for firms developing green technologies. The university of Central Lancashire has done excellent work in that area, and I am sure that firms around Lancashire will do a great deal in it in future. Beer duty will be halved for small breweries; although there is no small brewery in my constituency, I shall still have a celebratory drink in the Strangers Bar afterwards.

The working families minimum income guarantee for full-time workers will be increased to £237, which is £70 more per week than income support. That is a tremendous change. We are now looking forward, for the first time, to a three-figure state pension for a single person, which will be a tremendous psychological and financial boost to pensioners up and down this country. For those with occupational pensions, personal allowances will be raised, and we look forward to tax credits for future pensioners, too. The Chancellor has provided £2.5 billion for families—Labour is now firmly the party for the family.

On public services, huge direct payment increases will go to every school. That will be good for schools in my constituency such as Moor Nook primary school, which I visited a few weeks ago. I was shown photographs by the head teacher of what it looked like six years ago, and, seeing it now, it has undergone a total transformation. Schools such as Corpus Christi high school will also benefit, as ambitious construction work is being carried out there.

I was surprised to hear from Conservative Members that they do not agree that there should be a consensus on the national health service. That consensus has existed since the war, and the Conservative party agreed to it, at least until the election of Mrs. Thatcher. That national consensus will come back—people want investment, reform and a five-year programme of high growth. The criticism that too much of the NHS is centralised is

immediately defused by the fact that 75 per cent. of budgets will go to primary care trusts, which, as everyone must accept, is decentralisation.

The financial incentives, the reform of care for the elderly and the money going to primary care trusts are important. The independent audit and scrutiny of the performance of the health service is also important, for two reasons. First, as I said in an intervention, we need to make sure that we get value for money in the health service. Secondly, it will debunk all the myths thrown out by the Conservative party, which wants to denigrate the services provided in this country and the people who work in them and to leave an impression that things are far worse than they really are.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments on long-term care for the elderly. Which part of what the Chancellor has said to date in relation to looking after the elderly in the long term does he most welcome?

Mr. Hendrick: As I shall say in a moment, there will be a 6 per cent. increase for social services. As county councils and unitary authorities up and down the country administer social services budgets, that money can be spent on those services, as it can on other things.

An annual report on how much is spent, where it is spent and what is achieved is an excellent part of the Chancellor's proposals. As I said, the Conservative party does not want that, as it prefers the myths and anecdotes that we have heard today rather than the facts from an independent audit body.

We have heard a great deal about the increase in national insurance contributions, which has been referred to as if, in some way, it is income tax. It is not income tax. National insurance is what the name implies—insurance. Many companies up and down the country are happy to pay for private health insurance for their workers. The Chancellor has made it plain that the money that is raised in this way will be invested not in private health but in public health and public health provision. I am surprised that that should be presented as anything other than what it is. If we remember why national insurance was originally introduced, it was to pay for pensions, health and benefits. Let us not forget that or try to present the increase as something that it is not.

There will be a freeze on beer, wine and spirits, a freeze on fuel duties, a freeze on vehicle licences and, as I said, 6 per cent. extra for social services. UK health will benefit from a 7.4 per cent. increase each year, and my health authority—North West Lancashire—will welcome that, despite its recent statement that the 10 per cent. increase in its budget was still insufficient, even though that increase is five times higher than inflation. I believe that the doubling of expenditure since 1997 over the next five years will turn the Royal Preston hospital into, if not the top hospital, one of the top 10 hospitals in the north-west of England. I look forward to that investment.

This is a Budget for enterprise and for fairness, for investment and for reform. It will be a huge boost for the people in my constituency, and I commend it.

7.48 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Apropos of the comments of the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), I have every reason to feel protective towards national insurance, as I represent the seat once held by David Lloyd George. I find it difficult, however, to distinguish between national insurance and income tax, as, I am sure, do many other hon. Members.

The Chancellor has often reaffirmed the Government's commitment to ending child poverty—in the pre-Budget statement and in the publication, "Tackling Child Poverty", issued in December last year. He is right to do so again today because poverty blights so many lives, particularly in my constituency. Many people suffer from poor health in Wales, for example, specifically because they are poor.

The Chancellor highlighted the child and working tax credits, and I want to concentrate briefly on the principles of those tax credits. My colleagues in Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party will consider other issues in the debates over the next few days. The Government emphasise the need to make work pay, and they emphasise that there should be a seamless system. Again, the emphasis is on work, but my party and others are worried about the impact of tax credits in areas of high unemployment, such as my own, where the work is not available, and in rural areas with small populations and scant public transport. In such areas, the costs of owning a car are highly significant.

The Red Book shows that a fund of £5 million will be established to help with travel costs. I have some reservations about that, as my area suffers from severe out-migration by people who otherwise would be economically active and contributing to the local economy. I am afraid that I may be hearing an echo of the phrase "on yer bike".

The working tax credit will guarantee a higher income from work than from benefits, and it is targeted according to income. It is not means-tested in the conventional sense, but there are inevitable concerns about the disincentives to take-up. I am sure that the House would be interested to know the projected percentage take-up of the tax credits, for example in comparison with the take-up of universal benefits, which is very high.

The House will also note that people under 25 are again excluded from the tax credit system. That is yet another example of how age discrimination is becoming entrenched.

We in Plaid Cymru remain uneasy about the lower wage subsidy implicit in tax credits. That possibility will now affect all workers, including those without children. We fear that credit levels will become the ceiling for wage rates, rather than their floor. We in the north Wales travel-to-work areas have some experience of that. The results of the little noticed top-up experiments introduced by the previous Conservative Government do not convince people familiar with them that the new system will be much better.

Child tax credits will be paid to the carer, typically to the mother. That is very much to be welcomed. However, the emphasis on payments to the first child risks masking the costs arising from other children, especially as they grow older. It should be remembered that those costs are recognised in support levels. The House will note too that universal child benefit levels again hardly rated a mention today.

The extension of tax credits to students and student nurses is to be welcomed. As a university lecturer, I have experience of the real hardships faced by some students

[Hywel Williams]

on low income. Also, uprating benefits with earnings is a principle that could be commended in respect of other benefits.

A significant feature of the child tax credits regime is the recognition of the costs of child care. However, we in Plaid Cymru have serious concerns about the lack of child care in some areas, especially in rural areas. Often, they are areas of high unemployment, or of high underemployment.

Child care is not available extensively in Wales, and to some extent the solution to that problem is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. We have a national child care strategy, and I hope that my colleagues in the Assembly will take the matter up. I hope too that the Labour party will produce some joined-up government in Westminster and Cardiff, so that people will be able to take up work because proper child care is available.

I note with interest that the child care element will now cover those approved to provide child care in people's homes. The important word in this connection is "approved": what does it mean? The payments in the past have been called, pejoratively, "grannies' wages" or "nannies' wages". We will see how approval is worked out, but I note that the Department for Education and Skills is to consult shortly on the regulation scheme. Let us hope that the scheme fits in with patterns of family care in rural areas such as my constituency.

A change in income could affect the maximum credits available. I see that an increase in income of up to £2,500 will be ignored. However, when income falls, will claimants be required to contact the Revenue? People dealing with the difficulties and sometimes chaos caused by income change will have to decide to reapply. We know that the Revenue will be there to help, but I am not casting aspersions when I say that ordinary men and women facing the chaos and difficulties of income change will not, as a first instinct, reach for the telephone to call the Revenue.

Underpayments will be remedied immediately, but what about overpayments? Document No. 10 accompanying the Red Book states:

"The Inland Revenue's approach to dealing with overpayments will be set out in a code of practice, which will be published in draft for wider consultation later this year."

Why later this year and not now? People should be told.

Given the variations in income due to seasonal factors that affect agricultural areas such as my own, where there might not be much employment available in the hard winter months, does the new system of tax credits fit the real world of work better than the working families tax credit? I have my doubts.

Further ominous words about a fall in income appear in the document dealing with tax credits, which states that people who take a fall in income will be able to reapply. However, taking a fall in income to stay in work sounds rather like pricing oneself into a job. Many people have bitter recollections of what that means.

May I be the first this evening to welcome the reduction in the taper on tax credits to 37p in the pound? However, the level is still too high to provide the soft entry into well-paid work that has worked so successfully in countries such as Ireland. There is concern about the effect of the taper when it is combined with the respective tapers for housing benefits and for council tax.

We in Plaid Cymru welcome the extension of the new deal and the introduction of personal mentors, but we hope that the system will not be oppressive, especially in areas of high unemployment. However much people in those areas are mentored, the jobs are not available.

The tax credit system emphasises targeting, but there is the risk that targets will be missed. That compares with the high degree of success that universal benefits achieve in terms of reaching targets. Child benefit is very much the ghost at this particular feast. Targeting individual families also draws attention away from the value of universally available public services, especially in connection with those services—such as the provision of free school meals—that are significant for poorer families.

Finally, I note that the BBC is reporting that the Government underspent last year to the tune of £11 billion. I regret that that underspend extends to the poorer, deprived areas of Wales, which cannot afford it.

7.59 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I welcome this Budget. Ending poverty and improving public services in this country calls for bold action. Before 1979, there was a measure of consensus between the parties. That consensus was broken by a Conservative Government, who argued that wealth should trickle down to the poor. That dishonest cant hit the real impact of that Government's tax and benefit changes. The very poor faced tax increases—which included VAT being whacked up to 17.5 per cent—and falling incomes, while the very rich enjoyed almost unbelievable benefits.

In their first term, the Conservatives' single-minded dedication to shadowing the money supply needlessly pushed unemployment beyond 3 million and devastated British manufacturing, particularly in the west midlands, which I am proud to represent. In their second term they massacred the housing budget, cutting it nearly in half. They removed rent controls, and trapped hundreds of thousands of council tenants on housing benefit—they could not take jobs because they would not be able to pay the new higher rents. In their third term, that Government froze child benefit again. They also introduced the poll tax, the most regressive tax in the history of the United Kingdom.

During the 13 years between 1979 and 1992, the incomes of the bottom 10 per cent. in our society fell by 17 per cent. in real terms, not just in relation to the incomes of the rest of society. Between 1992 and 1997, the national debt doubled.

Many of our constituencies contain disadvantaged estates, but they did not appear magically, whether in 1997 or in 2001. Those estates fell into poverty in the 1980s and 1990s, when many people—particularly in my area in the west midlands—were thrown out of their jobs by the Conservative party's monetary policy. That was a direct result of the unnecessary viciousness of the party's economic and housing policies—policies from which the poor on those estates suffered for 20 years.

So what is the situation now, five years into a Labour Government? I have to say that it is very hard for the official Opposition. We have magnificent figures on inflation, which is at its lowest for about 40 years. We have magnificent figures on interest rates, also at their lowest for about 40 years. Unemployment has come tumbling down, and is now lower than it is in the United

States and Japan—and, as the Chancellor said in his statement, lower than the European Union average. As he pointed out, in the past year growth in the United Kingdom has been faster than that in any other G7 country. The national debt has come tumbling down as well.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that those excellent statistics obtained in large measure at the time of the 1997 election?

Rob Marris: No. It is not possible to say, as I have just said, that we have the lowest inflation for 40 years and then to say that it was just as low in 1997. That is clearly not the case. If the hon. Gentleman is trying to suggest, as some of his colleagues have, that the figures are simply the result of some golden legacy from the Conservative Government, I will gladly deal with that point.

Mr. Swire: While the hon. Gentleman is conducting his tour of the history of the latter half of the 20th century, may I ask him why Britain was considered to be the sick man of Europe in 1979, and 15 years later was attracting record inward investment?

Rob Marris: I did not set out to conduct a tour of the second half of the 20th century, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, and I shall continue with what I am saying.

In 1997, the national debt was 44 per cent. of gross domestic product. It is now less than 31 per cent. of GDP, and is projected to remain so until about 2007. That will mean a tremendous change in the legacy that we shall leave to our children and grandchildren, and to future generations.

I shall leave it to others to talk, as some already have, of the measures to assist families and pensioners. Let me say something about the measures—which I support—to help the environment. I am thinking of changes in vehicle excise duty for motor cycles and vans, measures to promote cleaner vans, the freezing of vehicle excise duty for buses, and new rates for low-carbon cars. The most efficient cars will attract £100 a year less in vehicle excise duty than the least efficient, which is a great step forward.

Further support for business will be provided by exemption from the climate change levy for electricity generated by good-quality combined heat and power stations, and from coal mine methane. We should do more to encourage such moves, which are beneficial to our environment. The same applies to the fuel duty differential that will apply to sulphur-free petrol and diesel from next year.

Manufacturing industry is dear to my heart, as I represent Wolverhampton, an industrial town—or city, as I should say now—in the west midlands. I welcome the changes in corporation tax, especially those affecting small business. They represent a major step forward, as I hope Opposition Members will be big enough to accept. I refer to the cut from 20 to 19 per cent., and the cut in the initial rate from 10 per cent. to zero.

I particularly welcome the £400 million for research and development that has been announced as a result, partly, of representations made by a joint—I stress the word "joint"—CBI-TUC productivity working group. Research and development has been lacking in this country, although it has started to pick up recently. I also welcome the £30 million provided for small firms to attain "investor in people" status. A community such as mine, where GDP per capita is about 82 per cent. of the national average, must welcome the community investment tax credit and the launch of the £40 million community development venture fund in May. They will be of real help to my constituency, which still suffers from the history of the Tory years.

Conservative Members bang on about regulations, and the way in which business is tied up in regulations. They have done it again today. I sympathise, but when I have asked them what regulations they would get rid of—as I have done here, and in the Standing Committee considering the Employment Bill—I have received no answers. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned the climate change levy, but it is not a regulation. It is a tax, and one that I support.

I hope that in future Budgets the Chancellor will provide more help for research and development. I would like him not just to assist the development of the green technology which, as he said, represents a growing world market, but to encourage the development of medical equipment technology. That too represents a growing world market. Moreover, it is not price-sensitive. We in the west midlands could do very well in that regard, given our history of innovation, working with metals, research, and building machinery. That is high-tech stuff.

I was disappointed by the lack of any announced increase in finance for education and, in particular, the further education sector. Wolverhampton college is partly in my constituency. Nor was there any announcement of the abolition of higher education student tuition fees. Wolverhampton university is the fifth largest university in the country; it is even larger than the one mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick). It needs such action so that it can continue its great work in tackling social disadvantage. It has the best intake figures in the country in that context. That is, indeed, a Government priority, and I wish that there had been more announcements about HE funding in the Budget. Such funding would push us, as other measures in the Budget will, towards the high-wage, high-skill economy that I hope all Members want. I hope that the measures I have mentioned will feature in next year's Budget.

Sadly, there was no announcement that we would move substantially nearer to fulfilling the United Nations target for international aid to constitute 0.7 per cent. of GDP. During the past five years of the present Government, we have seen big increases. I hope that they will continue, but I wish we could move closer to that target.

As for the reply given by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), perhaps he has been reading *The Guardian*. The paper said this morning that the Budget was to do with how much it would cost to fix Britain's creaking public services. I do not accept that proposition—I do not accept that our public services are creaking. I do not accept what was said by the Leader of the Opposition and some of his hon. Friends, who suggested that public services were getting worse all the time. "More talk, more taxes and more failure", the right hon. Gentleman said. That might describe the Government he served as a Back Bencher, the Government who were in power from 1979 and so on, but I do not accept that the paradigm exists now.

[Rob Marris]

I do not think all public services are getting worse. Of course we need to improve them, but they are not getting worse. When I travel around my constituency, I see things improving. Naturally I would like them to improve more, but they are already improving visibly. School roofs are not leaking as they used to in 1997, for instance, and we have a new accident and emergency department for children. A £44 million cardiac centre is to come on-stream, as is a £13 million state-of-the-art radiology centre. Some of those changes are still in the pipeline, and others have already happened. I do not accept that public services are getting worse—the official Opposition are completely wrong about that.

The Leader of the Opposition is wrong to say that the Labour party was opposed to savings for pensioners. Labour in government has introduced the pension credit to reward thrifty pensioners and to encourage future pensioners to save. The right hon. Gentleman said that investment and reform is old-style tax and spend, but it will not surprise the House to hear that I do not accept that; nor do I accept the pejorative use of the phrase "tax and spend". How on earth are a responsible Government to spend unless they tax? The answer lies in part in the fact that the national debt doubled between 1992 and 1997. Conservative Governments before 1992 had flogged a lot of the family silver, so that was no longer an option; instead, the Conservative Government bumped up the national debt and spent. They refused to behave responsibly and increase taxes, as the Labour Government and this Budget have done.

Taxes will increase slightly, and I support that. Page 218 of the Red Book shows that, on an accruals basis, the proportion of GDP accounted for by current taxation receipts in the tax year just started is 38.7 per cent.; in the years following it will be 39.9 per cent., 40.2 per cent. and 40.4 per cent.; and in 2006–07 it will be 40.5 per cent. In that five-year period, taxes will rise by about 2 per cent. In the same period, NHS spending is projected to increase 43 per cent. in real terms—a 43 per cent. increase off a 2.5 per cent. overall increase in the tax take. That is responsible service delivery. The key issue facing us all is delivery of public services, and the Government are taking great steps. Of course more could be done—that is always true—but we are moving in the right direction. Consideration is being given to management issues, whether in the health service or education, or even transport.

I do not accept the Leader of the Opposition's assertion that the corporation tax burden in this country is among the highest in the group containing us and our competitors. Let me cite some figures from the Trades Union Congress brief, which itself quotes figures from other sources. The CBI business submission in respect of the budget talks of "taxes affecting business behaviour". The briefing gives figures for various countries: France 15 per cent., Netherlands 9.5 per cent., Germany 9.4 per cent., United Kingdom 8.9 per cent., and the United States 7.5 per cent. The figure for the UK is only 1.4 per cent. higher than that for the US, and we get better public services.

Looking at the figures for the share of corporate income tax and employer social security in GDP, we see that the UK is way down the list of OECD countries. In 1999, the Czech Republic topped the list with a figure of 15.1 per cent. The figure for the UK was 7.3 per cent., and a host of our European Union competitors appeared above us in the list, with higher shares. The figure for the United States, which Conservative Members will no doubt want to know, is 5.9 per cent.

In the list of top corporate tax rates in the OECD, the UK figure is 31 per cent., but that is only the top rate. We have learned today that the starting rate is to fall to zero—it was 10 per cent.—and the rate for small businesses is to fall from 20 to 19 per cent. Let us compare our top rate with that of other countries. The top rate in Germany—one of our major competitors—is 54 per cent. In both Canada and Japan—fellow G7 countries—it is 46 per cent. We are way down the table with a rate of 31 per cent.

The figures for employer social security contributions are found in a table from the US Bureau of Labour Statistics. The UK figure is 13 per cent., less than half the figure for France, which tops the table at 32 per cent. The figure for Belgium is 30 per cent.. The United States figure is 21 per cent. The Office for National Statistics *Economic Trends* figures on international profitability—that is, the rate of return—are 12 per cent. for the UK, 17 per cent. for Finland, 8.4 per cent. for Canada, 3.6 per cent. for Germany, and 9.2 per cent. for the United States.

ONS figures on UK corporate profit records for five or 10-year periods from 1965 onwards show a figure of 12. 3 per cent. for all companies for the period 1997 to 2001, whereas for the period 1965 to 1971 it was 11.6 per cent.; for 1972 to 1981, 8.3 per cent.; for 1982 to 1991, 11.3 per cent; and for 1992 to 2001, 11.9 per cent. Under the Labour Government, that figure has increased to 12.3 per cent. I repeat: I do not accept the Leader of the Opposition's assertion about the UK corporate tax burden. It is simply not true.

The truth is that despite their investigations, research, travels abroad and other endeavours, the official Opposition do not like the NHS and they do not like Government spending. That is why they use "tax and spend" as a pejorative expression. They would prefer either to borrow money on the sly and let future generations pay, or not to have the services at all. As the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), said on 7 October, slightly more than six months ago:

> "The lower we can get public spending as a proportion of GDP the better."

The Labour party does not accept that principle. The official Opposition do. They have lost two elections on the back of it, and we will win the next general election as well on that division between us.

8.16 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): It is interesting that—merely in passing—the Chancellor mentioned that the economy was well within the Maastricht criteria. Given the importance that many Labour Members attach to the potential for this country's joining the euro, he could have dealt with the subject rather more thoroughly. After all, the decision has been taken in principle; it merely awaits an assessment based on the tests. I could understand the Government's sensitivity if they had bucked a decision in principle—if such a decision had yet to be taken; but given that the decision has already been taken and it is merely a question

of assessing economic convergence, I expected the Chancellor to take the opportunity to discuss the convergence criteria in greater depth. .

The Chancellor mentioned in passing one or two statistics. For example, he said that the growth rate in the eurozone was 1.5 per cent., whereas our own growth rate was much better at 2.2 per cent. That begs important questions about the rate of convergence. It would have been interesting to hear the Chancellor's assessment of whether it is suitable for our economy to enjoy a growth rate so much greater than that of the eurozone that we anticipate joining and with which we anticipate sharing an interest rate. It begs the question what differential effect an interest rate suited to an economy with 1.5 per cent. growth would have on an economy with 2.2 per cent. growth. I suggest that it would make us much poorer. I would have welcomed the Government's assessment, but the Chancellor bucked the opportunity.

With great flourish and rhetoric, the Chancellor advertised his decisions on corporation tax on small businesses, but there is a trick: for small businesses to benefit from a reduction in corporation tax and from a new corporation tax regime, they have to be making a profit. That is the difficulty facing many of our small businesses. The critical factor is not the tax they pay on their profits, but whether they are able to make a profit as a consequence of the regulatory environment in which they exist. The key thing that the Chancellor and those on the Treasury Bench can do in determining the profitability of small businesses is to alleviate the regulatory regime; it is not to change the corporation tax rate.

I take one example. One industry has been literally decimated by regulation: the intermediate care industry, or residential nursing homes. In the past four years, we have lost 10 per cent. of capacity—10 per cent. of the beds. From my experience in my constituency, that has arisen as a consequence of the stifling regulation that has been imposed on the industry, and the determination by the Secretary of State for Health to control that industry from the centre.

When he set up the NHS, Bevan said that he wanted to hear a bedpan in a provincial hospital drop in his office in Whitehall—such was his determination to control his new creation from the centre. It has taken until this Secretary of State to deliver that centralised control. What business can it be of the Secretary of State to determine the widths of the doorways of a residential home in Milford on Sea? What business of his can it be to impose a regulatory regime that determines the number of baths and the size of the rooms? These regulations are not important to me. They are measurements that are easy to make but by and large they do not measure the important things that determine the quality of care in a home. However, if those regulations were important to those on the Treasury Bench—

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: Let me develop the point. If they were important to the occupants of the Treasury Bench, the way to achieve them would be to pay a premium to homes that met the requirements of those regulations. The market would quickly follow.

The regulations were introduced with no regulatory impact assessment. Standing here, I asked the Minister what they were going to cost and he admitted that he had no idea. No assessment had been made of the cost. I can tell hon. Members what they have cost: 10 per cent. of capacity at care homes. As a consequence, there has been a huge effect on the health service itself. As a result of those beds being lost, elderly people with nowhere else to go have occupied acute care beds—some 7,000 at any one time on an average stay of six weeks.

The knock-on effect of that is the cancellation of some 78,000 operations. In order to expedite the turnover in beds, where there is somewhere else for someone to go, they are taken out too early. As a result, we have the shocking statistic that nearly 500,000 people had to be readmitted to hospital within months of their discharge, presumably because they were discharged too early. We see the enormous consequence of the determination of the Secretary of State to get his way by regulation. Reductions in corporation tax will not retrieve the situation.

Rob Marris: What has happened is a concern to many hon. Members. There seem to be two ways forward. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will agree, or perhaps he will disagree. One is to get rid of the Care Standards Act 2000, which appeared to be his approach, although he can clarify that. The other is that, in order to meet the increased costs for residential care home owners—I have talked to some in my constituency—of complying with the standards, which I support, the social services budget could be increased by, for example, 6 per cent. a year in real terms, which the Chancellor has already proposed in his Budget. We can either increase taxes and Government spending to deal with that problem, or we can dilute or abolish the standards. Which would he like?

Mr. Swayne: I made my approach clear on Second Reading of the Care Standards Bill. I said that I did not believe that the standards were important. I predicted entirely what subsequently happened.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: I will answer the point that has been made before I take another intervention.

There was no suggestion from the Chancellor this afternoon that the proposed increases in social services budgets will be used to carry out the structural changes that are required at care homes in order to make extra beds available. If the right hon. Gentleman wants a way out of the problem, he should remember our approach at the last general election.

I have concentrated on the effect of the regulations on the structure of the industry. Another underlying problem is that social services departments have been unable to fund clients in residential care homes sufficiently. In other words, the argument must be that there should be greater expenditure on social services budgets.

Our proposals at the last general election would have dealt with that. Paradoxically, the best way of assisting acute care is to readjust the budgets so that some of the expenditure goes into intermediate care, which would unblock many beds. An amelioration could have been delivered without an increase in overall expenditure.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman seriously think that it is not important for an elderly person in a care

[Mr. Hendrick]

home to have enough space in which to move around? In some cases, one can just about fit a bed into the room—the person is almost like a rabbit in a rabbit hutch. Is it not important that a wheelchair can get through a door if one of the people at a care home happens to be disabled? Is it not important that there are minimum nutrition standards, so that people are fed properly and not starved, as a minority have been in some of the worst-run care homes—although most of them are run very well? Is it not the Government's job to govern?

Mr. Swayne: It is appropriate that there be an inspection regime that stamps out abuses—a light regulatory touch. The hon. Gentleman is right. It may be very important that a particular doorway accommodates a wheelchair but in a significant number of the homes in my constituency there are no wheelchairs, so there is no requirement for those doorways to accommodate a wheelchair. By and large the buildings are very old, so changing the width of the doorway would present a major structural problem. There is no reason to do that.

The nonsense is that the decision is made in Whitehall. It has a disproportionate and catastrophic effect in Milford on Sea. That is the problem with the regulatory regime that the Government have designed.

I come to the main thrust of the Chancellor's Budget. He himself defined it is a question of how we deliver the expenditure to provide world-class public services. He concentrated on the NHS. As hon. Members will accept, we have heard some distortion in categorising the different positions of the parties. We must be honest and mature about the debate. By and large, there is a consensus. The consensus is that we want a comprehensive health service providing services that are available to those who need them and not based on the ability to pay. There is generally an acceptance of that principle. The difference between us is how we deliver that situation—what policies we pursue to achieve that ideal.

We do not serve the profession of politics well by pretending that that consensus does not exist, and by categorising our respective positions as a determination to destroy that ideal, rather than to achieve it. We may differ profoundly about the means by which to achieve it, or there may be shades of grey about the way in which to pursue the ideal, but it is monstrous for Labour Members to suggest that the Conservative party is determined to destroy the NHS and to create something different in its place.

I do not think that the electorate are taken in for one moment. Some of the turn-off from politics that ordinary people experience is to a great extent a consequence of the way in which we sometimes conduct our arguments—painting a bleak picture of one party vis à vis the other. We would do the debate and the [illegible] much greater service if we concentrated on a proper argument about how to deliver the services that we generally agree the electorate should have.

Rob Marris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way again. I salute his search for common ground between the two main parties—indeed, between the three main parties and the smaller parties represented in the House—but Labour Members, who uniformly support the concept of the NHS, find it difficult when confronted by statements such as that made earlier by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who seemed to suggest that there should be a much greater role for the private sector in delivering private medicine.

I am not talking about the kind of arrangements, such as contracting-out operations, into which the Government have recently entered. The right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that it would be a jolly good thing if more people were treated privately—in contradistinction to the Leader of the Opposition, who seemed to decry the fact that there were 250,000 private operations last year. Those mixed messages from the Conservative party confuse Labour Members and make it more difficult to find what common ground there might be.

Mr. Swayne: I welcome choice for patients as I welcome choice in any market: 250,000 people deciding that they want to pay for their health care would be very different from the situation that we face. My constituents are writing to me complaining—precisely as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said—that they have had to use their life savings for life-saving or life-changing operations. They do not want to do that, but in the current environment they are having to do so. I share the hon. Gentleman's desire for a national health service that provides a comprehensive service that is available to those who need it, not on the basis of whether they can afford it, but if we simply continue the present funding structure exclusively for the NHS, we shall put it and that ideal in much greater danger than if we explore other possibilities.

The Chancellor largely pre-empted such a debate by having the Wanless report published this morning and then launching into his Budget speech clearly having made his mind up about the way in which we will proceed. Indeed, when he addressed the Social Market Foundation a month ago, he made it clear that there would be no debate or discussion about how we fund the NHS. Mr. Wanless may well be right—I do not know the answer to the question—in his assessment that a publicly funded system from taxation is the best and most efficient. I doubt it very much, but it might be the case. I want to have that debate and to test all the arguments. I want to examine and be open to other possibilities. The Government are trying to close down that debate, but the nation and, potentially, the NHS would benefit greatly from it.

Effectively, we are saying that, by and large, with a measure of modernisation here and there, the only problem that the NHS faces is underfunding and that it has been underfunded for too long. However, hon. Members will know from the five Budgets at which they have waved their Order Papers in delight that we have been spending a great deal more on the NHS for some time. Indeed, the Chancellor said that spending has increased by a third. The estimate of ordinary people is that that has not done the trick—indeed, that things are marginally worse in some respects. It is a great leap of faith simply to say, "Let's double spending, and that'll do the trick." My belief is that it will not. It will be interesting to see whether at the end of this Parliament it has delivered the improvements in services that we want.

Mr. Hendrick: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct about the extra sums of money that have gone into the

NHS, but does he not recognise that, for their first two years, this Government stuck to the previous Government's spending proposals and that in the two and a half years since then, we have increased investment? He knows as well as I do that it takes four years to train a nurse and six years to train a doctor. Although there have been improvements in buildings and in much of the health service infrastructure, it will take time for that extra investment to come through. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that simple point?

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman is right that the Government accepted for their first two years the plans that had been laid down by the preceding Conservative Government. As a consequence, expenditure on the NHS significantly increased, as was the plan. Of course that has been added to since, and spending has increased by a third. Of course it takes time to change things, but we are still running into enormous problems of loss of capacity as people become exhausted by the pace of modernisation. The last thing hospital staff are looking forward to is yet more change as a consequence of what the Government call modernisation. Staff are already exhausted by it.

The experience of my constituents as a consequence of increasing the health service budget by a third is a bleak one. We still wait three years in New Forest, West for a hearing test. If someone in New Forest, West, has a stroke, suffers dysphasia and as a consequence is in intensive need of speech therapy, they cannot have it unless they are over 65. That example is from the letters of complaint about the level of service in the NHS that I have received in just the past seven days.

As I said at business questions when the Leader of the House was trumpeting the heroic achievements of the NHS with respect to waiting lists, a lady wrote to me only last week to complain that she has been waiting for an operation in excess of the very sensitive figure of 18 months. She was telephoned by a Southampton trust and told that because she had been waiting in excess of 18 months, the operation could be carried out by the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch hospitals trust. She agreed, but some four months later when she rang to ask why she still had not had the operation, she was told by the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch hospitals trust that, as she had been waiting only four months, she did not have a prayer. The trick is to start the clock the moment that she moves trusts. Then, lo and behold, the target has been met because no one has waited for more than 18 months. That is not an isolated case. We saw what happened at Derriford hospital. When the executives who were responsible for the extraordinary system of hidden lists lost their jobs as a consequence, they tipped up elsewhere in the NHS executive in better-paid jobs. That sends a powerful signal to executives throughout the NHS.

We have also heard of examples of people being offered appointments when they have gone on holiday so that the trust can say that as they did not turn up for the appointment, they do not count on the waiting lists. The holiday dates were solicited and the appointment offered after the person had set off. It is shocking that such things should happen at this time.

Those examples characterise a malaise in the NHS structure that we have delivered. I should like to explore alternative ways of fixing the problem to simply throwing more taxpayers' money at it. I am prepared to accept a debate that comes to the conclusion that the only solution is to throw more taxpayers' money at the NHS, but we have not yet had the debate and the Chancellor has already made his decision to throw the money. It will be interesting to see what happens.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I would point out that time is running out and several hon. Members wish to catch my eye. Unless contributions are a little shorter, some will be disappointed.

8.40 pm

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): This is not just a good Budget, it is a very good Budget. It is a courageous Budget and it is an important Budget because it will set the course for the Government for the remainder of this Parliament and, I hope, well beyond. It has a greater significance because it throws into stark relief the dividing lines between the Labour and Conservative parties. The Conservatives are committed to a decline in the size of the state, a low tax economy, tax cuts and the destruction of the NHS as we know it. On the other hand, the Labour party accepts the need not so much for tax and spend as for tax and investment in our public services, combined with a process of reform.

We know that in the general election of 1997 and last year, when the Conservatives ran on a policy of tax cuts and were comprehensively beaten, the great British public did not give us a blank cheque to spend their money. We must ensure that the outputs justify the increases in taxation. Labour Members accept that taxation is the price that we pay for living in a civilised society and I do not apologise for being fulsome in my praise of the Chancellor.

As well as being courageous, the Budget is also redistributive. The social measures, including the working tax credit and the child tax credit, will be of tremendous value to millions of poorer households and it is clear that the Chancellor has balanced the need to raise further taxes with the need to ensure an end to child poverty and the aim of lifting more people out of poverty.

The increases in public expenditure are substantial. The increase in the NHS budget between 2003 and 2008 will be 48 per cent. in real terms. That will make a difference, although we cannot be complacent about the need to ensure that the uses to which the money will be put will be considered carefully. That is why the Government are right to redouble their efforts to ensure that the process of reform continues. The Wanless report makes it clear that that is exactly what is required. We need a sound, long-term and sustainable programme of spending in the NHS if it is to remain a service that commands the respect and affection of the British public.

This is a Budget for the NHS, although additional spending will go into the other great public services, including education, policing and transport. As a Welsh Member, I am of course aware that we have created a democratic institution in the National Assembly for Wales and I hope and expect that it will wish to use the extra money for a drive to improve standards and cut waiting lists. I also hope that it will make those tough decisions

[Gareth Thomas]

that are sometimes necessary if we are to reform the NHS. I emphasise that the public will expect us to achieve results, and in that respect the Budget is courageous.

I turn to the measures that are, in my view, designed rightly to help fulfil the Government's commitment to creating an enterprising and fair society. Those terms are not mutually exclusive. We know that they have been a theme of the Chancellor's Budgets over the past five years, and it is a theme that I applaud.

I welcome the measures to promote enterprise, especially for small businesses. I welcome also the changes to corporation tax, which will be of great significance, as will be the changes to VAT and the research and development tax incentives. These measures will, as I have said, be a great help to small businesses, which are a considerable feature of the Welsh economy.

The welfare-to-work proposals build on the measures that the Government have already introduced. They will make a considerable difference to many of my constituents.

The Budget steers a clear course. It builds upon the record of a strong economy and our desire to create a fair and enterprising society. I welcome it greatly.

8.46 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): We have had a good debate and I shall make a brief contribution to it. I am aware that colleagues are waiting to participate.

First, I shall deal with process. Secondly, I shall talk briefly about poverty, and thirdly, I have a constituency point that I shall share with the House.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), a fellow member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, complained that he had not received big announcements about education expenditure. It occurred to me that we have come a long way from the old days. Perhaps I have been in this place for longer than is good for me. In those days, Budgets used to be about raising revenue, not about spending. I accept that a November pre-Budget statement is good, because it gives us an idea of what is coming up. A comprehensive spending round announcement will come in July, and there will be another round of spending announcements. Many tax measures are announced for implementation in a year or two's time and, as a result, the situation becomes extremely complicated to follow. I accept that modern life is complicated, and we are a sophisticated democracy. I am not complaining about that.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, made an interesting and sensible speech. He talked around some of the new ideas for Budget scrutiny that are being exchanged. That is a long way round saying that we should be thinking more seriously—the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned this—about how we cope with complicated Government financial announcements. The Chancellor makes the most of them politically, and we would expect that. He does it with some style, as he did this afternoon. But the House needs to think more carefully about how we scrutinise the work that the Government are doing and how we explore spending and revenue raising.

I think that tax raising and spending should be done all at once. There is a case for making announcements of spending and revenue raising at the same time. We should try to make it easier for Members better to understand the Red Book, taxation forecasts and other press releases. We would serve our constituents more effectively if we did that.

Complexity is another important part of the process issue. Those on the Treasury Bench should think seriously about some legislative consolidation. I know that in the past the Treasury Select Committee has considered disaggregating some of the technical tax changes and introducing a tax Bill every year, which would be for the real anoraks. That could be safely parked on one side while the rest of us could get on with a sensible debate about issues that affect our constituents directly. That would be helpful.

One complaint that I would make about the Budget is that the complexity of what the Chancellor is doing is loading complication upon complication. The social security system has been sucked into the Treasury purlieu in a way from which it may never recover, I fear. Some of the new tax credit ways of developing and delivering services are certainly interesting. However, they risk complicating the benefit situation in a way that makes it ineffably complicated.

There is also an irresistible temptation for all Governments to seek to centralise power in Whitehall. That might seem a strange view, coming from someone who welcomed the devolution to the legislatures of other nation states in the United Kingdom and the Greater London Authority, but I believe that there is still a propensity in Whitehall to seek to control. For the Chancellor of the Exchequer to state in one of his rhetorical flourishes the pounds, shillings and pence that he plans to send to every school seems to me to be ridiculous—as someone said earlier, Ministers like listening to the sound of bedpans. Ministers are for ever trying to influence local agendas, whereas we should be content to set limits, thresholds and ceilings for expenditure and let the decision-makers at a much lower level get on with the job.

Finally on process, the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), who made an interesting speech, said that the penny increase was nothing more than a slight change to the national insurance system. In my view, the national insurance fund is now completely redundant. The Government have made no secret of the fact that they have been making substantial changes to the way in which they deal with the contributory benefits system. The national contributory system has been substantially changed by the Chancellor's announcement this afternoon. If that happens entirely by default, it is a shame. The Beveridge contributory system has served us well. I am a little old-fashioned about that. To make such changes and to increase national insurance as the Chancellor has done—it is an income tax increase by any other name—is a shame. It is a retrogressive move in many ways.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as I know that he is trying to speed up. Has he taken on board the point, which has not yet been mentioned in the House, that not only is that an income tax increase, but it is tax increase on income worth 2p—1p from the employer and 1p from the employee? It will

affect most of all those with smaller incomes, because there is a cut-off for employees' national insurance contributions.

Mr. Kirkwood: Indeed. I am happy to concur with that view. There are unintended consequences that will start to unfold in terms of the increase in the employers' contributions. National insurance contributions have a specific focus and incidence, and I would have been much happier to use the income tax system, which is more transparent and more progressive. It is a great shame that the Government have decided to use the national insurance machinery to increase resources, but, then again, about time too. I have been waiting for this day since 1997. Some Labour Members reflected that in the euphoria of their reaction.

There are, however, some concerns about the Chancellor's statement. I welcome the expenditure, but I am worried about households that are in abject poverty. Of course I understand that the national health service deserves and needs expenditure, and I support the Government in the creative measures that they have introduced to change the culture of those who are on benefits for many years and who as families have been locked into benefits for long periods.

The move towards Jobcentre Plus and the concept of welfare to work is right and appropriate, but I worry for those who in the immediate future will get nowhere near the labour market. I know that the child tax credit will make some inroads into that, but I worry about some of the unintended consequences of the working tax credit. The emphasis on people who are in work and on subsidising low-paid work can stigmatise people who are a long way removed from the labour market and in abject poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group and other pressure groups are right to say that we need to give the poor a voice. We must also try to define poverty more clearly. I hope that there will soon be a consultation paper from the Government about how they assess their success in floating people out of poverty. That is an important issue.

Minimum income standards are used to great effect by sister European countries to measure the performance of Governments in terms of the reality of people's earnings—not just relative poverty and all the other difficult statistics, and how the weekly budgets of people who are nowhere near the labour market are affected. That is a group of people about whom I have real concerns. The Government did not do enough for such people in today's Budget.

There are further real concerns about the working tax credit and the way in which it is implemented. It can have perverse incentives within households where there is a working member and a non-working member and, if we are not careful, there is real opportunity for collusion with employers about introducing fraud into its implementation. Depending how the tapers are played out, people can be frozen into the tax credit and that diminishes the opportunity of a later career at a higher wage level than that set by the working tax credit.

The working tax credit poses many difficulties. I am prepared to consider the concept carefully, but we must be careful that we get its implementation right and that we do not forget that if families do not get into the labour market they cannot take advantage of many of the welcome announcements made this afternoon.

I repeat the point that I made to the hon. Member for Dumbarton about the NHS and the King's Fund. In many parts of the UK the NHS is not in a fit state to take big sums of cash and spend them sensibly in the short term. We shall have to deal with that and we must be careful about containing people's expectations about how long big sums will take to come through before they can make a difference to ordinary people.

I was slightly taken aback to learn about the effect of fuel duty rebate on local bus services in rural areas. Indeed, I was astonished to learn from my constituency of the adverse effect that the absence of fuel duty rebate was having on local bus service providers. There has been a strenuous effort in the Scottish borders to reduce social exclusion, both for those who lack access to basic services due to age, infirmity and limited means, but also for those who are physically a long way removed from central services and who are geographically isolated.

Some 30 per cent. of border households do not have a car and they have been particularly hard hit by the imposition of fuel duty on local bus services. Although fuel is duty free on trains—though the borders have no railways—ferries and air services, local bus operators are required to pay fuel duty, only part of which can be reclaimed.

What surprised me was the estimate that local bus operators in my constituency now pay some £320,000 a year in unreclaimable duty. Against that figure, only £193,000 is provided to the council through the rural bus fund, so public transport users in the borders region contribute more to the Exchequer than is received back in public transport support. I do not know whether that makes the region unique in the UK.

The cost of fuel duty is obviously directly reflected in the fares, which as a result are among the highest in Britain. The tax falls on those least able to pay and increases the isolation of most rural communities and the social exclusion of the most vulnerable. That scarcely represents a joined up social or environmental policy.

If that is not bad enough, it is particularly harsh that school transport bus contractors must pay fuel duty in full. In a rural area, where a high proportion of pupils qualify for free school transport, some children face daily journeys of up to 60 miles. The council makes every effort to co-ordinate school and public bus services, but most school services get no rebate on fuel duty. Any efforts made locally to encourage more parents to send their children to school by bus so as to reduce road traffic and improve pedestrian safety at the school gate, are frustrated by the high cost of fares. The estimated cost of fuel duty on statutory school transport amounts to about £115,000 a year, some 4 per cent. of the council's school transport budget.

Those are important issues which I hope that those on the Treasury Bench will note and take to heart. I understand that there is a wider strategy with an environmental dimension, which is very important, but if we are dedicated, as I am sure that we all are, to trying to eradicate social exclusion in our rural areas, such issues will have to be addressed.

9 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). Like him, I think that we need better

[Mr. David Kidney]

scrutiny of the economic and financial decisions that are taken or approved of in this place. I also believe, however, that departmental Select Committees could do more about departmental budgets if they wanted to in conducting their scrutiny. I am sure that they are all very busy, but there is also a feeling that such work is for anoraks—just as he felt about people interested in tax legislation. That is a shame; it is a perception that we should try to change by pointing out the value of such scrutiny.

I want to remind myself of the position when I spoke at the same stage in last year's Budget debate. At a time when we faced the general election in which I made my first attempt to be re-elected to Parliament, I was able to praise the position that the Chancellor had achieved. The sound and sensible work that he had done in all his previous Budgets had put Labour into a strong position in which it could implement a Budget that would stand it in good stead for the coming election. Lo and behold, the election was successful. The result was very good for Labour and we looked like achieving something that we had never achieved before: two full consecutive terms in government. I was returned to Parliament, so who am I to complain? Indeed, I am one of the dozens of Labour Members who took seats in 1997 that Conservatives had held for decades, and I do not think that I was untypical in then improving my majority in the 2001 general election. All that is a tribute to the sound economic work that Labour did in government in those first four years.

The Chancellor has run out of stealth taxes, and has determined on taking the necessary risks in the decisions that he has made today. He is taking two particular risks. First, on the very high-profile taxation for investment in our public services, the public must see improvements in the next few years, otherwise they will object to having had to pay the higher taxes. To some extent, I am relaxed about that, as it does not matter what we say in the Chamber: it is the experiences of voters and residents in our constituencies that will determine whether they perceive those improvements. Nothing that we can say will change that. The second risk is that the public do not want to pay higher taxes. The opinion polls tell us that people are willing to pay more for better public services, and we are now going to put that to the test, as they will be paying higher taxes in a year's time to fund such services.

The Government's economic strategy has moved on. In those first four years in office, it was clearly based on stability and fairness. They have now moved on to enterprise and fairness. That is not to say that they have given up on stability, but that stability has put in place foundations on which they can be more ambitious and start to tackle some more deeply rooted problems such as the productivity gap between us and our main competitors. Again, it is a credit to what we did in those first four years that we can now move forward and deal with problems in enterprise and productivity.

The Chancellor mentioned the Enterprise Bill, which has just started its passage through the House. The Bill is a worthwhile development because it takes politics out of competition decisions—an echo of the bold decision in 1997 to take the politics out of monetary policy. I wish the Government as great a success with the current decision as they achieved with the 1997 one. The Bill also introduces criminal sanctions against cartels, better protection for consumers and some improvements in insolvency measures.

We heard in today's announcement about improved work force skills and reductions in some tax rates, especially for smaller companies. The Chancellor reminded us that only a month ago, he responded to the Competition Commission report on bank services for small businesses. I suspect that the best announcement today for small businesses was the introduction of the flat-rate VAT scheme for companies with a turnover of less than £100,000 this year—and £150,000 next year—which will apply to more than 500,000 companies. Large companies will of course be delighted that, like small and medium-sized enterprises, they will benefit from a research and development tax credit.

That is all to the good for the enterprise and productivity agenda, but it is worth mentioning as a footnote my attendance at last week's conference at Staffordshire university, where I spoke on the subject of starting up a new business. My message was factual—in dealing with the support available—rather than party political, and after giving it, I was able to sit back and listen to the other speakers. About half the audience were undergraduates thinking about their first job, and about half were people in work and thinking about career changes. Two messages came across. First, self-employment and starting up a business is not a soft choice but a tough one that might also prove rewarding and satisfying. The economic climate in which to take such a decision has been very benign for some time, and the future also looks reasonably benign. Secondly, the Government are giving good support to people who run small businesses, and to those who want to start them up. The impression came across that things are much better than in the past, which is reassuring in terms of this Government's enterprise and productivity agenda.

On the fairness agenda, it is clear that improvement in public services is at the heart of today's Budget. Although the national health service has understandably taken centre stage, it is worth reminding ourselves that the Chancellor did not overlook other public services. He had things to say about our defence forces, law and order and the law agencies and education. Although education occupied only a small part of the speech, he said something very significant about it: the Government remain committed to increasing substantially the proportion of GDP that is spent on education services. It is important not to overlook such statements, even though our attention is on the national health service.

It is a matter of equity and fairness that strong public services are available for everybody when they are needed, without the worry of being able to pay for them. As the Chancellor and the Wanless report have stressed, with money must come reform. The same is true of the national health service. We have already witnessed national examples of reform such as NHS Direct, national call centres, walk-in centres and more nurse consultants. Consultation is also taking place on wider prescribing by nurses and pharmacists. In terms of money, such reforms are reflected locally. Improvements have been made to my local hospital's accident and emergency, medical assessment and intensive care units. Improvements have also been made to GP surgeries, all of which now have a social worker attached. More courses from nurses and therapists are available at GP surgeries, and improvements have been made to our mental health hospital services.

With the money has come reform. I witnessed a good example of that in March, when I visited the new eye centre that the local hospital trust has set up in my Stafford constituency. Back in 1997, the biggest proportion of the many complaints that I received about health services concerned waits of 15 to 18 months for cataract operations. All such services were provided under contract at a hospital outside the district. My local hospital took advantage of the Government's offer of a modernisation fund for cataract treatment by accessing that fund and setting up the local eye centre that I visited in March. It is modern—it has just been built—run in modern ways, and ophthalmists can refer patients directly. The service is fronted by nurses, and patients have a single assessment to check whether they are suitable for a cataract operation. Their operation is booked then and there. During my March visit, operations were being booked for May. Instead of waiting 15 months, patients are getting their operations within 15 weeks. That example shows how money and different working methods can be combined to improve service. I now receive glowing letters of praise from constituents about cataract services when I used to receive letters of terrible complaint. An hon. Member asked about operations to replace hip joints. To complete the picture locally, Stafford wants to establish an orthopaedic surgical unit that gives people the same service as the orthopaedic unit. We will look to the Government for help from the modernisation fund to do that.

I do not want to get carried away with how rosy everything looks because there are still dreadful problems, some of which are noticeable in my constituency. One of the three pilots for drug testing of offenders who are arrested by the police and charged with an offence is taking place in Stafford. Just under half the people tested have proved positive for drug dependency, which makes it a health problem. Most of them say that they would like help with that dependency, but when the police and the referral service turn to the health service, the support is not available to the extent that it should be.

The problem of access to NHS dentistry is not unusual in Stafford and is experienced throughout the country. For the elderly, there remain the problems of delayed discharge, lack of domiciliary care help and difficulty in adapting people's homes. More needs to be done and the way forward for the NHS is set out in the Wanless report. The money is earmarked for reform. It is not meant to pay for services when people are sick, nor to go towards private insurance schemes or even a social insurance scheme. No hon. Member would propose that employers pay more in social insurance contributions than they are going to be required to make under national insurance.

At the end of my speech last year, I made three points that are valid today. I berated Departments for underspending their budgets. It appears that a year later the situation is the same. They are letting the country down if they do not spend the money that is allocated.

My second point related to the unfair distribution of education money by central Government to local authorities. The Government have now made the commitment to change that system for next year. I just hope that this summer's comprehensive spending assessment contains enough money for education to level up the money that is paid to local authorities so that everyone gets a fair and decent amount from the Government.

My third point concerned the attempt to eradicate poverty. I am delighted that the Chancellor disclosed the rates for the child tax credit next year. Ally that with the national minimum wage, the universal child benefit and the new working tax credit and I am confident that the attack on poverty will make great advances in the next four years, never mind the next 15.

9.13 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): My party welcomes the additional initial investment in the national health service, which for Northern Ireland means a total of £2.7 billion extra over the next five years. In 2003–04, we will get an extra £73 million, rising to £1 billion in 2007–08.

I note the Chancellor's proposal for the appointment of an independent auditor for the NHS in England. I hope that that measure will be replicated in Northern Ireland. It is important that we get proper scrutiny and accountability of how money is spent on health because we think that we are not getting value for money. The appointment of an auditor in Northern Ireland would be welcome.

I want to enter a note of caution. Northern Ireland spends more per capita on health than England. In fact, our health care spending is on a par with that of France, yet we still have among the longest waiting lists in the United Kingdom. As Opposition Members have said, it does not always follow that additional expenditure on the health service equals reduced waiting lists. That has been our experience in Northern Ireland, which is why we need to look at bureaucracy in the health service and take steps to ensure that the extra money gets to the point of delivery and reaches our constituents at the point of need. The key test of the success of this welcome investment will be the extent to which waiting lists are drastically reduced in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom.

On families and children, we support the Chancellor's measures to introduce a new child tax credit from 2003, and to increase the working families tax credit from June 2002. In addition, the child care element of the new working tax credit, which will allow families to receive extra tax credits to meet up to 70 per cent. of their eligible child care costs, is a significant improvement which will especially benefit families who are most in need. In Northern Ireland, these reforms should see some 250,000 people benefit to the tune of £600 million from next April, and we welcome that additional investment in the family and children.

Staying on the theme of children, we welcome the additional capital investment for expenditure in our schools. I note that this money will go directly to the schools, but the £2,500 for a typical primary school and £7,100 for a typical secondary school will not go far. The primary and secondary schools in my constituency will not find it difficult to spend that extra money, and I would have liked to see more capital expenditure made available for schools throughout the United Kingdom.

On business, the economy in Northern Ireland is heavily dependent on small businesses, which are at the heart of our economy. I welcome the proposal to reduce the small companies corporation tax rate from 20p to 19p, and to consider further steps to reform and modernise the corporation tax regime. Although I welcome the additional reliefs on capital gains tax for business to

[Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson]

encourage investment and entrepreneurial activity, and the proposals to simplify VAT for small businesses, more needs to be done to help the business sector in Northern Ireland.

The new tax credit for research and development will also help Northern Ireland companies, which have an excellent record for innovation. The Ulster Unionist party has been concerned at the lack of investment in R and D by some of the larger companies in the Province, and we hope that this new tax credit will be an incentive to those companies to invest in research and development for the future.

High transport and energy costs continue to impose a disproportionate burden on business in Northern Ireland, in comparison with other parts of the United Kingdom. The freeze on fuel duty rates is welcome, but it does not go nearly far enough to ease the situation. The high fuel duty rates in the UK seriously disadvantage the road haulage industry in Northern Ireland, and the cost of this is inevitably passed on to business and, ultimately, to the consumer. With a land frontier next to a eurozone country whose fuel duty rates are much lower than ours, our retail petroleum industry has been devastated by the differential between those rates. As a result, fuel smuggling has increased substantially in Northern Ireland, and the result of that has been the closure of a large percentage of retail petrol outlets in the Province. We would therefore have welcomed a decrease in the fuel duty rate in the United Kingdom, which would have helped Northern Ireland's road haulage and retail petroleum industries.

We welcome the announcement of the introduction of a distance-based lorry road user charge that will make foreign lorry operators pay towards the costs that they impose in the UK. Obviously, as Northern Ireland has a land frontier with the Irish Republic, we will see the benefit of that. However, I cannot understand why the Government are delaying the introduction of the new charge to 2005 or 2006. The British road haulage industry wants those reforms to be introduced at the earliest opportunity, and that is especially true in Northern Ireland, where our haulage industry is under enormous pressure. I urge the Chancellor to reconsider the timetable for the introduction of the new charge and to implement it at the earliest possible opportunity. We shall monitor the proposed consultation process with the road haulage industry and shall want firm action to be taken to alleviate the pressures on that hard-pressed industry.

The decision to increase duty on cigarettes will once again increase the likelihood of cross-border smuggling in Northern Ireland. That will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the tobacco industry in the Province and throughout the United Kingdom. The black market in smuggled cigarettes and fuel in Northern Ireland is booming, primarily filling the coffers of the paramilitary organisations that are at the heart of such smuggling and racketeering. We need the Government to take action to deal with that, not only by tackling crime, but by reconsidering duties on those products. Smuggling must be deterred, not encouraged. Such encouragement may be inadvertent, but it is the end result. The problem must be addressed by reforming the duty regime for those products. That will be a key element in closing down the smuggling that is the scourge of our economy in Northern Ireland.

We welcome the Chancellor's announcement that in Northern Ireland the proposed tax relief for aggregates in respect of processed products will be backdated to 1 April 2002 on receipt of European Union state aid approval. That is to ensure that no levy is paid on aggregates that are used to make such products in Northern Ireland in the tax year 2002–03. My party has lobbied hard to gain recognition for the special circumstances of the quarry industry in Northern Ireland, and the announcement of further relief is a welcome step in the right direction. Nevertheless, we shall continue to press the case for consideration of those special circumstances and for further relief to be given to the quarry industry in respect of the introduction of the aggregates tax.

We welcome many of the provisions in the Budget, but it remains to be seen whether the tax increases to enable additional investment will result in the substantial improvements in health care and other public services that give people confidence that their taxes are being well spent. My constituents will measure the Budget's success by the extent to which it results in shorter waiting lists, increases the number of hospital beds available and delivers the best health care to them at the point of need. The final verdict on the Budget may have to wait until the people can make that judgment for themselves.

9.23 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): In the very limited time available to me, I want to reflect on the national health service.

Last year, my father was taken into hospital twice with an eye condition, and he eventually lost the affected eye. On two other occasions he was taken in, with blue flashing lights, for a broken femur. At Christmas, my mother was taken into hospital, where she was finally diagnosed as suffering from brain cancer.

I have spent hours every week in hospitals—great NHS hospitals—in the city of Leeds, and I think that I know as much about the NHS and how it works, from a patient's point of view, as is possible. I have met hundreds of patients, doctors, consultants, nurses and others, and I can speak with some knowledge about their feelings about the NHS.

I feel a moral obligation to a woman who died from brain cancer to argue for the national health service. It is apparent to everyone who uses it that it does not need reform, the private sector or any of the other remedies that are being discussed. The NHS is suffering from a simple lack of resources. The top and bottom of the matter is that there are not enough resources to make people better sufficiently quickly.

I congratulate the Chancellor on commissioning the Wanless report, which clearly and starkly states the extent to which the NHS is under-resourced. It estimates that we need an extra 300,000 staff, including 62,000 additional doctors and 108,000 more nurses, to reach the average standard for an acceptable NHS by 2022. Wanless demonstrates that people in this country are dying younger than they should because the NHS is suffering from a lack of resources. He uses a sinister phrase—"PYLL" or "potential years of life lost" because of an inadequately funded health service. Wanless compares us with many similar countries and shows that people in the United Kingdom die younger because of inadequate NHS funding.

I have taken a special interest in cancer because of my mother's cancerous tumour. According to Wanless, 10,000 people a year die needlessly of cancer because the service is underfunded when compared with the European average. If we moved to the standard of the European best, 25,000 people a year who currently die of cancer would live. That shows the scale of the crisis in the NHS. It is simply wrong to suggest that there are systemic, structural or managerial failures in the health service. The problem is underfunding.

I will not join a conspiracy of politicians from any party to imply that better results can be achieved through reform. Wanless demonstrates that people in this country have to wait an average of 4.3 months to see a consultant when people in Germany can see a consultant the same day. The average waiting time to see a general practitioner in some of the comparator countries is 14 minutes, whereas in this country, 25 per cent. of patients have to wait a minimum of four days.

The NHS suffers from underfunding and under-resourcing, and Wanless shows that clearly. It is wrong for us not to spell out the facts to the nation, which, in any event, already understands them. I believe that 25 million patients a year go to see a GP. The figures are staggering, and people understand that the NHS is under-resourced.

Conservative Members make a fundamental misjudgment about our political culture at the turn of the millennium when they assume that they can appeal to the perhaps natural desire of people to keep more of their money in their pocket rather than paying tax. The country has moved on from the Thatcherite years. People want our services, especially the NHS, to expand, and they are prepared to pay for that. I congratulate the Government on finally taking the bull by the horns with today's Budget.

I have listened carefully to the debate. I left the Chamber only for a five-minute comfort break when an hon. Friend was speaking and I have therefore heard every Conservative speech. Not one Conservative Member made a positive comment about the NHS or the increase in expenditure. Opposition Front-Bench Members have not argued for an expansion of a publicly funded health service. That is lamentable; they fundamentally misunderstand the country's mood and the daily experience of families such as mine who have been through a crisis.

How shall we pay for the health service? My family, who are reasonably well off, could not possibly afford the care that they received from the NHS when my father lost his eye and then broke his leg, and my mother developed brain cancer. It is beyond our capacity, as a middle-class family, to pay for such services. There is only one way that middle-class families such as mine can pay, and that is through a publicly funded health service.

The Tories misunderstand the nature of the British people, who clearly comprehend that, although it is possible to pay for minor operations such as cosmetic surgery and perhaps possible to pay for a new hip, paying is beyond the capacity of many people when a mother or a father suffers the acute traumas from which my parents suffered.

I believe that among the various strata, apart from the super-rich, there is a broad social coalition that the Government should encourage. Those people say that there is only one way adequately to fund a health service that is currently inadequately funded, and that is by general taxation of one sort or another.

The Chancellor has constructed an interesting taxation package, which is a mixture of measures on national insurance and holding down personal allowances. That is progressive to some extent, as poorer families will pay less than wealthier ones, but I would prefer an honest, straightforward income tax increase, which is progressive. After all, many families can afford to pay and would gladly do so. They understand that the strong should help the weak and that the rich should help the poor. That ethos, I believe, runs strongly through our country.

In a nutshell, there is a strong case for overcoming the new Labour fear of a middle-class revolt over tax. It is possible to build around health socialist policies that argue for progressive taxation and provide the massive injection of additional funds that is clearly necessary to develop the health service.

I feel passionate about this issue and I want to say much more. I have been through some horrendous experiences and I have seen miracles—people brought back from the dead by the skill of nurses, doctors and consultants. I have seen the most amazing things, which I would have liked to describe to the House. Perhaps the opportunity will arise in the next few weeks, but the Whip is indicating that I should sit down.

9.32 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is a strange comment on our parliamentary system that, although we are about to raise £8 billion in revenue from the British people, only about eight Government Members have bothered to turn up to defend that conduct.

I welcome, very sincerely, some measures in the Budget, in particular the plan to alleviate the burdens on rural breweries, although I note that nothing has been done to de-tax Brakspear's 2.5, which is a fine brew. One can drink three pints without being over the limit, so it would be nice to have fiscal recognition of the benefits that that beverage can provide to the rural economy.

I also congratulate the Chancellor on getting rid of some ridiculous tax breaks that the Labour Government instituted for the film industry. Well done, at last. However, bigger announcements were made today, and I turn to those—*[Interruption.]* I hear the word "disaster" coming from the other side of the Chamber. Well, well, well—dissent.

I turn to those announcements, because most Members will agree that this is an important political Budget in which the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, finally felt confident enough to raise taxes openly. He has done so by stealth over the past five years, raiding pension funds, for example, by £5 billion. This is the moment at which he has decided to raise taxes without anaesthetic, to use an NHS metaphor. The thought is not original, but that must reflect some power shift on the Labour Front Bench between No. 10 and the Treasury. It was the essence of Blairism—the unique selling proposition of Tony Blair—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct terminology when referring to Members of the House.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I meant the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was the Prime Minister's unique selling

[Mr. Johnson]

proposition that he could improve public services without raising taxes. Labour Members may recall the gigantic posters that sprouted up all over the country with images of the then Leader of the Opposition—with his signature appended, the better that we might believe his pledge. It is interesting that the Chancellor has today made nonsense of that promise. I agree with the analysis that we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that this surely constitutes a power grab by the Chancellor.

I can see why there was so much cheering and waving of the Order Paper on the Labour Benches. Like the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) and others, I have listened carefully to the debate. It has been wonderful to behold those on the Labour Benches, because this is what they came into politics to do: tax and spend. It is what they like doing. They want to take money away from the productive sectors of the economy and give it to public sector special interest groups, which they largely represent.

Labour Members may have missed two points in their discussion of the national insurance hikes: first, that those raises will hit the very public sector workers whom they hoped would benefit from the Chancellor's spending plans; and, secondly, as the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) rightly said, that the national insurance increases are regressive, and someone earning £32,000 will pay exactly the same as someone earning £132,000. That may be why Labour Members were so jubilant: we all know that they are now fat cats and MPs, and will not be as hard hit, relatively speaking, as many of their constituents.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does the hon. Gentleman advocate a more progressive rate of income tax for those on higher incomes? If that is his policy, I agree with it.

Mr. Johnson: I merely point out that it is ironic that Labour Members should cheer a regressive tax.

Those regressive taxes are expected to go a very long way. The Chancellor said that he would increase public spending from £390 billion to £470 billion in about four years' time. I hope that I heard him correctly. If his growth projections are wrong, someone will pick up a large bill, and I expect that it will be the taxpayer.

It is the judgment of the Chancellor, the hon. Member for Hemsworth and many others who have spoken tonight that the time is now propitious to raise taxes and that the taxpayer is willing—

Sir Robert Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnson: I will, but I am conscious that other hon. Members want to speak.

Sir Robert Smith: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed the sleight of hand in the Chancellor's statement? While the ceiling remains for most levels of national insurance, it will not remain for the 1 per cent. level. In effect, therefore, the Chancellor has taxed income right up through the scale—except unearned income or income from investments, which will not contribute to the national health service—despite saying that he did not want to increase income tax.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that out.

The Chancellor hopes to take a huge amount of money from the public and he thinks that the time is right to do that. Labour Members may be right that the public are in a generous mood and are prepared to pay more in taxes. What the public want more evidence of, however, is that those taxes, if taken and spent exclusively by the Government, will deliver a better health service. We have had umpteen health service reforms, and we now have more health administrators than beds. More people are on waiting lists than when the Government came to power and we are now driven to the crazy expedient of using taxpayers' money to send patients to France and Germany in the hope that they will be cured there. I wonder how the Chancellor can call the NHS the envy of the world, or whatever fatuous phrase it was that he used, when people are driven to go to South Africa for cataract operations and to India for heart surgery. More people than ever before are now being forced to use their own resources to pay for operations. That is not because the Labour Government have been particularly kind to private medicine; on the contrary, when the Government came to power they took away the tax break for private health care for the elderly, with the result that 200,000 people immediately gave up their policies. People are being driven to use private medicine in despair at the NHS. There should be no shame in pointing that out.

It should not be sacrilegious to say that the NHS is failing. I think that Nigel Lawson said that the NHS is the religion of the British people, and, to some extent, that is true. We all sign up in a general way to the objectives of the NHS. I think that the Chancellor said today that the NHS amounted to a definition of the character of this country. It is all very well to treat the NHS as a religion, but it is legitimate for some of us to point out that, in so far as it is a religion, it is letting down its adherents very badly.

It is wrong of the Chancellor to set his face against the experience of other countries that have a far better record of health care provision, a far better life expectancy, and a far better record of dealing with cancer and coronary heart disease. Those countries do so not just because they spend more money on health but because they do not rely exclusively on a top-down monopolistic health service of the kind that we have in this country. The Chancellor has decided that there is only one model for health care in this country—the NHS model—and he has decided that it is unimprovable except through the addition of more taxpayer's money and platoons of auditors to swell the ranks of the administrators. The best auditors of health care in this country should be the patients, and it would be far better if they were given more control over how money was spent for their health care.

We have had five years of bluff about the Labour Government's tax and spending intentions. Now, at last, we are getting the reality—in their hearts they are deeply wedded to tax and spend, and they have no more imaginative prescriptions for the NHS than those outlined by Labour Members today. All the froth, the candy floss and the spin of new Labour have finally been blown away. People such as the hon. Member for Hemsworth have

been revealed in their true colours as taxers and spenders and believers in the NHS unreformed and as it is—monolithic and monopolistic. They think that that is the only way to improve health care in this country. I hope that they are right; I fear very much that they will be proved wrong.

9.43 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): In the previous Labour Government, the Chancellor achieved through, first, independence for the Bank of England, and, following that, low and stable interest rates and growing employment, an important reversal—that of Labour's reputation for economic incompetence.

I hope that this Budget will mark another change—a change in the way that politics works. For some years, we have experienced a sort of ersatz politics, in which politicians have become so expert at presenting policies in the best light that people have begun to believe that all politicians are interested in treating them like fools and patronising them. The consequence has been a growing distrust of politicians and an abandonment of the political process. Many politicians have wanted to make politics easier and simple to understand; instead, we have made it simplistic and confusing. We have implied that one can have extra investment in public services without paying for it, and have then faced the wrath of people when they realise that they are paying for it through so-called stealth taxes.

Let me take this opportunity to nail the myth that stealth taxes were invented by the Labour party. I recall the 22 Tory tax increases between 1992 and 1997 imposed by Conservative Chancellors.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Fiona Mactaggart: I will not take any interventions. I have sat here all day and am the first woman to speak, but I have only eight minutes.

No one likes paying tax. We all think—usually correctly—that we are the best judges of how to spend our money, but there are some things, such as public transport, that we cannot provide for ourselves. Other provision, such as health care, is much cheaper and better when provided collectively.

I know that because I remember vividly when my mother required a kidney transplant. The private health insurance company, on which she had depended for half a century, abandoned her. Because of her growing ill health, it put her premiums up to thousands of pounds a year. When my uncle lay dying in a British hospital, his daughter told me that, despite the pile of empty cardboard boxes by the lift and the lack of a carpet on the floor, the quality of nursing care that her dad received was fantastic. It was much better than the care that her mum received in a very posh private hospital in Florida.

We must not doubt that the quality of care that NHS patients receive is unmatched. Because we can hold the institution of the NHS accountable, we can deliver a better service. That will always be hard for an individual to achieve.

Another sign of the growing maturity of politics is a willingness to invest in the long game, when results will not be seen before the next general election. Research shows that that long-term investment is worth it when it comes to children: every pound spent on a child under seven results in savings of £7 later in that child's life. The investments that have been made in the child tax credit or in innovations such as sure start will not show a return for 10 or 15 years, but other beneficial effects will be evident—women will continue to participate in the labour market, children will have a better start in life and be able to achieve better skills, and so on.

The Budget's emphasis on directing resources towards mothers is really important. Women have done better than men out of Budgets under this Government since 1997. That is sensible politics, as it recognises who is the responsible person in a family. The mother is the one who invests in the children and protects the needs of the family.

Fear and despair are the greatest destroyers of real politics. People are afraid for their children's futures and for their own health. A third great fear that destroys politics locally is the fear of crime. I was glad to hear that the Budget will devote some extra investment to the criminal justice system. More will have to be done, however: people can buy their way out of the consequences of crime by acquiring gates and security guards, but the criminal justice system cannot be privatised.

Am I right in thinking that the Budget could deliver a new integrity in politics? For politics to work, people have to engage in debate. They have to respect each other, and I admired what the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said—I rarely do that, but the hon. Gentleman said that the Opposition should not be treated as scoundrels. He suggested that we should accept that Opposition Members want to do their best for people, and that their proposals are worthy of examination.

I was terribly disappointed that, when he responded to the Budget statement, the Leader of the Opposition did not rise to the challenge laid down by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to create a national consensus on the health service. Instead, the right hon. Gentleman asked what we had to show for the extra investment in education. Well, I shall tell the House what my constituency has to show for that extra investment.

When I was selected to stand for the Slough constituency, half of all children leaving the primary schools there were unable to reach a basic standard in reading. That proportion is now 25 per cent. It is still too high, but the number of pupils leaving our primary schools who are unable to read properly has been halved. That is the difference that the extra investment has made.

We should not just consider British standards, however. We should make international comparisons, as we have with the health service. During the same period, Britain has moved from the bottom quartile to eighth in international comparator tests relating to literacy and numeracy.

If we invest well and base our investment on good research, we can improve standards. The Budget gives us the chance to do that if we build a national consensus, but we cannot do it if we adopt the approach of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). He was right to say that it is not the amount spent but what it delivers that counts, but he went on to justify everyone's cynicism about politics by observing that if it did deliver in the health service he might say "Well done", but he would

[Fiona Mactaggart]

say it the day after a general election rather than the day before. If we engage in politics like that, we let down the British people. We betray them, and we betray the duty that we bring to this House of Commons.

I urge the Chancellor, however, to make it easier for people to understand the set of processes involved. I have two degrees, but I do not understand my tax return. I do not think I am alone in that, although I may be alone in admitting it. We must make it easier for people to see where the money comes from, as well as where it goes. A number of suggestions have been made today—the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), for instance, made precisely this point in terms of scrutiny of the Budget—but we certainly need to ensure that the context of people's tax take is much clearer to them.

I welcome the simplification of small businesses' VAT, and I feel we should keep working to make the operation of tax credits more comprehensible. I understand why the Chancellor rejected the idea of a hypothecated tax for the NHS, but I think he should continue the investment in a way that enables people to see where the money comes from.

The Chancellor should invest in a way that will deliver change. He should ignore the counsels of despair from Opposition Members who say that that is not possible with public investment, and ensure that public investment delivers the reform and the improvement that we require.

9.52 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), and I thank her for allowing me time to speak. I agree with her about the need to make the whole tax system simpler. Since the present Chancellor took office, Tolley's tax guide has got bigger and bigger. I do not think this was the Chancellor's intention, but the system has become more complicated and less easy to understand. As the hon. Lady said, roll on the day when we can deal with our own tax returns again.

I found parts of the Budget very encouraging. There were a number of plus points. The Chancellor spoke of a ladder of opportunity for businesses and said that the Government were on the side of business. I welcome the research and development tax credit, which he said would be worth £400 million a year, and the reduction in small companies' corporation tax by 1 per cent. to 19 per cent. However, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), many small businesses do not make a profit at all. I wonder how many of them will benefit.

On the plus side, I welcome the changes in capital gains tax and the VAT regime. On the minus side, the increase in national insurance contributions—as the Leader of the Opposition said—is equivalent to a 3 per cent. increase in corporation tax. It will lead to a tax take of £6.1 billion. Furthermore, as well as hitting companies and largely undoing the good done by the corporation tax reduction, it will hit the pockets of senior nurses, police officers, hospital radiographers and senior post office sorting staff. Many of them do not have a large income, yet they will be about £29 a month worse off. They—the people on the front line of public services—are exactly the sort of people we need to deliver better public services, but if their morale is damaged they will not be in a position to do so.

There is nothing in the Budget about reducing the burden on small businesses. Last Friday in my constituency I attended a chamber of commerce lunch at which every business man I spoke to mentioned the increasing burden on small businesses. A recent survey of 600 members of the Institute of Directors reveals that 84 per cent. feel that excessive bureaucracy is worsening. The British Chambers of Commerce estimates that the costs faced by business have increased by £15 billion.

Some of the burdens are home grown—the current Employment Bill has been mentioned—but there are various European directives as well. The end of life vehicles directive will oblige car makers to assume financial responsibility for scrapping old cars from this year onwards. If it is strictly enforced, that directive could wreak havoc on this country's car industry. There are 26.5 million cars on our roads: if it costs £300 to deal with each car under the directive, the overall cost will be £7.95 billion.

The problem is not only red tape but the growing tax burden on businesses. The CBI estimated that the Labour Government had increased business taxes by £5.8 billion. Business taxation as a whole in this country was moving in the right direction in terms of the supply side of our economy vis-à-vis that of other countries. That movement has now been arrested, and it might even go into reverse as companies have to pay more tax. That will mean that Britain's competitive position will continue to slip—we were ninth in the world, now we are nineteenth—and our productivity, which was better than America's, will continue to fall. I am concerned that there is not more in the Budget to help small businesses and to reduce the burden of bureaucratic red tape.

Much of the Chancellor's speech was devoted to the national health service. There have been large increases in NHS expenditure, but I can see no real evidence of improvement. I spent four years out of Parliament. When I was last a Member of Parliament, I received about one letter a week from constituents complaining about NHS matters. I should say that they were not complaining about the staff, the management or the nurses, who we all know are entirely dedicated and do a superb job. Now, however, I get five or six letters a day from constituents complaining about, for example, cancellations of operations or long waits. Two days ago I received a letter from a constituent who has had a serious stroke: he must wait 14 weeks for an MRI scan, even though his consultant believes that there is blood on the back of his brain and he needs a scan immediately.

My local hospital in King's Lynn, the Queen Elizabeth hospital, has a severe shortage of consultants in key disciplines, including radiology, pathology, histology and dermatology. The hospital recently recruited 80 Filipino nurses; they are extremely caring and hard working, but that is not a long-term solution. There has been a large increase in emergency admissions, but our number of acute beds per head of population is less than the average. The number of beds in the hospital has fallen from 602 eight years ago to 504 last year.

That is not all the fault of the last Conservative Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West pointed out, the bed-blocking problem is entirely the fault of the Labour Government. The Opposition will support increased funding for the NHS, but only in a framework of structural changes to the NHS. In every other European country that is spending more on

health than we do, there is a mature mix of private and public health provision. The only way to bring our expenditure on health up to the European average is to secure a bigger role for the private sector. Yes, we need more public expenditure on the NHS, but we also need a genuine partnership between the public and private sectors.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Alban Gashi

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the case of Alban Gashi. I raise it in two contexts: first, the injustice that I believe has been perpetrated on an individual constituent and, secondly, the Government's policy on deportations and removals.

I begin with the constituent's case. Alban Gashi arrived in this country in February 1998. On the same day, he applied for asylum. He was a single Kosovan. I do not complain that the merits of his case were not justly considered, or that his application was eventually rejected. That is not the point of this complaint.

More than two years after Mr. Gashi's application, the Home Office arrived at the conclusion that it should be refused. During those two years, he lived in Maidstone in my constituency. He had a stable address in a local vicarage, the vicarage of St. Michael and All Angels. He had a stable job interpreting for West Kent magistrates court.

The reason why I rehearse those facts is that there is no doubt that, from day one until his removal, Mr. Gashi's whereabouts were known to the authorities, and he pursued lawfully the correct processes of an asylum application.

Mr. Gashi appealed against the refusal. Again, I do not wish to rehearse the merits of his appeal but it is common ground between me and the Home Office that the appeal was received, considered and in February 2001 rejected.

Allegedly, notification was then sent to Mr. Gashi that his appeal had been refused, and giving him the opportunity—it is a crucial point—to appeal beyond that to a tribunal; but in order to appeal to the tribunal, he had to receive notification of the refusal of the appeal and to comply with time requirements. He never received notification.

It is not unfamiliar for Members of Parliament to hear people claim that they have not received this or that inconvenient document that was sent to them through the post by the Government, but this case is different for two reasons. First, Mr. Gashi was resident in the vicarage. The priest, whom I know well, has confirmed that throughout that time he, the priest, got all the post, as he has always done. He was the first to see the post and would have known whether anything had come. However, way beyond that, and more importantly, Mr. Gashi began to wonder, as did the priest, why he had not heard anything.

In July, with the assistance of the priest, Mr. Gashi wrote to the Home Office giving his address as the vicarage, stating again that he was working with West Kent magistrates court. Again, his whereabouts were well known. No reply was received to his letter.

That letter should have alerted the Home Office to the fact that Mr. Gashi had not received notice that his appeal had been turned down. After all, there was no other purpose in his writing that letter with his address on it telling everyone where he was. There was no reply to that. Twice more, Mr. Gashi—and the priest confirms this not from belief but from personal knowledge—telephoned the

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

Home Office with the help of the priest to ask what was happening to his appeal. On both occasions, he was told, "Don't worry, it's in the system." Because from the Home Office point of view Mr. Gashi had not appealed against the rejection of the independent adjudicator, the Home Office decided that he was removable.

I should say here and now that, although I take severe exception to the way in which my constituent was dealt with, I have had absolute courtesy from the Minister of State, Home Office, Lord Rooker, who has made himself available to me throughout this case, and who indeed did me the courtesy of sending me a copy of the envelope involved in the case. All that the envelope shows is that a postman ticked a box which said that the addressee had gone away. Mr. Gashi had never gone away. He was notifying the Home Office almost monthly that he was still at his address and waiting for a result. There was never any question of his having gone away.

On the basis that the appeal documents had been correctly served—which clearly they had not—Lord Rooker decided that the removal should go ahead. That is a gross injustice. When it became apparent that Mr. Gashi's repeated requests of the Home Office for a resolution had been ignored, and that if the Home Office had responded to those requests it would have been clear that there had been confusion about the serving of the rejection of the appeal, the clock should have started running again and he should have been able to appeal to a tribunal had he so decided.

Mr. Gashi seems to have been a very sensible man. He arrived in this country when the situation in Kosovo was anything but settled. He arrived at a stable address, he took stable work and decided not to appeal on the grounds of human rights because in his view that was a waste of time.

Mr. Gashi was contacted by the Home Office in January. Home Office representatives said that they would like to come to see him. That was a rather coy expression. He thought that they were coming to see him at long last to respond to his various representations, either to ask him further questions or to give him some result. Instead, when he opened the door, there were two policemen and an immigration officer. He was arrested on the spot and subsequently removed. I believe that to be profoundly wrong. As I say, I shall not argue about the merits of the case or that I have not had due access to Ministers. I argue that that constituent was appallingly treated.

There is a larger dimension to this matter, however. I have often said that this Government are ineffective about the number of removals from this country, and that one of the biggest magnets to those who abuse our asylum system—as opposed to magnets for those who go lawfully through the processes—is the ease with which one can disappear in this country. Because we have no identity cards and, thank God, we do not have an oppressive police force carrying out raids and checks every five minutes, it is very easy to disappear into our black economy.

The Government have responded by saying that they have set themselves an ambitious target for removals. This case shows that they are up to an old trick. I do not even say that it is exclusive to this Government. By going for all the soft targets, they can bump up the numbers and ignore the really serious cases. So, instead of looking for those who have disappeared and trying to track down those who have failed to report, this Government are turning up on the doorsteps of people who are known to the authorities; who have a stable address and a stable job; who are complying with every procedure with which they have ever been asked to comply; and who are reporting on every occasion on which they have been asked to report, because it is easy to roll up and arrest them and say, "Lo and behold, a removal."

There was no need for a removal in this case because Mr. Gashi was known, and would have left the country when asked. Indeed, when the time came for him to go, he turned down the opportunity of a judicial review and the opportunity to appeal on human rights grounds, because he is a sensible man.

I have another case—of which I cannot give details because it is not the job of Members of Parliament to make representations against their constituents—on which I made muted representations to Ministers. I shall not give the name of the person involved, but he came to the notice of the authorities when he was detained for a criminal offence, of which he was subsequently convicted. He failed to report, abandoned his appeal and was then detained. When I made muted representations about that—remarking to my staff, "The Minister will look at that and laugh"—I was appalled to learn that my constituent had been released. However, Mr. Gashi, who has done nothing wrong and who stuck to all the procedures, was arrested and deported. Whatever sort of lunatic sense of priorities is that?

I say to the Minister, first that Mr. Gashi was badly treated; and, secondly, that it is easy to bump up removal figures if one goes for soft targets. Members of Parliament should be alerted by this case to the way in which those removal figures are being calculated. Thirdly, I advocate a situation in which all new applicants are routinely held in secure reception centres and all treated equally. However, the Government seem to have some odd criteria by which to pick and choose who to release and who to deport. I am grateful for the way in which the Minister's colleagues have dealt with the matter and I look forward to hearing her reply.

10.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I note the issues that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has raised about the case of Mr. Alban Gashi. I would like to set out the essential background to the case.

Mr. Gashi entered the United Kingdom illegally on 3 February 1998. He was detected by immigration officers at Dover, along with 20 other illegal entrants, in the back of a lorry that had just disembarked from a ferry from Calais. When Mr. Gashi was interviewed he claimed that he had come to the United Kingdom because he was fleeing persecution in his own country. He was given temporary release by the immigration service while his asylum claim was processed.

On 3 April 1998, Mr. Gashi's legal representatives submitted a five-page signed statement setting out the basis of his claim to asylum in the United Kingdom. That included claims about his treatment between 1995 and 1998 at the hands of the authorities in his home country. Inquiries carried out by the Home Office, under the

provisions of the Dublin convention, revealed that Mr. Gashi in fact had applied for asylum in Belgium on 7 November 1994, his application being refused on 23 October 1997—he had been free to remain in Belgium during that period. Mr. Gashi made no mention of claiming asylum in Belgium in his five-page, signed, written statement to the Home Office of 3 April 1998.

Mr. Gashi was asked to attend for interview in Croydon with regard to his asylum claim on 10 May 2000. The letter inviting him was also sent to his legal representative. Mr. Gashi failed to attend the interview or to provide subsequently a reason for his failure to attend. His asylum claim was considered on the basis of all the available information before the Home Office, and refused in a letter dated 19 May 2000. In the letter refusing his claim for asylum, it was noted that

"the risk of persecution to the ethnic Albanian majority by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been removed with the establishment in Kosovo of an international peace-keeping force, KFOR. Indeed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been organising the repatriation of refugees back to Kosovo since 28 June 1999 and as of 30 July 1999 some 800,000 ethnic Albanians, representing 90 per cent. of those who fled Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, had already voluntarily returned to Kosovo. Consequently the Secretary of State has concluded that your fear of persecution is not well-founded."

Mr. Gashi's legal representatives lodged an in-time appeal against the decision to refuse him asylum.

Mr. Gashi was notified by the Immigration Appellate Authority that his appeal had been listed for substantive hearing on 7 November 2000. He appeared on the day, but informed the special adjudicator that his representative had informed him that morning that she could not attend due to a family bereavement. The adjudicator adjourned the appeal hearing until 19 December 2000, when there would be a pre-hearing to ascertain whether Mr. Gashi and his representative were ready to proceed. The special adjudicator asked Mr. Gashi to arrange for his legal representatives to fax the IAA to explain why they had not attended the appeal hearing.

Mr. Gashi faxed the IAA on 12 December 2000, seven days before the re-arranged hearing, to say that he had been unable to get in touch with his legal representative and that three other legal representatives that he had approached had declined to take on his case. He said that he had approached two other reputable organisations with the same result, though he then went on to note that one of these organisations would be able to deal with his case after January 2001. He asked that the pre-hearing scheduled for 9 December be put back to February 2001.

The IAA then received a fax from Mr. Gashi's legal representatives on 18 December 2000 to the effect that he had informed them that he wished to represent himself at the appeal hearing on 19 December, and that they were no longer representing him. At the pre-hearing on 19 December, the appeal was set for substantive hearing on 5 February 2001.

The appeal went ahead on 5 February 2001, with Mr. Gashi representing himself. He gave evidence and made a submission to the special adjudicator, relying upon his earlier statement but admitting that he had claimed asylum in Belgium.

In his written determination dismissing Mr. Gashi's appeal, the special adjudicator made the finding that

"the appellant has not established that any additional risk factors apply in this case, which would differentiate him from the 850,000 Kosovars who have already returned home voluntarily. Nor has he established that there is a reasonable chance that he would on return now face persecution either from the Serb authorities, or from individual Serbs, or from anyone else."

Mr. Gashi had therefore failed to make his case for being granted refugee status in the United Kingdom. Consideration was also given by the Home Office as to whether he should have been granted leave to remain in the UK exceptionally. The right hon. Lady will know that that ground is exceptional and that rarely do single men qualify.

The written determination was promulgated by the IAA by first-class post on 8 February 2001. A copy of the determination was sent to the address given by Mr. Gashi at his appeal hearing. The right hon. Lady has said that he lived at that address in a stable way for two years. The determination was returned to the IAA by the Royal Mail with the words "Not at this address" written on the envelope in biro, and with a Royal Mail sticker marked "Addressee has gone away."

The Royal Mail has confirmed that a first-class letter would be delivered to the address shown unless a person at the address told the postman when he tried to deliver it that the person did not live there. The postman would then write on the envelope that the person was not at that address and return the envelope to the sorting office and attach the Royal Mail sticker, thereby returning the envelope to the sender.

Alternatively the postman would have delivered the letter and someone at the address marked the envelope to show that the person did not live there, and then returned it to the Royal Mail, which would again attach its sticker and return the envelope to the sender. Either way, it seems extremely odd that Mr. Gashi resided at the address before the determination was posted to him and was picked up subsequently by the immigration service, as the right hon. Lady has said, at the same address after non-receipt of the letter, the Royal Mail having been informed that he did not live there.

On 10 January 2002, Mr. Gashi was picked up by members of the immigration service and detained at the Port of Dover detention centre.

Miss Widdecombe: The Minister has performed a jump from what happened when the appeal letter failed to be delivered for whatever reason and the arrival of the immigration officers on the doorstep. Will she comment on the letter that was written in July and on the telephone contacts that were made and witnessed from Mr. Gashi to the Home Office?

Angela Eagle: I shall be frank with the right hon. Lady. In my briefing for the debate, I have been given no knowledge of those contacts. I shall go back with the information that the right hon. Lady has given me tonight. I am sorry to give her such a disappointing reply, but I do not intend to freelance on the Floor of the House, unbriefed. The right hon. Lady has given me the details and I promise her that I shall go back and have the immigration and nationality directorate check its records for those contacts.

As I said, Mr. Gashi was picked up and detained at the port of Dover. Representations were received on 11 January from the right hon. Lady on behalf of Mr. Gashi. Those representations related to the fact that he was still awaiting the determination of his asylum

[Angela Eagle]

appeal, and expressed concern over the conditions in which he was being detained. Assurances were given to the right hon. Lady that Mr. Gashi would not be removed until the issues relating to the serving of the determination had been resolved. As Mr. Gashi was liable to be removed from the United Kingdom, his detention was maintained.

The original and subsequent representations made by the right hon. Lady were responded to by my noble Friend Lord Rooker—I thank her for her comment on the usual graciousness with which he deals with such issues—in two letters dated 14 and 15 of February and by a telephone conversation between the right hon. Lady and my noble Friend on 14 February. Acting on the advice given by his officials, Lord Rooker confirmed that there was no legal basis for Mr. Gashi to remain in the United Kingdom, and that removal action would continue.

During his period of six weeks in detention prior to his removal, Mr. Gashi did not ask to see a copy of the determination of his appeal or seek the free legal advice that was available and signposted in the IS96R notice which is given to all detainees on arrival at removal centres. That notifies them of their bail rights and the available free legal advice and contains the relevant telephone contacts to access it. On 21 February Mr. Gashi was removed by plane from the United Kingdom.

We are considering the implications of the technical issue of non-receipt of the determination by Mr. Gashi, despite the fact that it was clearly delivered correctly by the Royal Mail to the last known address. The right hon. Lady may be pleased to know that the Home Office is piloting schemes involving the hand delivery of determinations by officers from the IND to appellants. Such a scheme would ensure that the problem experienced by Mr. Gashi will not be replicated for others. If the right hon. Lady wishes to discuss the implications after we have considered them, Lord Rooker would be happy to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 April 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LAND AT PALACE AVENUE, KENSINGTON (ACQUISITION OF FREEHOLD) BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 25 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Modulation Proposals

1. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What economic appraisal her Department has made of the effect on UK agriculture of the modulation proposals contained in Sir Donald Curry's recent report. [R] [46509]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): In discussion with stakeholders, others in Government, and the devolved Administrations, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is considering the implications of the Policy Commission's proposals on modulation very carefully.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. Given the importance that Sir Donald Curry attached to modulation as a way of reforming UK agriculture, will the right hon. Lady commission some work to enable us to determine, for example, who the winners and losers are in the modulation stakes? Could she also help us by identifying the types of environmental goods that she thinks might be bought? Sir Donald tells us that there are many gains to be had in terms of the restructuring of UK agriculture and our rural development prospects by that means, but many UK farmers will be fearful that if we go the whole hog down his route, they will be trading in an uncompetitive situation, compared with their European rivals.

Margaret Beckett: We are doing the kind of work that the right hon. Gentleman seeks. Let me explain further to him and the House; with his experience, I am sure that he will understand. It depends on the exact nature of the schemes that are introduced who the winners and losers are and what the pattern is. Although he rightly says that the Policy Commission recommended that we consider modulation, we should bear it in mind that to a degree, that was the commission's fallback position. I do not think that I am misrepresenting the commission when I say that. It recommended that there should be a shift in the way that funding for the common agricultural policy is used; that if we were unable to obtain that shift as a result of more fundamental reform, we ought to consider using modulation more extensively; and that perhaps we should consider using modulation more than we propose at present, even in the run-up to change and reform. Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is right that these are serious issues, and the points that he raises are exactly the ones that we need to examine.

As to how the funding might be used, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the whole point is that we would wish to change the purposes for which the funding could be used and make the scheme less bureaucratic. That would involve support for rural areas in different ways, as well as possible environmental projects.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Although my right hon. Friend is right that our major target must be CAP reform, it may be some way away. Given that, is it her policy to increase modulation from the 4.5 per cent. target by 2006 to a higher percentage? If so, what hope has she of receiving extra resources to enable her to fund that?

Margaret Beckett: I always live in hope. My hon. Friend raises an important issue. As part of the work to which I referred, we are considering carefully, as the Policy Commission recommended we should, whether there would be merit in increasing the percentage of modulation to which we are committed. We have concerns about the limitations on what can be done and the bureaucracy involved in people applying to schemes at present. That is partly why the rate of modulation to which we aspire was set at that level. That was regarded as practical, but we are considering afresh the advice of the Policy Commission.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The Secretary of State is rightly cautious about going down the proposed route. Does she recognise the dangers of erecting a surrogate green CAP, which would be even harder to reform than the present one, as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is a great deal more powerful than the National Farmers Union? Does she recognise that ill-defined public goods and complex schemes requiring intensive manpower and womanpower to monitor and yielding very little to farmers would not represent a significant reform or benefit? If we do go down that route, will she consider requiring farmers to group together to apply for the schemes, perhaps to encourage at last some collective working among British farmers, the absence of which is one of their great problems?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I do not think that anyone on the Labour Benches—and probably on the Conservative Benches—would disagree that we must be careful if we are successful in getting reform not to replace the current CAP with a scheme that is equally burdensome and

difficult. We all share that point of view. I also take his point about ways in which we might seek to use any change to encourage more co-operation in the farming community—another of the Policy Commission's many recommendations.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I should like to carry on in the same vein as the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Surely in the aftermath of Curry, there is a great deal to be said about increasing co-operative working—an issue about which I asked my right hon. Friend during questions some weeks ago. Is there any better place to start than in the dairy industry, which clearly has significant problems regarding the scale of certain enterprises? The benefits of economies of scale can be achieved only by more co-operative working, which can be achieved in its own right only with encouragement. Will she talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to ensure that we look again at some of the structures in that industry that have not been helped by interference in the past?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point about an issue that I know is of considerable concern. I have had many conversations not only with representatives of the NFU, but with individuals in the farming community, and I am aware that his concern is widely shared. The House will be aware that many of the Policy Commission's recommendations were not for the Government, let alone my Department. One of the recommendations is that we encourage the farming community to work much more co-operatively, in whatever sphere it may be.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): It is interesting to note how much more cautious the Secretary of State is now being on the question of modulation, which was the main thrust of Sir Don Curry's argument in his important report. Is this new tone of caution the reason why there was no mention in yesterday's Budget statement of modulation or the additional funding for which Sir Don called? Will she explain why the Budget offered not a shred of comfort for hard-pressed rural businesses, contained nothing to bolster economic activity in the countryside and promised only higher taxes? What comfort can she give that rural regeneration remains a top Government priority, and what does she propose to do now to rescue her credibility?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman said that I was now displaying greater caution, but I always display caution; he must have noticed that by now. I therefore reject entirely the charge that I was reckless on this issue in the past—especially if the Treasury is listening.

The hon. Gentleman also said that there was no mention of modulation in the Budget, but I think that he and everybody else would have been very surprised if there had been, not least because, as Sir Don Curry and I made plain when the Policy Commission reported to the Government—indeed, we have continually done so ever since; I recall Sir Don doing so on "Farming Today" only a few days ago—the resources that are available are a matter for the spending review. That is not a matter for the Budget, except in terms of the very broad fiscal envelope for the whole Government. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor explicitly said yesterday that decisions in the spending review had yet to be made.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Budget contained nothing to bolster economic activity in rural areas. He cannot have been listening yesterday, otherwise he would have noticed the plethora of initiatives directed at assisting and supporting small businesses. Those initiatives are obviously of great value to businesses in rural areas. As to his final remarks about how I can retrieve my credibility, I do not think that they come well from somebody who does not seem to know the difference between the Budget and the spending review.

Mr. Speaker: Chris Mullin. Not here.

Animal Production

3. **John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): If it is her policy to support animal production in remote areas; and if she will make a statement. [46511]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Livestock farming makes an important contribution to the economy of many remote areas, and the Government strongly support EU policies intended to encourage farming in those areas.

John Thurso: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he aware of the remarks of Sir John Marsh, chairman of the independent review group on veterinary medicines, who suggested that stock rearing in remote areas was economically unjustifiable? In the light of those remarks, what assurance can he give my constituents, for whom stock rearing is economically and socially very important, of the Government's intention to continue to support that area of endeavour? Furthermore, what is his view on the prejudice expressed by Sir John in his capacity as chairman of that review group?

Mr. Morley: I have not read the remarks by Sir John, so I cannot comment on them. I can speak only for the Government, and we have repeatedly made it clear that we recognise the social and economic benefits of upland livestock farming. Grazing regimes are an important part of conservation programmes and conservation management. Serious issues are involved in the economics of upland grazing, but we are prepared to address them. We have put together several support programmes and packages. Moreover, we are consulting on the sheep envelope and the way in which we can use additional money and the flexibility that it provides to deal with some of the problems of remote livestock areas. They are very important and we as a Government will continue to support them.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): Many people in most, if not all, rural areas will be deeply concerned about views expressed in a report by the Countryside Agency, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02", which I briefly mentioned yesterday. To remind the House, it says:

"Rural proofing is the process by which impact of policy on rural areas is evaluated."

Of the 11 Departments that have been asked to get involved in rural proofing, DEFRA has the worst record. When will it do more, and do it more quickly?

Mr. Morley: With due respect to the hon. Gentleman, he may be misinterpreting what the report said about DEFRA. Ewen Cameron himself speaks highly of what DEFRA is doing and its rural programmes. I remind hon. Members that it was the Government who established the concept of a rural advocate and rural proofing. The whole idea of the job of a rural advocate is that if he thinks that the Government are not doing enough on rural proofing, he must point that out. We will take that charge seriously and respond to it.

Mr. Speaker: Claire Curtis-Thomas. Not here.

New Forest National Park

5. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): What representations have been received from local authorities in response to the New Forest national park designation order. [46513]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Eight local authorities have submitted representations in relation to the New Forest National Park (Designation) Order 2002. Seven of them raised objections to the boundary, to the proposed administrative arrangements, or to both.

Mr. Chope: In the light of that response, can the Minister confirm that there will be a public inquiry, as the Countryside Agency promised that there would be if concerns were expressed by local authorities? Can he further confirm that that public inquiry's terms of reference will cover not only the issues relating to the boundary, but the controversy surrounding the proposed special administrative arrangements?

Alun Michael: It is not for the Countryside Agency to take decisions about a public inquiry; it is required by the legislation. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 requires that an objection made by a local authority that is not withdrawn will cause a local inquiry to be held. I shall make an announcement about a public inquiry as soon as all the objections to the designated order have been received and fully considered. That is the time at which the detail of the hon. Gentleman's question should be dealt with.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Irrespective of whether the New Forest is designated as a national park, when one approaches the area on many of the major trunk roads one is immediately struck by the number of brown tourist information signs. That is not only relevant to the New Forest, but has a read-across to other parts of the country, including the county of Devon. Rural proofing was mentioned a moment ago. Will the Minister confirm that the Highways Agency does not intend to reduce the number of brown tourist information signs in the New Forest or anywhere else, as we are hearing on our local television stations?

Alun Michael: The hon. Lady should address her question to the relevant Minister, because it is a pretty long stretch from the question that we are dealing with.

National park status recognises the national level of importance of certain areas in terms of landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage, as well as recreational resource. Those are the sorts of features that encourage people to go to those areas, and our policy is to try to ensure that they get the information that they need in order to find those local attractions. The way in which the national parks authorities are engaging with the regeneration of those areas is extremely encouraging.

Climate Change

6. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): If she will make a statement on UK-US discussions about climate change. [46514]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): It is clearly important that we continue to maintain a constructive dialogue with the US on climate change. To that end, I held discussions on the subject with senior representatives of the Administration during my visit to Washington last week. In addition to ministerial discussions, UK officials are in regular contact with their US counterparts.

Tom Brake: I thank the Secretary of State for her response, but does she not agree that the UK has worked hand in hand with the US in the international coalition to fight terrorism and it is now time for the US to work hand in hand with the UK, the EU and other communities to combat an equally important international threat to the global environment? Does she further agree that the UK's position is somewhat weakened by an increase in its CO_2 emissions for the second successive year?

Margaret Beckett: First, I agree that it is important to continue to work in co-operation with the US; we endeavour to do that. The hon. Gentleman may know that there is a high-level group in the European Union that maintains a dialogue with the US.

People perhaps overlook the fact that President Bush's announcement in February about US domestic action related to the first Kyoto period, which ends in 2012. In the not-too-distant future, we shall need to discuss internationally what we all do when that period expires. We anticipate that discussions about the detail of further steps will begin as early as 2005. The US has decided recently that it will take action, and although it is perhaps not as stringent as we would like, we should welcome it. It is making investment available, and we also welcome that. We must encourage further moves in the right direction.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): May I express my frustration at the absence of the hon. Members for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas)? It means that other hon. Members and I were denied the opportunity to ask questions. It is disappointing when hon. Members table questions and do not turn up.

However, I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) was here to press the Secretary of State not to follow the US Administration's view that trading emissions, rather than trading reinforced by regulation, is primarily the way in

which to resolve the problem of carbon dioxide. Trading, backed by the abolition of regulation, will damage, not improve the environment.

The Secretary of State launched the trading emissions scheme in the United Kingdom. Will she acknowledge that it has had an early start, which has cost a lot of taxpayers' money, that we have some way to go to prove that trading emissions will help the environment, and that they cannot do that without effective regulation?

Margaret Beckett: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a need for an effective balance and that we must use a range of instruments and approaches to tackle the serious problems. He correctly said that we recently launched our voluntary emissions trading scheme. Indeed, I am going to ascertain how it is working when I leave the House today. From the hon. Gentleman's comments I detected a slight note of criticism that the scheme was not a good idea.

Malcolm Bruce: The UK scheme is simply not proven.

Margaret Beckett: Well, I am glad if I misunderstood him, because it is good to have that on the record. The Kyoto protocol provides for such mechanisms and we believe that they have merit, although I fully accept that they are only part of a balanced approach.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that we have provided taxpayers' money as an incentive to encourage people to trade. We have done that because we believe that it could provide a substantial first-mover advantage in the long term. That also applies to other matters. We are considering an aspect of handling climate change that could provide a market of billions of pounds in the future. It is a valuable step for Britain to have the first-mover advantage and to build up experience in co-operation with business.

I hope that I may be forgiven if I take the opportunity to pick up a point made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) to which I neglected to respond. He is right that there has been a small increase in our CO_2 emissions. We must watch that, but overall, we believe that Britain is on the right course.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I hope that the right hon. Lady will do more than watch the rise in CO_2 emissions; I hope that she will seek to reduce them. Does she acknowledge that it is agreed on both sides of the Atlantic that tropical rain forests play a critical role in balancing the climate? In the light of that, will she confirm the Prime Minister's statement last week that all the timber supplied for the refurbishment work in the Cabinet Office was from certified sustainable sources?

Margaret Beckett: That was certainly the contract that was placed, so far as I am aware. I know that allegations have been made, and, obviously, people are looking to see whether that contract was properly fulfilled. It was certainly the case that the Government abided by our approach, and our policy, that such timber must be supplied for all Government use.

Genetically Modified Crops

7. **Jim Knight** (South Dorset): What actions her Department has taken to ensure an even geographical distribution of trial sites for genetically modified crops. [46515]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): We have appointed an independent scientific steering committee to oversee the farm-scale evaluation programme of GM trials. It is content that the overall distribution of trial sites is in line with the aims of the research. It has confirmed that the distribution should reflect the geographic range over which the particular crop is grown in order, specifically, to represent the range of different management regimes that are used for the crop in the UK.

Jim Knight: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, and I apologise for not being here for the beginning of questions, Mr. Speaker.

I understand why the Government have negotiated these trials with the industry, and I appreciate that my right hon. Friend has talked about the need for improved consultation on the trials, which will be ending shortly anyway. A farmer on the edge of my constituency is particularly keen to help the Government with these trials, but the results of the consultation that we have had locally suggest that my constituents do not want them in their backyard. Why do we consistently seem to have these trials in Dorset despite my right hon. Friend's commitment to their even geographic distribution?

Mr. Meacher: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and I know that a number of sites in the parish of Bincombe in his constituency are involved in the current spring sowing round. I repeat that the spread of research sites aims to represent the range of management practice that is applied to crops within its geographic distribution. It is perfectly true that there is a cluster of several sites in Dorset, but that does not preclude the general principle. I must make the point, which I think my hon. Friend understands, that the sites are not chosen by the Government. The industry body SCIMAC—the supply chain initiative on modified agricultural crops—identifies the pool of candidate farms. The research bodies then select those that are most appropriate, in accordance with criteria set down by the independent scientific steering committee. That is the basis on which the selection has been made, but I take note of my hon. Friend's concerns, and they will certainly be taken into account in future.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Minister was careful in that reply to his hon. Friend, because he knows that this is an issue of great public concern. I acknowledge his statement that a scientific body is examining the matter, but the Government must, nevertheless, have a view on it. Will the Minister tell us why the separation distances between trial sites for GM crops are smaller in the UK than in other European countries? How can GM and non-GM crops co-exist while maintaining consumer

and farmer choice? Given the public concern over GM crops, does he believe that there will be a substantial market for them? That is a key issue for us all.

Mr. Meacher: Separation distances were determined in negotiation with the industry to ensure that in every case, wherever possible, the amount of cross-contamination is below the 1 per cent. threshold. That threshold is reflected in the marketing arrangements that have been agreed in the European Union, and the separation distances have been fixed to reflect that. I am not aware of any differences between us and the EU. The main plant in the farm-scale evaluation trials is oilseed rape and, for ordinary, non-hybrid oilseed rape, the EU still proposes the 200 m separation distance that we use in the UK.

We are examining the issue of co-existence. We have not had the results of the farm-scale evaluation trials, which we will not get until the summer of next year. We are considering contingency plans, whatever the results may be. That examination is in its early stages, so I cannot answer the specific point that the hon. Gentleman raised, which is a fair one, but the issue is certainly on our agenda.

Whether there will be a long-term market is a matter for consumers, not for the Government. The Government are neither for nor against GM crops. It is for consumers to decide whether they want to eat GM food.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, on the basis of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission's report "Crops on Trial", the Government will not be able to rely on the results of the test trials to make a decision on commercialisation? Can he guarantee that there will be a proper public debate at the end of those trials, which will include the right to say no to the commercialisation of GM crops in this country?

Mr. Meacher: Our policy is as scientifically based as it can be. We believe in sound science and its application. We need to listen to our scientific bodies, such as the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, the Advisory Committee on Animal Feeding Stuffs and others, but we realise that it is important to take account of public opinion. We have asked the AEBC to advise us on how we can ensure that there is a wider public debate on this issue as the farm-scale evaluations come to an end. I only wish that it had been possible to have such a debate at a much earlier stage. There are such deeply polarised positions on this issue that it is difficult to conduct a genuine debate. We need such a debate, and the Government want to have one. We shall do our best to ensure that it is proper, balanced and fair.

Refrigerator Recycling

8. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What steps her Department is taking to assist local authorities with the recycling of refrigerators. [46517]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): We have announced a payment of £6 million to local authorities to cover their costs from January 2002 to March 2002. An announcement will be made very shortly regarding funding to cover local authority costs in the current financial year.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Secretary of State aware that on 31 January the Minister for the Environment answered a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), in which he said that since late 1999 his Department had made frequent requests to the European Commission for formal clarification that insulating foam was covered by the regulation. He said:

> "We did not get a formal reply until June 2001. We were badly let down by the Commission".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 414.]

In the light of the comments that he made on Monday to the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in which he apparently more or less retracted that statement, will the right hon. Lady ask him to apologise for his earlier answer not only to the House, but to my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon, to the European Commissioner and to all the local authorities who are now left with a bill of up to £40 million—not just £6 million—as a result of the mistakes made by her Department?

Margaret Beckett: Absolute rubbish. I advise the hon. Gentleman to read the memorandum that my right hon. Friend and our officials prepared for the Select Committee. If he does so, he will find that all his questions are fully answered. My right hon. Friend tempered the high-flown language that he had used, but it is perfectly clear, as the memorandum to the Select Committee made plain, that there is a great deal of continual dialogue between the United Kingdom and the Commission and others, and that, not least at the request of the business community and local authorities, clarification continues to be sought. I do not believe for a second that my right hon. Friend owes anyone an apology. He and the Department have been most assiduous in trying to get the right result.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the Secretary of State familiar with the European WEEE directive—the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive? As amended, it will extend its provisions to cover not just fridges but microwave ovens, stereo equipment, hoovers and all domestic white consumer goods. Is the right hon. Lady aware that that is causing great concern in the farming community? Many such items are dumped on farmland, and local authorities then charge the farmers for their removal. What does the Department propose to do about this?

Margaret Beckett: We are looking closely at the directive's implications, how it can be handled, and how its purpose can be fulfilled in the United Kingdom. But I remind the hon. Lady—who, as a former Member of the European Parliament, will appreciate the distinction—that it is a directive, and that that provides some flexibility in regard to its implementation. The measure relating to fridges is a regulation, which gives no discretion: those are rules, which must be rigidly applied.

We are studying the new directive to see how we can best deal with people's concerns. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising a further important point.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I was surprised by the Secretary of State's answer to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). I have read the evidence that the Minister for the Environment gave to the Select Committee, and it is clear that until this week the Minister blamed the European Commission for the fridge fiasco. In evidence that he gave three days ago, he effectively retracted that accusation, instead blaming everyone but himself. I understand, however, that the industry and officials from more than one Department warned him of the consequences of signing the directive, and that he chose to ignore them.

My question is this: is that true? If it is not true, who is to blame? Does the Secretary of State accept ministerial responsibility for a monumental Government blunder that was not just predictable but predicted?

Margaret Beckett: I am not aware of the slightest shred of evidence for what the hon. Gentleman has said. To my knowledge, no one has ever suggested that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment was advised not to agree to the directive on those grounds; nor is there any evidence for anything else that the hon. Gentleman has said.

The hon. Gentleman said that he had read my right hon. Friend's evidence, but it is clear to me that he has not understood it.

Common Fisheries Policy

9. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): If she will make a statement on the forthcoming review of the common fisheries policy. [46518]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The review is an important opportunity for the European Union to correct the faults of a policy which, as the Commission has acknowledged, has to a significant degree failed to fulfil its objectives.

We will argue for a policy that is environmentally and economically sustainable, offers stakeholders greater involvement in management decisions, commands their support, and offers them a viable long-term future.

Mr. Mitchell: As the Minister says, the 10-year term for the common fisheries policy is about to expire. As far as I am aware, there is no shred of evidence that it has had any real effect on the conservation of fish stocks. May I suggest, in a spirit of helpfulness, that now is the time to argue for the repatriation of fishing policy to nation states? If the Minister acts, perhaps we shall be able to conserve some of the British fishing industry while there is still time.

Mr. Morley: I am not entirely sure what the hon. Gentleman means by repatriation to member states. Is he suggesting that we draw a line down the North sea and say, "Fish must not cross this line. You can follow certain rules on this side of the line, but not on the other side"? That would be ludicrous. We must have a European fisheries management policy.

There are weaknesses in the CFP, everyone realises that, but we are pleased that the Commission's Green Paper recognises the points being made by us in the United Kingdom and by our industry, and it is issues of this kind for which we shall be arguing.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I am sure that my hon. Friend considered the contribution from the very inland hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) to be important and timely, but is he aware that my constituents want to know what the Government and the European Union are thinking of doing in order to cultivate and train future fishermen, and to bring about the circumstances which we hope will result from reform of the fisheries policy?

Mr. Morley: The European Union, through structural funds, recognises that it is legitimate for member states to use funds to support a range of training initiatives. We are doing that in the United Kingdom, for example by providing free safety training for all fishermen. I am glad to announce that, tomorrow, at the fisheries exhibition in Glasgow, I will launch a new apprenticeship scheme designed to provide training for new entrants to the fishing industry. We believe that, despite the problems of management, the industry has a good long-term future. We need to consider how to attract crew and ensure that people have a professional, safe and long-term future in what could be a very good industry for this country.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Does the Minister agree that, although fish may not be that bright, we know that they are just about intelligent enough not to have hang-ups about their nationality? Seriously, does he agree that we should be concerned about the delay in the announcement of the route map for the review of the common fisheries policy? The fundamental reason why the policy has failed is over-centralisation. The main concern for the industry in this country is that any regional advisory committees that are set up should not be merely talking shops but should have real teeth and a real say in how policy is delivered in the fishing regions.

Mr. Morley: I agree. One of the problems of the common fisheries policy is that it has been too centralised, inflexible and bureaucratic. That is why we warmly welcome the proposals in the Green Paper and the indications that the Commission intends to propose regional management structures. How those will work will be a matter for discussion and debate, and it is likely to be an evolving, stepping-stone process, but we believe that it is right to involve the industry in decision making in that way, as well as having a more regional, flexible approach, recognising the whole range of different priorities in the fishing industry in Europe, and indeed in our own country.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): My hon. Friend will be aware that there is a strong feeling in this country that the fishing industries in many other European countries have survived the current common fisheries policy in better shape than our own. I ask him again to consider setting up a Government-industry taskforce, so that we can work

more closely with the fishing industry in a structured way, to work out, following the review process, how we may best survive what replaces the current common fisheries policy. We know that the Government cannot conjure up more fish in the sea, but I believe that we could work more closely with the industry and develop a plan for the future. We did it for the oil and gas industry—can we not do it for fishing?

Mr. Morley: I am glad to report that, yesterday, at the high-level fisheries meeting, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we had a presentation from the Fish Industry Forum on a strategy for the fishing industry. It was an excellent presentation and we agreed to hold meetings with the forum to develop its ideas in a joint working party, which certainly answers my hon. Friend's sensible proposals.

David Burnside (South Antrim): As a student of history, I am sure that the Minister will agree that records that have now become public show that the Heath Government's negotiations with the European Union, then the Common Market, were among the most incompetent and damaging negotiations on behalf of any industry in the United Kingdom. Those records are well worth reading. Will he give a commitment that this country will not sign up to a new fisheries policy that the industry predicts will lead to further decommissioning of British fishing vessels, which are essential to our economy, especially in ports such as Kilkeel in Northern Ireland, and others all around the United Kingdom?

Mr. Morley: I can certainly confirm that the hon. Gentleman is right, in that the records show that the fishing industry was sacrificed as part of a wider negotiating priority at that time, under a Conservative Government. I do not think that the Conservatives would dispute that.

Decommissioning is but one approach to dealing with effort control and management. I concede the point that decommissioning is a double-edged sword. It has benefits for the industry in making remaining vessels more viable, but I am very sensitive to its impact on regional ports. I cannot guarantee that there will never again be decommissioning, because that depends on circumstances, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I understand his points, which are serious, and that they will be taken into account.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): The Community has stated that

"rooting out all discrimination, whether based on nationality, race or religion, is one of the basic objectives of the European Union."

Does this not mean that within the new proposals, which I understand will now be considered by the College of Commissioners on 24 April, access to the living marine resource within Community waters shall be equal for all Community vessels, as set out in the basic principles of Community law?

Mr. Morley: They are part of the Community law which Britain was signed up to by the Conservative Government. However, before we start on the scare stories for the fishing industry, we should remember that the important factors are access to quota and relative stability. Enlargement of the European Union does not give new or existing member states the right to unlimited fishing in our waters because fishing is governed by the level of stability and access to quota which we do not intend to have changed or disrupted.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will my hon. Friend confirm my understanding that the only country in western Europe successfully to maintain its fishing stocks is Norway and that it is significant that, for obvious reasons, Norway is not part of the common fisheries policy? Would it not therefore be sensible for the European Union, and maritime member states such as Britain, to look to what Norway has done to conserve stocks? Finally, does my hon. Friend agree that it is possible that some of the fish that we are catching in the North sea were unwise enough to swim out of Norwegian waters?

Mr. Morley: Of course there are lessons to learn from other countries. We have discussions with Norway and Iceland about their fisheries management. However, their circumstances are different from ours as they are much more of a single-species fishery, which is easier to manage than a multi-species fishery such as ours in the North sea. I should also say that their fisheries management is not always perfect and that Norway has had problems in the past in relation to overfishing. The Norwegian position in the recent negotiations on deep water stocks was quite disgraceful; it was unsustainable and not worthy of a country that has always set high standards of conservation.

North Sea

11. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): If she will make a statement on the outcome of the fifth international conference on the protection of the North sea. [46520]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I represented the UK at the fifth North sea conference in Bergen, Norway, on 20 and 21 March. The outcome was an agreed declaration for further action to protect a whole range of aspects of the marine environment. I have placed copies of the declaration, together with copies of the report on progress made since the fourth North sea conference, in the Library of the House.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I should like to welcome the progress made at the conference. As my right hon. Friend is aware, one of the issues that was covered was the problem of the dumping of ballast water by shipping in the North sea which has major and damaging consequences for native species in the oceans and seas around Britain. What steps does he intend taking to implement the recommendations of the conference in respect of the dumping of ballast water?

Mr. Meacher: I recognise that this is a significant problem. I also attended the sixth conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity in The Hague yesterday. I am glad to report to the House that we agreed a set of principles for international control of invasive alien species, many of which are inadvertently transferred through ships' ballast water. The UK has a major role

in the International Maritime Organisation to develop the convention to control the transfer of harmful species in ballast water. The work is ongoing and very important. Chinese mitten crabs, which have been very destructive of species in estuaries and almost certainly came to this country from ballast water, are a good example. The results from the meeting in The Hague will have a major role for the UK in preventing this from happening in future.

Foot and Mouth Disease

12. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What her latest calculation is of the total sum overpaid to farmers, valuers, slaughtermen and farm cleansers during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [46521]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): We have identified £9.4 million of overpayment, of which £8.2 million has been recovered so far. In addition, the NAO and EU are undertaking audits of our expenditure and we await their findings.

Paul Flynn: Has my hon. Friend studied the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on the case of Mr. Joseph Bowden, who attempted to defraud his Department of nearly £500,000? The Comptroller and Auditor General is concerned that that case was discovered virtually by accident. Mechanisms to discover such cases in the future will not be in place until 2004. Given that subsidies and compensation for farmers cost the country £5.25 billion last year—equivalent to £700 for every family in the land—should not the best mechanisms be put in place to detect all fraud, especially as most of those who are paying for such subsidies work in industries that receive not a single penny in compensation or subsidy when they themselves are in trouble?

Mr. Morley: It is right that, wherever public funds are used, controls are necessary to ensure that fraudulent claims are not made. The points that my hon. Friend raises relate to two issues, the first of which is the recent foot and mouth outbreak. I can assure him that we are still disputing several claims. Forensic accountants are examining the number of claims being made to the Department in respect of contractors and compensation for animals. We will not pay those claims unless they are backed up by proper invoices, and are based on a justified valuation. On the management of subsidies in general, we are investing in new technology and new procedures to ensure that the public interest is protected, and that any claims have a legal basis within the common agricultural policy.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is not the real concern to ensure that no similar outbreak of foot and mouth occurs in future? What steps is the Under-Secretary taking to ensure that contaminated meat is not imported into the United Kingdom, given that the number of Customs officers has still not been increased? When will he finally agree to the pleas from farmers and others—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is far outwith the range of the original question.

Food Imports

13. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): What plans she has to overhaul the regulations governing food imports. [46523]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): A wide range of legislation governs all aspects of food imports. In particular, regulations dealing with veterinary checks on imports of animal products from third countries are being amended to bring them up to date and fully into line with European rules. They will soon give enforcement officers the power to search personal baggage for illegal imports of meat and other animal products.

I have also raised with the European Commission the need to tighten and clarify rules on personal imports. In addition, we have produced an action plan that details the further measures that we are putting in place to combat illegal imports entering the country.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) was doing his best to pinch my lines. Under the rules of the House, I am required to draw attention to my farming interests.

I thank the Minister for that most helpful reply. As he knows, in the past five years this country and the agriculture industry in general have suffered the devastating epidemics of swine vesicular disease and foot and mouth disease, both of which are thought to be caused by illegal food imports. The matter is therefore very urgent, and although he said that he is discussing it with the European Union, can he say when the outcomes of those discussions are likely to be implemented, and will he publish all the details of those discussions? In the light of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield, will he liaise with Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to ensure that more inspectors are provided, and that they police illegal food imports into this country more rigorously?

Mr. Morley: All these issues are in the public domain, and in fact, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State participated in a meeting with interested parties concerning the steps that we need to take now and in future. I should emphasise that immediate steps, such as talking to airlines, are being taken. In some African countries, airlines that fly to the UK question passengers about what they are carrying and remind them about the rules that are in place. Posters are being put up, and increased powers are being given to our enforcement agencies at points of entry.

All these issues are important and we take them seriously, but I should point out that border control forms only one part of disease control. We must also give equal consideration to aspects such as animal movements and biosecurity.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): On the question of border control, I can tell the Minister that 15 years ago my constituency had 25 Customs and Excise officers on Shetland and 18 on Orkney. This year, we have three on Shetland to cover both island groups. That situation is replicated throughout the country and that is

what leaves us vulnerable to illegal meat imports. In the context of the loss to the economy from the foot and mouth outbreak last year, does he not agree that cuts in the number of Customs officers are false economies?

Mr. Morley: Of course that needs to be taken into account and the costs of foot and mouth were catastrophic. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that his question needs to be put to the Treasury Ministers, who are responsible for Customs officers. It is not a matter for my Department. However, we have commissioned a risk assessment to help us to allocate additional resources, if a case is made for them. We need to know where the risks are in terms of points of entry, and which areas we need to concentrate on and perhaps provide with more resources. Those points are being taken into account.

Genetically Modified Crops

14. **Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): What measures are in place to ensure that crops involved in GM field/farm trials are prevented from entering the animal feed chain; and how these measures are enforced. [46524]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Material from the farm-scale trials is either incorporated into soil or goes to landfill. For the oilseed rape and beet crops, that is a statutory rule enforced by our GM inspectorate. The maize in the farm-scale trials is not subject to the same requirement, but the industry has agreed that it will not be used for food or feed.

Alan Simpson: When I tabled the question, it was an attempt to discover whether we had adequate mechanisms in place to ensure non-contamination of the food chain and effective penalties to deal with transgressions. I was slightly concerned by the latter part of the Minister's answer, because I have been supplied with details of specific ways in which parts of the GM crop trials have been allowed into the animal feed chain. I know that the Minister takes contamination issues as seriously as I do, and in a previous answer he made the point that ultimately it is for consumers to decide whether they wish to consume GM products. If I can provide him with details of GM crops being fed into the animal feed chain, will he assure me that those responsible will be prosecuted, rather than fobbed off with assurances from an industry that does not enforce the standards to which the Government claim we are committed?

Mr. Meacher: Yes, I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. If he will give me details, I will follow them up and if an offence has been committed we will certainly prosecute. I am aware of two examples. In one it was alleged that cows were grazed on GM maize stubble at a farm-scale evaluation site in Dorset. We checked that report and the farmer confirmed that it did not happen. The other example was when some maize from the trials was used in a cattle feeding study at Reading university. During the study and for the period thereafter no milk from the animals concerned was allowed to enter the food chain and the animals were not used to produce meat for human consumption. My hon. Friend may have been referring to one of those examples, but if he has other evidence I will certainly follow it up.

Hunting With Dogs

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): If she intends to publish a consultation paper setting out her proposals to amend the law on hunting with dogs. [46525]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am pleased to confirm that I have written to all Members of this House and of another place, and to a wide range of interest groups, seeking comments and evidence on practical issues related to hunting, as set out in my statement to the House on 21 March. A copy of the letter is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Prentice: I have read the excellent letter penned by my right hon. Friend, but it does not constitute a consultation document. Can he cite any previous example of the Government consulting on forthcoming legislation without publishing a consultation document first?

Alun Michael: As legislation is prepared, people have a variety of occasions to contribute to the process. In my statement on 21 March, I made very clear the principles on which legislation will be prepared, as a result of the six months of discussion and drafting. That will involve considering both aspects of cruelty and practical issues for the countryside, such as pest control, wildlife management and conservation. The process will depend on the contributions that are made and the way in which organisations wish to engage in discussion on those issues. I look forward to hearing from people who have a constructive contribution to make to the debate in the next few weeks.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 22 APRIL—Continuation of the Budget debate, in which the theme for the day will be enterprise and opportunity for all.

TUESDAY 23 APRIL—Conclusion of the Budget debate, in which the theme for the day will be health.

WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL—My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will propose an Humble Address to celebrate the golden jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that there is an all-party consensus. Second Reading of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill will follow. That will be followed by consideration of a Lords consequential amendment to the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 25 APRIL—There will be a debate on international development on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 26 APRIL—There will be a debate on the quality of life in local communities on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 29 APRIL—Second Reading of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 30 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 1 MAY—Second Reading of a Bill making the necessary legislative changes to national insurance following the statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

THURSDAY 2 MAY—There will be a debate on Wales in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the approbation of the House.

FRIDAY 3 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that business in Westminster Hall for May will be:

THURSDAY 2 MAY—A debate on women and information technology.

THURSDAY 9 MAY—A debate on the report from the Trade and Industry Committee on the end of life vehicles directive.

THURSDAY 16 MAY—A debate on the report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on empty homes.

THURSDAY 23 MAY—A debate on the role of the United Nations.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 1 May, there will be a debate relating to the promotion of the use of biofuels in road transport in European Standing Committee A.

[Wednesday 1 May 2002:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 15500/01, Promotion of the use of biofuels in road transport; Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xix, HC 152-xxii, (2001–02).]

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us that notification of the business. Will he please find Government time in the very near future for a debate on the future of agriculture? It is a very long time since we have had such a debate. Since the very damaging effects of foot and mouth, given that there was nothing in the Budget for agriculture or rural communities, and as it would appear that the countryside is in general revolt, I would have thought it was in the interests of the Government, and certainly of the House as a whole, that we had a full day's debate on the future of agriculture in order that we can sort out those matters.

I was interested in the announcement of consideration on 1 May of a Bill on national insurance. I know that 1 May used to have a political significance, of which the Government obviously do not want to remind us, but perhaps it is an appropriate day to debate such a Bill. As the Bill obviously has major tax and policy implications, will have an effect on both individuals and businesses and we will surely need a considerable amount of time in order properly to consider it, and in essence, reality and substance it is a taxation Bill, will it or at least its substantial aspects be dealt with on the Floor of the House? Will the Leader of the House guarantee adequate time in Committee, either on the Floor of the House or Upstairs, for all its implications to be considered?

National insurance increases of the kind the Chancellor mentioned yesterday represent a major policy and directional shift by the Government. I hope that we can have an assurance from the right hon. Gentleman that the House will be able properly to consider them in all their aspects.

On the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, the Leader of the House will know that, under consistent pressure, the Government have been forced to notify the Bill to the authorities of the European Union. It was only as late as 28 March that notification was finally made, as is required by a number of EU directives. Member states are obliged to notify Bills that have an impact on the internal market.

The purpose of notification is to provide an opportunity for the Commission and other member states to comment if they consider that the proposed legislation has the potential to create a technical barrier to trade. Given that, and given that it is also a requirement that any resultant substantial changes to legislation must be allowed for, can the Leader of the House tell me whether he believes we can embark on the Bill's Second Reading during the notification period or, more important, on its Committee and Report stages. I know that this is one of the obvious benefits of our membership of the European Union, but it strikes me that there are considerable implications for the procedures of this House and the timing of legislation, not least this Bill. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can advise us how far he believes the Government can take this Bill during the period of notification, which may indeed be extended beyond the initial three-month period starting from 28 March.

Finally, I remind the House of the sensational developments that occurred in this place on 15 April when the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said to Mr. Deputy Speaker at col. 420:

"Can I ask you to reconsider the procedure for private Bills to prevent this abuse of the House by the Prime Minister?"

He went on to say in column 421:

"I believe that the process has been corrupted and tainted by the Prime Minister's intervention."

Later in column 421 he referred to communications between the City corporation and the Prime Minister, and asked in column 422 whether we could

"therefore clarify and investigate the relationship between the City corporation and No. 10".

The hon. Gentleman finally repeated his belief in column 422 that

"the process has been corrupted as a result of the Prime Minister's intervention".—[*Official Report*, 15 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 420-22.]

In my 19 years in this House I do not think that I have ever heard a Government Back Bencher accuse his Prime Minister of corruption, of abuse and of tainting the procedures of the House. These are very serious allegations. Given that the Prime Minister is the custodian of the ministerial code of conduct, who will implement and police that code of conduct in the context of these very serious allegations? It is a matter for the House, and something to which we are therefore obliged to return. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will allow time urgently and soon for the House to go into these very serious allegations, and possibly for the Prime Minister to appear so that he can answer them.

Mr. Cook: Let me seek to respond to the points that the right hon. Gentleman has raised; I will save until the end the serious issue of substance in respect of the forthcoming national insurance Bill.

On agriculture and the countryside, I am well aware of the feeling in a number of quarters in the House that it would be valuable to have a debate on the countryside. I am not resistant to that, but it has to join the many other things that we have to consider. However, I think that the right hon. Gentleman was rather unfair about spending on the countryside as farming and rural businesses have received substantial support in the wake of the foot and mouth outbreak.

On the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, the right hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that an issue is being pursued in Brussels that conforms with the regulations there. It is being pursued in parallel with the legislation here, and I would greatly regret it if the House decided to suspend proceedings on the Bill. It is a very important health measure that will literally save lives, and it has substantial support on both sides of the Chamber. I therefore hope that we can proceed in parallel with the discussions in Brussels. I am confident that my colleagues there will put up a robust case and that those in Brussels will agree with us. The Bill is not a barrier to trade but it is a barrier to cancer and therefore deserves the support of all Members.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Tell them to get stuffed.

Mr. Cook: I thought that I had just done so, but in a rather more parliamentary way.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman gave notice to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) that he was going to name him in his question. I note that my hon. Friend is not here. Given the extent to which the right hon. Gentleman quoted him, it would have been fair to give my hon. Friend advance notice. In mitigation, however, I am sure that my hon. Friend will be intensely flattered to have been quoted at such length by the Opposition.

On the issue of substance, I think that the right hon. Gentleman rather overdid the synthetic rage. The City of London (Ward Elections) Bill has come before the House on many occasions and has been debated exhaustively. I thought that it was supported by the Conservatives, but I may have misunderstood the Opposition's relationship with the City of London. I am sure that people in the City will read the right hon. Gentleman's observations with interest.

Technically, of course, any business motion is tabled in the name of the Prime Minister. The motion to dispose of the Bill was a collective decision of Government as, although it is a private Bill, it has been before the House many times. I assumed that the motion would have been welcomed by those Conservative Members who support the Bill. I think that the right hon. Gentleman's indignation is especially synthetic because, whereas the motion was to suspend the 10 o'clock rule, proceedings on the Bill got nowhere near 10 o'clock but had been concluded by 8 o'clock.

The right hon. Gentleman raises an issue of substance in connection with the national insurance Bill. He reminded the House that 1 May is a date of deep significance. It is the anniversary of the historic landslide with which the Labour party pushed the Conservative party into opposition. It is the date from which we were able to address the previous Conservative Government's under-investment in the health service. We are proud that, over the course of two Parliaments since 1 May 1997, we will have doubled the investment in the national health service that we inherited. The national insurance Bill is important in enabling us to do that, and for that reason will be supported by all Labour constituents, and by most Conservative constituents.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have been following with interest details in the press of what is happening with ntl and ITV Digital. My hon. Friends the Members for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) and for Battersea (Martin Linton) and others met my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness this morning. We discussed the implications for competitiveness, the digital action plan, and for hundreds of jobs in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady is not getting us off to a good start. We do not want statements; we must have questions. A great many hon. Members wish to speak, and I appeal to them to be very concise.

Linda Gilroy: Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House agree to an early debate on this very important topic, which is at a critical stage?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the concern expressed by my hon. Friend and by many hon. Members about the

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current crisis in digital TV. It is very important that we take forward our commitment to digital TV, as we intend to do. We must make sure that we absorb the lessons from this matter and see whether we can mitigate its impact. My hon. Friend asks for a debate on the matter. Earlier, I announced a debate on women and information technology, which will take place in Westminster Hall. I am sure that many points relevant to digital TV can be raised in the context of that debate.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. Will he be able to find time for a debate on education? That is especially important, given that the Chancellor produced only a minimal amount of money for education in yesterday's Budget statement, and that there will be a national announcement on class sizes next week. My own local authority, Stockport, still receives £830 per child less than neighbouring Manchester. I know that the hon. Members for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) and for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) are in the Chamber and that they share my view about the need for a debate.

Will the Leader of the House also find time for a debate on House of Lords reform? A remarkable silence seems to have fallen on that matter, which has led to rising fears of a split in Government thinking on what is a very important matter.

Will the Leader of the House also arrange for a debate on the state funding of political parties? A wide range of views appears to be emerging from the Cabinet, and some clarification of the Government's approach would be helpful. It might also help to clarify the Conservatives' approach. They have recently sent out an invitation to a

> "Gold level briefing . . . £500 Membership . . . exclusive Policy Renewal Programme events, attended by . . . Shadow Cabinet Ministers."

Those kind of gimmicks might no longer be needed.

Mr. Cook: Perhaps I can suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he might usefully reread the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement yesterday. He will find, at column 588 of *Hansard*, a strong commitment from this Government to investment in education. The Chancellor clearly stated that not only did we increase the share of the national income going into education in the last Parliament, but we fully intend to raise it again in the course of this Parliament. Next to health, education is a priority for this Government's investment in public spending and we are proud of that record.

On Lords reform, the hon. Gentleman made the preposterous suggestion that there was a split within the Government on this question. As he is interested in progress on this matter, however, I advise him and the House that, this morning, I believe, the Lord Chancellor has given an interim response to the Select Committee. Of course, many of the major questions that must be addressed are those that we are considering in the period of reflection following the consultation. I assure the House that, as soon as we have reached a conclusion on this matter, I shall bring it to the House in the expectation of support. I hope that the unity that will then be shown in the House will reflect the harmony and unity within the Government on this question.

I am slightly surprised, however, that the hon. Gentleman should express concern about different views within the Government on state funding. We have made it clear, and the Prime Minister has made it clear, that we would welcome a public debate on the matter, and it is very important that members of the Cabinet should be free to take part in that public debate without necessarily first adopting a collective line and then seeking to impose that collective line on the party, on Parliament and on the public. I said the other day, and I am happy to read it into the record, that in 1974 I stood on the commitment of my party to introduce state funding. I believe that it would have been better had we acted on it then. Political parties are an important part of the parliamentary process. One cannot have a parliamentary democracy without healthy political parties. It is very important that we identify the least unacceptable way of making sure that they are healthily funded.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Could we have a debate early next week on the future of the London underground before the contract for that is signed? Is the Leader of the House aware of the very considerable concern in the Select Committee that the Chancellor or one of his Ministers is not prepared to come before the Select Committee to justify the policy that he is pushing through, which would be disastrous for the London underground?

Mr. Cook: I have, of course, seen the Select Committee report, and it is on a matter on which we have had exchanges in the House previously. My position remains the same as when we last had an exchange on this point. Treasury Ministers are willing to come before any Select Committee provided that it is on matters within the remit of the Treasury. That is why a Treasury Minister has appeared before the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee to consider matters in relation to the landfill tax, for instance, and has appeared before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on a similar tax and duty issue. It was a very important principle of ministerial accountability that those Ministers with responsibility for transport or local government, for example, should appear before the Select Committee and give evidence and answer questions on those matters. It is very important that we preserve that principle of ministerial accountability because all Select Committees would be undermined if it were broken.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Leader of the House find time today to look at the case of Paul Drayson, who is the chief executive officer of PowderJect. One moment he gives £50,000 to the Labour party and, lo and behold, the next moment his company gets a £32 million order from the Department of Health for smallpox vaccine. That contract was not put out to open tender. Surely we should consider this matter. Is not a pattern of sleaze emerging in which we are seeing cash for favours? Can we have a debate on this, please?

Mr. Cook: First, PowderJect won that contract because it is one of five companies that bid for it, and it put in the best tender. That is why it got the contract; there is no other reason. If the hon. Gentleman really wants to have an honest and open debate on this question, there is one simple way in which the Conservative party can help.

We have changed the law so that company donations are recorded and open, and everybody knows what companies have made donations to the Labour party over the past five years. Nobody knows, except the Conservative party, who made donations to the Conservatives in the last five years of the Conservative Government. If the hon. Gentleman really wants to pursue the issue, why does he not take it up with his own party and get it to publish—it has the information—all the data on who gave it donations in the last five years of the Conservative Government?

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Events in the middle east have dominated the world headlines in the past few weeks, but another equally serious dispute has been raging in the state of Gujarat. The official figures for the number of dead there are 900, but the real figure is likely to exceed 2,000. As serious allegations have been made against the state government and, indeed, against the national Government, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement to be made in the House so that those hon. Members with many people in their constituencies with relatives and friends in the region can be made aware of the true facts?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a grave issue that is of deep concern to many communities in Britain because of the strong ties between our country and the sub-continent. I have followed with deep concern the mounting death toll and will look with interest at recent reports. I cannot promise him a statement, but I shall certainly draw his observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and will invite him to write to my hon. Friend.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): With reference to the answer that the right hon. Gentleman gave me last week saying that he stands ready to amend the data protection legislation so that Members of Parliament will be able to represent their constituents more adequately, will he tell us the Lord Chancellor's view on the matter?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to say that we are in discussions with the Lord Chancellor's Department, which has Ministers in this House. There is no division between us about the fact that there is an issue that needs to be addressed. Whether it needs to be addressed by legislation or by other means is a matter for exploration, but I am fully seized of the Alice in Wonderland results that some Members have experienced when pursuing constituency cases. The problem needs to be resolved.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I was pleased to hear that a response has been published today to the Select Committee report. However, we have been told that it is merely an interim response, so can we have a statement on how the debate on the future of the reformed second Chamber will be conducted and on when we will have some decisions from the Government?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that this issue will be ventilated repeatedly in the Chamber, and I look forward with anticipation and delight to answering my hon. Friend's oral question in 10 days' time. However, I cannot promise a statement until we have carried out our reflection and come to a considered view. In the meantime, we have given what I fully acknowledge is a holding response to the Select Committee. I hope that, in the fulness of time, we will be able to respond more fully to the major points that it raises. I welcome its report. It showed that it is possible to find a centre of gravity around which reformers can unite. I hope that we can find such a point in Parliament.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I urge the Leader of the House to reconsider his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on the issue of a debate on agriculture. We have just received the most damning report from the Countryside Agency about rural proofing across Departments, an initiative that this Government introduced. However, when I put a question about brown tourism signs to the Minister for Rural Affairs during DEFRA questions, he referred me to another Minister altogether. He suggested that I had asked the wrong person and did not seem to appreciate that DEFRA has the lead on this matter. If Ministers do not realise that, a debate on the Floor of the House may help them along the way.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that that was quite the most convincing case that I have heard for a full day's debate in the House. I do not agree with the hon. Lady's characterisation of the Countryside Agency's report, but it certainly found areas in which further progress needs to be made. It was, of course, a report on the first year of what is a three-year strategy.

I repeat to her and to the House that I understand the real interest in the House in countryside issues. I shall certainly keep in mind the possibility of a debate on such matters should the opportunity arise. I will not disguise from the House, however, the fact that, as the Session progresses, we shall have a lot of business to get through.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Following the question from the Liberal Democrats' spokesman, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), may I ask my right hon. Friend to find time for a debate on the future funding of political parties? The idea that state funding of political parties could be introduced is something that some of us oppose on principle. I pay my subs to the Labour party, and I do not want to pay them to any other party. The idea that my taxes could go towards funding that lot over there or even to those nice, cuddly Liberal Democrats is anathema and sticks in my craw. Could we have a debate or perhaps at least a statement on the issue?

Mr. Cook: I assure my hon. Friend that if he were to contemplate paying subscriptions to any other party, he would have severe difficulty receiving the Labour Whip in the House. Of course I understand his reluctance to subsidise other parties, but I put it to him that it is very important that we find a way in which political parties can be funded—not excessively, but appropriately—and in a way that is accepted as legitimate and proper. My hon. Friend has to ask himself whether he regards the Conservative party's present way of funding as necessarily legitimate and proper and, if not, whether he is prepared to contemplate other ways in which we might go about the possibly distasteful but necessary task of funding the Conservative party.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): As the Leader of the House was in his place yesterday afternoon, he will

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clearly recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) asked the Prime Minister whether he thought it right that six Parliamentary Private Secretaries, including his own, had voted against the Government's policy on specialist schools on Tuesday. The Prime Minister replied:

"No, I believe that the position of the Government was right."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 573.]

In the light of that and the fact that none of those PPSs have even resigned or been sacked, as would have been the case previously, can we have an urgent debate on the ministerial code and collective ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Cook: Of course my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right and the Government's policy is right, and the right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to demur on either of those propositions. However, it is fair to recall that the Division on that occasion was on a private Member's motion, about which other private Members decided on their own way to vote. We can possibly get a little too pi, simultaneously demanding that Governments should be open minded and permit open debates and that they should crack down, like Torquemada, on anyone who steps out of line, even on a private Member's motion. If we could restore a sense of proportion, it would help everyone.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the serious allegations in the media regarding Dungavel immigration detention centre? If he is, will he consider, because of the seriousness of the situation there, whether the Home Secretary should make a statement to the House about those conditions to ensure that people understand that they are not as reported in the press, as that would give some comfort to my constituents who have raised the issue with me?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises that issue from a legitimate and proper perspective. I have seen some of the reports in the Scottish press, as he will be aware, and I am interested to hear that they do not necessarily reflect the correct and full picture, as is so often the case. That matter was raised at business questions last Thursday, since when we have approached the Home Secretary to draw his attention to it. I will ensure that my hon. Friend's remarks are also drawn to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): The Leader of the House may be aware of reports emanating from Jenin this morning that survivors are being pulled from the rubble of demolished houses, but will he arrange for an urgent statement on that issue next week and, perhaps in the meantime, consider offering the services of organisations, such as Rapid UK, which are used to going into disaster areas, such as earthquake zones, to assist in bringing out people who have been buried in certain situations?

Mr. Cook: The House had a full day's debate on the middle east only this week, and it was absolutely right and proper that we made that day of debate available to the House. We shall, of course, continue to keep the situation under review and, if there is a case for a further statement or allowing the House to discuss that matter, we are open to taking that forward.

On the substantive issue, I am sure that the House will share the hon. Gentleman's concern at the evidence that is emerging of the humanitarian crisis in Jenin. It is vital that the Israeli Government facilitate the access of humanitarian and aid organisations to help those, especially the civilians, who appear to have been involved in the suffering during the military incursion into Jenin. I cannot respond to the hon. Gentleman at present on whether Britain could offer more specific aid or help, but I will draw his observations to the relevant Secretary of State's attention.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can find time to debate the working of the NHS Appointments Commission—in particular, the singular, apparent reluctance of the commission to appoint people from our more health-deprived areas to sit on health bodies? When I discussed the appointments to the Warrington primary care trust with the north-west appointments commissioner recently, he was able to tell me that only the best people are appointed, but not why the best people apparently come from a very small geographical area of Warrington. Does my right hon. Friend think that there is something in the water; or is there something wrong with the commission's appointment procedures? Can we have an opportunity to debate that issue?

Mr. Cook: I can assure my hon. Friend that since we came to office, we have made sure that all appointments follow a clear standard procedure—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, as all the evidence shows, people have been appointed on merit. That is quite different from many of the appointments made under the Conservative Government. I recall that the chairman of the Conservative Association in my constituency became the chairman of my health trust. Against that background, I cannot comment on the particular local case to which my hon. Friend referred, but I shall obviously make sure that her concern and comments are brought to the attention of the Department of Health.

Since we introduced the new system, trusts and primary care trusts have on their boards people who are much more broadly representative of their communities than was the case in the system that we inherited. That is important because the NHS belongs to the people, and local NHS trusts must belong to the people as well.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As has been widely reported in the Channel Islands press and some parts of the British press, the Treasury is planning economic sanctions against Jersey if it does not sign the European code of conduct. Bearing in mind that a Treasury Minister told the Treasury Select Committee that the code was voluntary; that the only impact will be that money leaves the Channel Islands where it is well regulated to go to other places where it is not; and that the Channel Islands have no representative in the House of Commons, will the Government at least have a debate on the matter or issue a ministerial statement of

some sort? The Government have said nothing at all, despite the repeated stories, which are damaging to the Channel Islands.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I concur with the hon. Gentleman that the islands have no representative in the House; they appear to have a good affinity with Southend-on-Sea. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having time to represent people other than his own constituents. On the specific point at issue, it is important for the hon. Gentleman's constituents in Southend-on-Sea that the Government of the United Kingdom are able to negotiate, debate and commit themselves in debates in Europe that make sure that we deliver on the commitments we make.

The withholding tax, which is at the root of the hon. Gentleman's argument, was a success of British diplomacy and saw off what might otherwise have been a new European tax. We made sure that such a tax was not introduced, and dealt with the problem by providing information. It is important that all territories for which the United Kingdom speaks in foreign affairs are committed to the agreements that we make, and that embraces the Channel Islands as well.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): During business questions on 7 March, I asked my right hon. Friend for a debate on the membership of Select Committees, because I was concerned about the continued inclusion in departmental Select Committees of Opposition Front Benchers. My right hon. Friend referred me to a Liaison Committee meeting that had taken place that morning. I dug out the Report of Session of that meeting, point 35 of which states:

"At present some official Opposition spokesmen or Whips are serving on committees. We are strongly opposed to this in principle."

Given that that situation has been ignored by the Opposition, who are abusing the independence of Select Committees, I repeat my request to my right hon. Friend for a debate on this important issue.

Mr. Forth: He is the Chairman of one.

Mr. Cook: Indeed, but the Liaison Committee did not object to that; its comments referred specifically to the official Opposition. Whatever my sins, I am not a member of the official Opposition. I think that the right hon. Member will confirm that.

On the specific point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), I urge him to try to be a little more understanding of the problems of the Opposition; they are the smallest official Opposition for 30 years and, frankly, I doubt whether they could fill those posts without occasionally raiding their Front Bench. The Liaison Committee has expressed a bona fide concern, and I can tell my hon. Friend that there will be a debate on Select Committees and their membership next month, when we introduce the Standing Orders arising from the recent report of the Modernisation Committee. It will be relevant and in order for my hon. Friend to make his points in that debate.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): As the Leader of the House is in such a helpful and jovial mood today, will he consider holding an urgent debate on the arrogant disdain of Ministers for Back Benchers, in view of the fact that it has taken almost six months—five months and five days—for the Health Minister to respond to a letter that I wrote to him? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether that is a record, and would he advise us to set up yet another waiting list for replies from Health Ministers to our letters?

Mr. Cook: I always try to be helpful to the House, and perhaps I am in a particularly jovial mood today after such an excellent Budget statement from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I regret it if the hon. Gentleman has been kept waiting for correspondence and I will ensure that his comments are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. We try to make sure that we achieve replies to hon. Members, both in written correspondence and in parliamentary questions, as quickly as possible. Some Departments are under particular pressure and some questions raise particularly difficult issues that require some time to resolve. I shall certainly make sure that the Secretary of State for Health is aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): May I reinforce calls for an early and specific debate on the future of digital broadcasting in the UK? The difficulties faced by ntl and ITV show that there appear to be problems with two out of the three platforms for digital TV. That raises serious competition issues and has implications for the Government's plans to switch off the analogue signal. In addition, 900 jobs are threatened in my constituency and the neighbouring constituency in west Wales.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue. It is important that we should reflect that the recent collapse of digital TV from the ITV stable has implications going well beyond the well-publicised concerns about the football teams. My hon. Friend is aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will be opening the Budget debate on Monday, so she may wish to contribute to the debate to make sure that the issue that she raises is fully ventilated. I can assure her that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Trade and Industry are following the matter closely.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Leader of the House will be aware of the crisis in the automotive industry. We have seen the closure of the Ford car assembly plant at Dagenham and the closure of Vauxhall at Luton. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that not only has there been a problem because of blockages in the channel tunnel, but that the new tax on jobs—the employers' contribution of 1 per cent.,—will cause an even greater crisis in labour-intensive industries such as the automotive industry? Can we have an urgent debate on the future of the automotive industry, in the west midlands in particular and the UK in general, and the veracity and honesty of the Government in putting a tax on jobs instead of a tax on national insurance or, rather, a tax on income tax?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a speech on enterprise and manufacturing industry, he has an early opportunity to do so on Monday. I cannot do

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better than refer him to Monday's forthcoming debate. If he takes part in that debate, I hope that he will answer the question to which we will be seeking an answer from every Conservative Member: given that we are increasing the national insurance contribution to make sure that we can double the spending on the national health service, will the Conservatives tell us whether they will match that increase and sustain it? If they are not in favour of the measures necessary to achieve that increase for the health service, are they telling us that they want more charges for the health service or less spending on the health service?

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As these business questions have shown, there is an urgent need for a debate on state funding to demonstrate that the Labour party is the only party in the House that does not enjoy any part of the £20 million of state funding that will be paid in Short money in this Parliament. Is it not right that if there is to be transparency in all donations to political parties, it should stretch back over the past 25 years, so that we can demonstrate the contrast between the fantasies about sleaze in the present Government invented by the piffle artists on the Opposition Benches, and the real corruption that existed in the 1980s and 1990s, when it was said that some Conservative Members had their noses so deeply in the trough that all that was visible of them were the soles of their Gucci shoes?

Mr. Cook: I cannot improve on that.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): While I am delighted that my Welsh colleagues have managed to secure yet another full day's debate on the Floor of the House to discuss Welsh issues, may I ask what we in Scotland have done to offend or upset the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends? When can we expect a full day's debate on the Floor of the House on Scottish issues? Perhaps I can belatedly remind him that there will also be no local elections in Scotland on 2 May.

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Scotland has done nothing to offend me. Were it to do so, I am sure that he would be the first hon. Member to draw it to the attention of the House. I think that he is being slightly curmudgeonly. As he said, we welcome our Welsh colleagues' opportunity for a full day's debate. I remind him that we took action, in which I took a particular interest as Leader of the House, to ensure that the nationalist parties had an Opposition Supply day. If I remember rightly, his party had half of that day.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Events this week in Italy have served to highlight once again serious divisions on the economic philosophy of the European Union. On one side, there are those who want privatisation, extreme liberalisation, an attack on workers' rights and a weakening of welfare states, while on the other there are people such as our own Chancellor—he made this clear yesterday—who want to improve social protection, and those in our trade union movement who want to improve workers rights. Will my right hon. Friend make a day available for a further debate on the future economic direction of Europe?

Mr. Cook: I have just got into trouble for not having a day's debate on Scottish politics, so I would hesitate to offer a day's debate on Italian politics, although like my hon. Friend I noticed the massive number of people who took to the streets to express their commitment to ensuring a secure future for themselves at work. Of course, we have taken very powerful measures to ensure that the prospects of people at work are improved. In particular, we have taken measures ensuring that many more people are at work than when we came to office—1.5 million in total—and that we have the lowest unemployment that either his or my constituents can remember in a generation.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Gentleman now kindly agree to a debate in Government time next week on the vexed question of rail freight passing through the channel tunnel? The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee last week and said that the French would put up a fence to prevent asylum seekers from storming the tunnel, as they have again done this week. However, the trains' failure to materialise is affecting constituency companies such as Potters of Melmerby as well as English, Welsh and Scottish Railways, and is costing £500,000 a day. Can we now please have an urgent debate?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Lady on the assiduity with which she has raised this issue. I have raised her concerns with my colleagues at the appropriate Departments. We have obtained commitments from both the French authorities and SNCF that security would improve, and efforts have been made in that regard. We are not there yet, but we will continue to try.

I remind the hon. Lady that we have so far made good progress on tackling the arrival of those who are the source of the insecurity. The number of clandestines and people without proper documentation who are arriving has dropped sharply. We will continue to do all we can on our side, and to press the French authorities to do all they can on their side.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I welcome the fact that the Government have today sent their interim response to the Select Committee on Public Administration on its report on the House of Lords. Will he give an assurance that there will be an opportunity for a debate once the Committee has had a chance to consider the Government's interim response and make its comments?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to say to my hon. Friend that I am under no illusion that this issue will go away. There will be many opportunities for the House to return to it in future, including in two weeks' time when I answer oral questions. The Government will continue to make progress on the issue, so as to ensure that we will be in a position to examine it at some length at a future stage in this Session.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Leader of the House will know that the Government will face probable defeat in another place today on the Export Control Bill, when my noble Friend Baroness Miller of Hendon moves with cross-party support an amendment that seeks to defend academic freedom. If the Government are to persist in their policy of trying to constrain

academic freedom, can we have an early statement from the Department for Education and Skills about the likely effect on Britain's universities, how they will continue to attract international students, and the effect on our research base?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman creates a worry and a risk on stilts in relation to a modest aspect of the Export Control Bill. I am proud that we are introducing such a Bill; it is much needed and is based on a commitment that we made and are now carrying through. I am pleased to tell him that we are seeking to introduce amendments that will take care of concerns about academic freedom that we think are rather exaggerated, although we know that they are widely held.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): May I press the point made by the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer), who is no longer in his place? If there is to be a debate on the state funding of political parties, as the Leader of the House says, surely that should include a debate in this Chamber. Given that he says that there is no collective Government position on the matter, will members of the Cabinet be able to speak in the debate, so that the Home Secretary can tell us why he thinks that it is inevitable, the Transport Secretary can explain how he is examining other countries' systems and the Leader of the House can take us on a trip down memory lane about his various political views?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman asks for a free debate. I should be tempted to have such a debate—having first reached agreement with the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—if the many right hon. and hon. Members who were Conservative Cabinet members in the past would take part and tell us exactly where they got funding from and which companies gave them donations.

NHS Plan

1.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the next steps on the NHS plan. I am today laying before Parliament a Command Paper setting out those next steps, copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office.

The NHS plan that we published in July 2000 set out a 10-year programme to rebuild and renew the health service in our country. It diagnosed the NHS problem as follows. The principles of the NHS are right—on this side of the House we believe in an NHS that is free at the point of use, funded from general taxation, and based on need, not ability to pay. But today's NHS is the product of decades of underinvestment. It is also the product of a failure to reform. Staff—the greatest asset that the health service has—work flat out in a system which still too much resembles that of the 1940s. The NHS plan set out a 10-year programme of investment and reform based on clear national standards, more devolution of resources, greater flexibility for staff and more choice for patients.

With the economy stabilised and the public finances sorted out, the 2000 spending review was able to give the NHS the largest ever real-terms increases in resources. Two years later, anyone who says that there are no problems in the NHS has clearly got it wrong, but those who say there has been no progress have also got it wrong. Yes, there is a long way to go—it is a 10-year plan—but those who point to an NHS black hole should in fact be pointing to dozens more hospitals, hundreds more beds, thousands more doctors, tens of thousands more nurses—and a better health service as a result.

In July 2000, we acknowledged that three years of sustained funding was not enough. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had already said in January 2000 that we needed to match European Union levels of spending. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer put NHS finances on a sustained footing, not for three years, but for five. Years of failure to invest in the past are now being replaced with years of investment for the future. Today, I can tell the House what that investment will give us: 35,000 more nurses, 15,000 more doctors, 40 new hospitals and 500 primary care centres. As investment grows, so the capacity of the NHS will grow.

Investment in the NHS must, however, be accompanied by changes in the way in which the NHS works. Ours is not an unconditional offer. Without those reforms, we will not get the best use of the money for the taxpayer and we will not get the improvements in service for the patient. Where we have had the courage to invest, we must now have the courage to reform. Our formula is simple: investment plus reform equals results.

First, building on the national standards already in the NHS plan, we will strengthen the system of inspection and audit to improve accountability to patients and the public. Where more resources are going in, people have the right to know what they are getting out. We will therefore legislate to establish a new Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection to inspect and to raise standards in health care across our country. We are clear that we need higher standards in NHS hospitals and also in private hospitals.

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The commission will assess the performance of every part of the NHS so that the public can see that every extra pound in the NHS buys something better for patients and gets something more for taxpayers. Similar arrangements will be made for social care. We will discuss the details of both with the National Assembly for Wales.

The new commission will be independent of both the NHS and Government, and more independent than the current fragmented system. It will report annually to Parliament, not Ministers, on the state of the NHS, its performance and, most important, the use to which it has put the extra resources. The Government should not be judge and jury of the NHS. The commission will be the judge, the British people the jury.

Secondly, we can go further in extending devolution in the NHS, building on what has been achieved. The health service should not and cannot be run from Whitehall. The NHS is delivered in hundreds of different communities by more than 1 million staff. The relationships are between the local patient and the local doctor; the local community and the local hospital. However, those relationships will not work properly until central control is replaced by local accountability. After 50 years, the time has come when the sound of bedpans being dropped in Tredegar should reverberate only in Tredegar.

With national standards and inspection in place, power, resources and responsibilities must now move to the NHS front line. When we came to office, GPs controlled only 15 per cent. of the total NHS budget. Today, primary care trusts, with GPs and nurses in the lead, already control half the budget. In only two years, they will control three quarters of it. Just as the new commission will report nationally, so primary care trusts will need to report locally on how NHS resources have been spent.

The best primary care trusts, like the best NHS hospitals, should enjoy greater freedoms and more rewards. We will therefore establish new foundation hospitals and foundation primary care trusts, which will be fully part of the NHS, but with more freedoms than they have now. They will have more powers, including a right to borrow, to expand their services for patients.

Thirdly, further to the new powers that we have given nurses and others, we will radically alter the way in which staff work and introduce a new system of financial incentives throughout the health service. We will put in place new contracts of employment, not only for nurses and other staff, but for GPs and, yes, for hospital consultants, too. Our objective is to liberate the potential of all members of staff, rewarding those who do most in the NHS and, crucially, improve productivity throughout the health service.

New incentives for individual members of staff will be matched by a new system of financial incentives for NHS organisations. The hospitals that can treat more patients will earn more money. Traditional incentives work in the opposite direction. Indeed, the poorest performers often get the most financial help.

We will therefore introduce a new system for money to flow around the health service, ending perverse incentives and paying hospitals by results. The incentive will be to treat more patients more quickly, and to higher standards.

Fourthly, patient choice will drive the system. Starting with those with the most serious clinical conditions, patients will have a greater choice about when and where they are treated. From this summer, patients who have been waiting six months for a heart operation will be able to choose a hospital, public or private, which has the capacity to offer quicker treatment. This level of investment means that we can grow NHS capacity as fast as it is possible to do so.

I can also say today that it is our intention to draw into this country additional overseas capacity so that we can further expand NHS services to NHS patients. As capacity expands, so choice will grow. Within three years, all patients, with their GPs, will be able to book hospital appointments at a time and a place that is convenient to them. The reforms that we are making will mark an irreversible shift from the 1940s take-it-or-leave-it, top-down service. Hospitals will no longer choose patients; patients will choose hospitals.

Reductions in waiting times to get into hospital must, of course, be accompanied by cuts in waiting times to get out. Older people are the generation that built the health service, and they have supported it all their lives. This generation owes that generation a guarantee of dignity and security in old age. Bed blocking denies both.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Ah!

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman ought to get a grip.

In recent months, the extra resources that we have made available have reduced the numbers of elderly patients whose discharge from hospital has been delayed. I am grateful for the help that local councils have given us in addressing this problem. Here, however, the long-term solution is not just investment, it is reform. I can tell the House today that, to bridge the gap between health and social care, we intend to legislate, as they have done in Sweden and other European countries, to give local councils responsibility—from their 6 per cent. extra real-terms increases—for the cost of beds needlessly blocked in hospitals.

Councils will need to use those resources to ensure that older people are able to leave hospital when their treatment is completed. If councils reduce the current level of bed blocking so that older people are able to leave hospital safely when they are well, they will have the freedom to use those resources to invest in extra services. If bed blocking goes up, councils will incur the cost of keeping older people in hospital unnecessarily. There will be similar incentives to prevent hospitals from seeking to discharge patients prematurely. In this way, we will provide local councils with the investment and the incentives to improve care for older people.

Taken together, the NHS plan and the next steps announced today amount to the most radical and fundamental reform programme inside the NHS since 1948. I want to pay tribute to the staff of the national health service—not just the nurses, doctors and consultants, but all the staff in the different medical disciplines, the ancillary staff, the secretaries, the receptionists, the porters and the cleaners. They represent the very best of British public service and I believe that, as a nation and as a Parliament, we should be proud of the work that they do. I know and understand the enormous pressure that they are under as the NHS plans to make these big changes. But I know, too, that they share this basic goal: to rebuild the national health service around the needs of its patients.

This programme of investment and reform will mean that each year, every year, waiting times will fall. Last year, the maximum wait for a hospital operation was 18 months. Today it is 15 months. By this time next year, it will fall to 12 months. By 2005, it will be six months, and by 2008, it will have been reduced to three months. By then, the average waiting time for a hospital operation will be just six weeks. It is our aim that people will no longer have to face the dilemma of having to wait for treatment or having to pay for it.

As a party and as a Government, we are committed to providing opportunities to all in our society and not just to some, so there will be more effort to prevent ill health, as well as treating it. Twenty-five thousand lives a year can be saved by the investment we can now make in preventing and treating heart disease alone.

The balance of services will shift, with more patients being seen in primary and community settings, not just in hospitals. Social services will have resources to extend by one third rehabilitation care for older people. Councils will be able to increase fees to stabilise the care home market and secure more care home beds. More investment will mean more old people will have the choice of care in their own homes rather than in care homes.

Yesterday's Budget and today's reforms mean that the NHS plan will be delivered.

I want to make two further points. First, it is a 10-year plan, as we said in July 2000. By the time of the next election, there will be real and significant improvements. However, that cannot happen overnight. It takes seven years at least to train a doctor and up to 15 years to train a consultant. Expectations will be high—I understand that—but they also need to be reasonable, and people need to understand that a 10-year plan is exactly what it says. It will take time to be delivered in full. At least now, public and patients will be able to see improvements made stage by stage, independently of Government, audited, monitored and inspected.

Secondly, there is consensus in the country on one thing: Britain needs to spend more on health care. There is no mystery about why there are no waiting lists in Germany. It has spent more, and has done so for years.

We can debate endlessly the system of finance, but one thing is beyond debate: the level of finance has to be raised. Once that is accepted, the choice is not between a system funded out of general taxation, which results in higher national insurance, and some other system that comes for free. Importing the German system of social insurance would cost the equivalent of an extra £1,000 per worker per year, and the French system would cost £1,500 per worker per year.

Labour Members believe in the NHS in our heads as well as our hearts. We believe it to be the best and fairest system of providing true health insurance, because it is based on the scale of the person's need, not the size of their wallet. It is the best insurance policy in the world.

It is now for those who want to see the NHS not reformed but abandoned, and who routinely call it Stalinist, to say honestly what their alternative is, what it would cost and how much families and pensioners would have to pay for it.

Yesterday we made a choice, and we ask the British people to make the same choice. We are proud of the NHS and of the people working in it. We are giving it the money that it deserves. We are making the changes it needs. Investment plus reform equals results. We will be happy to be judged on them.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement. He is right: there is a measure of consensus in the House. We all agree that more money should be spent on health in the United Kingdom. We believe that health care should be available to all irrespective of their means. The Secretary of State's statement must be judged against the criterion set down by the Chancellor yesterday, when he said that the scale of long-term investment would be matched by the scale of long-term reform. Have we had today anything like the indication of long-term reform that comes anywhere close to the increase in funding announced by the Chancellor? Indeed, the Secretary of State's words mark quite a shift in the Government's position. He said in his statement:

"Without those reforms, we will not get the best use of the money for the taxpayer".

However, the Chancellor told *The Sun* in November:

"I'm going to insist any additional resources must be matched by reforms so that we get the best value for money. There is not to be one penny more until we get the changes."

We believe that reform is needed, but we are not willing to give the Government a blank cheque—especially after a statement such as this, high on waffle and low on detail. I should like the Secretary of State—yes, he can get his pen ready—to give us some numbers, and some of the details of what the plans actually mean.

First, let me ask about national insurance. What will the changes announced yesterday cost the NHS as an employer, and what will be the additional cost in taxes to a consultant, a senior house officer and a ward sister on average salaries?

Where will the new auditors come from to deal with the Secretary of State's new auditing system? Please let them not be the Prime Minister's cronies in Andersen! How many are envisaged, and how much will it all cost? Who will appoint the new auditors? Will they be free to set their own budgets? The last thing we need is a new set of bureaucrats. Perhaps the most important question is this: will the auditors be able to audit private hospitals? That is especially important when NHS patients are being treated in such hospitals. Will we see the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Care Standards Commission merge with the National Audit Office, or any potential mixture involving the three bodies? *[Interruption.]* I see that the Government Chief Whip is up to her usual intellectual standard today, although that is not saying much.

When it comes to the question of devolved power, the Secretary of State is pulling a confidence trick. He talks of more money being available on the front line, but he does not say that there are so many strings attached that those on the front line are not free to choose how to spend it. Last week I visited the chairman of a primary care group, who told me that of the extra £13 million made available last year only £55,000 was discretionary money that he could choose how to use.

Perhaps the Secretary of State can give us one or two more details about devolved power. He talks of devolved bodies being able to borrow. Where will they be able to borrow from? Will they be able to borrow from

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the markets? Will the borrowing happen with or without an underwriting by the Government, and how will this affect PSBR calculations?

The Secretary of State said that there would be

"New incentives for individual members of staff".

What sort of individual financial incentives will those be, how much—typically—will they be worth, and at what level will they be negotiated?

I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State talk of money following the patient: I had thought that that was one of the phrases new Labour had banned. At least he is returning to some of the right ideas. But what exactly does he mean by "importing additional overseas capacity"? Who is being imported and from where, and how will the process be funded?

Perhaps the most appalling part of the statement related to bed blocking. For more than three years, the Government were warned about the consequences of their policy of running down care homes in the community. They were warned that when they lost beds in the community they would block beds in the NHS, and that they would see an increase in the number of cancelled operations and a rise in waiting lists as well as inappropriate care. What is the Secretary of State going to do now? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Opposition spokesman must be given a fair hearing. We cannot have repeated sedentary interventions.

Dr. Fox: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the sedentary interventions were better than what we have heard from the Government Front Bench.

The Government are shifting the blame, which they always do. The blame for bed blocking now lies with local government, rather than with those who created the problem—central Government. The financial burden and the penalties will be transferred to local government: in other words, council tax payers will be fined for the Government's incompetence in terms of their care homes policy. That is a terrible indictment of this Government.

We seek detailed answers to those questions, because several things have become clear over the past 24 hours: that the Government now believe that one of the ways of helping recruitment and retention is to tax NHS staff more; that the Government have now returned to tax and spend; and that the third way and new Labour are gone.

When the Government came to power, they said no internal market, no money following the patient and no GP fundholding. Having broken their promises on taxes, they have now gone back to many of the reforms that they said in opposition they would never tolerate. They are admitting that they wasted five years for all those who use and work in the health service. They were wrong and we were right. The one word missing from today's statement was "Sorry".

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman either misunderstood or has not read our proposal on the new independent audit regime. In fact, it will mean less rather than more bureaucracy. We will put together the current arrangements, with the Commission for Health Improvement, the value for money work of the Audit Commission and the private health care work of the National Care Standards Commission, in one single new body. That will make for less confusion and bureaucracy in the national health service, with clearer accountability to the public.

The hon. Gentleman did not say one word about matching extra investment either in the national health service or in social services. It is a bit rich for him to bleat about bed blocking and problems in care homes—which exist—and not to commit his party to matching the extra resources that we are allocating to social services.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about borrowing, we will put in place a new prudential borrowing regime, along the lines of the one that we are considering for local authorities. The details are in the document.

On importing staff, we envisage bringing in spare capacity from abroad—from Europe. The hon. Gentleman is very keen on his travels in Europe. Normally, the purpose of travel is to arrive at a destination. This must be the only instance of travel narrowing the mind. His mind is made up. The challenge for him is threefold: will he match our extra investment, match the extra sources of that investment and match the reforms that we have outlined? The answer for all three is no.

The public will see that, rather than wanting to reform the national health service, the Tories want to abandon it. The hon. Gentleman gave the game away when, in his secret speech in Harrogate, he said that the Tories' strategy was first to talk down the national health service, and then to run it down, as a prelude to their real agenda of selling it off. That is not the right choice for the British people.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the reforms that he outlined, but those who will be paying the extra taxes will want a copper-bottomed guarantee that their money will be spent wisely. They will want improvements to be made, and quickly. Will he assure me and the people outside who will pay the extra taxes that this massive investment will find its way to front-line services and not be lost in more red tape and bureaucracy?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an important and telling point. It is important that people who work in the national health service and the managers who are responsible for delivering care understand that the extra resources do not come for nothing—this is not an unconditional offer. The days have gone when public spending worked on the something-for-nothing rule. We are offering something for something and we expect big changes and improvements, but we do not expect them overnight. No magic wand can be waved and no silver bullet can be fired, but people have a right to expect a steady improvement year by year, as capacity grows and the NHS plan is implemented over 10 years, providing more staff, more beds, more buildings, new hospitals and new ways of working backed by the reforms that I have announced today.

When people put more money into the national health service they have a right to expect more out of it. That is why the new arrangements for audit and inspection, which are not supported by the Opposition, and the new obligations on primary care trusts are being brought into

being as quickly as possible. Some will require legislation and some will not, but in my view it is important that taxpayers see that extra resources deliver real results for patients.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): On the rise in tax, including a not so brave 1 per cent. on top earners such as the Secretary of State—and the Prime Minister and Chancellor, who are leaving the Chamber to count their money—to give the NHS the funding boost for which we have been calling for years, we would like to resist the temptation to say, "I told you so", but we cannot. Nor can the people who have died while waiting, the patients who suffered poor care during years of underfunding and the elderly who are stuck in hospital and who will still have to sell their homes to pay for the personal care that they thought they would get on the NHS.

The funding is welcome, but it would be more welcome if the Secretary of State apologised for his five years of the 23 years of underfunding and the two income tax cuts, for which the Conservatives also voted, because without them we could be halfway through a 10-year programme of NHS investment rather than at the start.

If the Secretary of State is serious about reform, why does he not consider truly decentralising decision making to publicly and democratically accountable local decision-making bodies instead of simply decentralising the blame and centralising the praise?

On the new financial incentives for hospital performance and the distortions, if the Secretary of State really thinks that doctors and nurses will treat patients better if he stuffs their mouths with gold, he simply does not understand the motivation of public sector health care workers. Does he really think so little of doctors and nurses? If he believes that these new people's foundation, grant-maintained hospitals that give financial incentives for admitting, discharging, operating and not operating, and the creation of an accountant's paradise, will produce no clinical distortions and improve clinical care, he misunderstands doctors and nurses in the health service. He is moving from stethoscope to spreadsheet, and that will damage patient care.

On social services, it appears that the Secretary of State, like Conservative Front Benchers, has just discovered social services underfunding and bed blocking. He has announced that he will suddenly get a grip. Does he not understand that the 1.2 per cent. real growth between 1999 and 2001, as set out in the Wanless report, was grossly inadequate, as was the real-terms cut in social services funding in the previous two years? Is he about to insist that local councils not only punish council tax payers, but cut services to the mentally ill, the vulnerable young and the disabled to avoid his fine? The real-terms increase in funding is only 3.5 per cent. now, rising to 6 per cent. this year. That is around £200 million, which is grossly inadequate for the amount of underfunding in health services.

Finally, can he assure people in Oxfordshire facing £9 million in social services cuts in the fifth year of a Labour Government that they will not have to face more cuts this year? Unless he can make that commitment and unless he apologises, people will not believe that he is serious and the Government will appear even more arrogant than they have to date.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman said that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have left the House, and I now know why they did so. If I were the hon. Gentleman, I would be very cautious about raising national social services funding issues, given that the Liberal Democrats are cutting such funding at a local level. Indeed, as I have told him before—he has failed to answer this charge—the biggest complaint that I heard on my recent visits to Liverpool and Sheffield was the cutting by Liberal Democrats of social services expenditure for the elderly, the disabled, people with mental health problems and vulnerable children; yet the hon. Gentleman has the temerity to complain about a 6 per cent. increase in social services investment.

The problem with the hon. Gentleman and the Liberal Democrats is that they always want more money but never want change. He must recognise what everybody else recognises: if we are to get the best from the resources and improve services for patients, investment and change must go together. It is about time that he learned that lesson.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a very important matter and many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. May we please have shorter questions, and perhaps shorter answers?

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): On any test, this is a defining moment for the health service, and I congratulate the Government on what they are doing. People simply have to make up their minds: do they want to rebuild the health service, or not?

The Secretary of State talked about giving a guarantee to heart patients who face a wait of more than six months, and about introducing a true insurance approach to the health service. Under such an approach, people pay in and they know what they will get out. In talking about making step changes and step improvements to bring down waiting times, can we not tell people that that is a commitment? Can we not say, "A commission will ensure that we do that, and we will give real patient guarantees, so that we know what you have paid in, and you know what you will get out"?

Mr. Milburn: On my hon. Friend's first point, the decisions relating to the Budget and the reforms were of course important. The simple observation—I hope that it is widely shared—is that if people want world-class health care, it has to be paid for somehow. The issue is not whether we pay for it but, I suppose, how. The argument and debate about that will continue in the weeks, and perhaps years, to come. When people examine the issues carefully—as we have done, and as the British Medical Association did in 2000—they will conclude, not on the ground of destabilising the current system, but on the grounds of principle and of values, that the national health service is the right way forward for the country. However, we must ensure that we grow the capacity, and I am afraid that we must make some big changes.

We want to grow the capacity in stages. The biggest capacity constraint is the shortage of qualified staff, be they doctors, nurses, scientists or therapists. We must be

[Mr. Milburn]

straight and honest with people: it will take time to grow capacity. It is no use the Opposition yelling about a 10-year plan. Yes, it is a 10-year plan, and it will take time to get there. As we improve services and cut waiting times, the offer that we can make to individual patients will of course improve. However, it is important that people understand that an enormous pot of money is now going into the national health service, but that it will be released in stages. We have to ensure that the NHS works for patients, and we will improve the services that they use progressively, rather than overnight.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Secretary of State has put great store by his improved audit arrangements, but who will set the criteria by which success will be judged? Will the auditors set it, or will he set it? In his statement, he also mentioned improvements in waiting times, but not for the first consultant appointment. What will he do to reduce targets for that?

Mr. Milburn: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware, as a Treasury Minister in a previous Conservative Government, that the Audit Commission works very independently. It has done a first-class job and its integrity and independence must be maintained at all costs in the new system. It decides what value-for-money studies it wishes to undertake and, similarly, the new commission will decide which studies it wishes to undertake. There are two forms of standard setting, including the new national service frameworks for cancer, coronary heart disease and mental health, which are drawn up between the Government, the NHS, clinicians who work in the NHS and patients who use it.

On the subject of out-patient appointments, I did mention the cuts in waiting times for in-patient treatment that are taking place. Getting the waiting times for out-patients down has been a long haul, but they are now down below the level that we inherited. As we grow the capacity, put the extra resources in and—crucially—make the reforms, we will continue to bring waiting times down so that by 2005 no one will wait more than three months for an out-patient appointment either.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Bolton has welcomed the considerable amounts of money that we have received for our health service and our social services department, but a problem remains. In 1997, we were 6 per cent. away from target funding. A letter that I received this week from the Under-Secretary revealed that the new primary care trust began its work 6.02 per cent. away from target funding, so the situation has not improved. I seek assurances for my constituents from my right hon. Friend that in the next five years the real inequalities that exist in areas such as mine will be addressed once and for all.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend will be aware that a review of the way in which we distribute resources is being conducted, both in local government and in the NHS. As I have said before, I cannot give an absolute assurance for Bolton, but I recognise that the area has its fair share of problems, with high levels of morbidity and deep health inequalities. Our new formula for distributing growing NHS resources is designed to address such problems.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Will the Minister cast his mind back some five years, when the Labour Government introduced a whole new inspectorate system for local government called best value? That immense gendarmerie is now so complicated and complex that his Government are saying that they must start to dismantle it. What assurances can he give us that the inspectorate that he has announced today will not be such an enormous consumer of management time that it will divert people from the task of looking after patients? Does he realise that he has now announced a sort of amalgam of nationalised and local responsibility, so that nobody will any longer have the faintest idea of where the buck stops? Can he decide whether he or the people who know about it are running the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: For once, the right hon. Gentleman is remarkably confused on the issue. Normally, he is a beacon of light in a sea of darkness on the Opposition Benches. The position is clear. We will not have three bodies inspecting and regulating health care in our country. Instead, one body will inspect and regulate health care to common national standards, whether in the public or private sector, in primary care or in hospital-based care. Nobody, with the best will in the world—even someone with the right hon. Gentleman's creative accounting mind—can possibly make that add up to more bureaucracy when it will mean less bureaucracy.

The right hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that we must get the right balance of national standards in a national health service, because the last thing that we want to do is to return to the position that the Government inherited in 1997, when there was a lottery of care for cancer services and drugs. We have put that right. What we have recognised, as I have been able to announce today, is that services have to be delivered locally. We need greater freedoms and more rewards for the best. We must step in where there are problems, but we must step back where there is progress.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Barnsley has exactly the same problem as Bolton: we are moving further and further away from our target funding, and that means a £6 million shortfall, which the primary care trust must address. I very much welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about the independent audit, but will it be empowered to compare health authorities throughout the country in order to show exactly where value for money is delivered, so that in areas such as Bolton and Barnsley, which administer their funding very well, we can benefit from the extra resources going into the service?

Mr. Milburn: The straightforward answer to that question is yes. That is precisely what it will be doing, so that people both locally and nationally, and particularly in this House, have an opportunity to judge how well different health services are doing in different parts of the country. That is a welcome step forward and a recognition that the national health service belongs not to me or even to the people who work in it, but to the British public, who have a right to know how well it is doing.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State is well aware that health matters have been devolved

to Northern Ireland and Scotland. Can I have an assurance that the increase in health service funding will be allocated at the same level in Northern Ireland? I have to raise the issue because this is a national health service, and over the years Scotland, Northern Ireland and England have shared the situation, providing doctors, nurses and specialists.

I want also to press the Secretary of State on whether he is absolutely sure that there will be less bureaucracy under the independent inspection—or will fewer people do the job, which has not been done well in the past, and we will continue to suffer? The British people are the jury. They have been long-suffering, but are beginning to turn and become more demanding. They will still be demanding if we do not deliver.

Mr. Milburn: It is not really my responsibility to comment on issues either to do with Northern Ireland or to do with finance in Northern Ireland. However, my understanding of what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said yesterday is that the funding increases are not just for England but for other parts of the United Kingdom.

Inspection and ensuring that we have the right number of people in place is more than anything else a matter for the new independent commission; that will not so much be a matter for me. It must decide on the level of resources and the number of staff needed in order to do the work that it needs to do, which is about improving standards and accounting for where public money is spent.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is my right hon. Friend confident that he will have the full co-operation of the royal colleges and the British Medical Association in his effort to reduce waiting lists? He will be aware that those mighty vested interests have in the past been part of the problem rather than the solution. Is it true that the consultants are demanding a 29 per cent. wage increase in return for their co-operation? If it is, will he politely tell them that that is not on?

Mr. Milburn: I do not know about the specific figures but, clearly, negotiations are taking place with the BMA about the future of the consultant contract. There will no doubt be different points of view. It is important that people recognise that, although these are large increases in NHS investment, they must go to the right place so that we can improve services and, of course, motivate staff. As my hon. Friend will recognise, we require some profound changes—not just increases in the number of staff but changes in their working practices. We cannot have ancient, traditional demarcations among those working in the NHS standing in the way of improved patient care.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): What is it about the Audit Commission that makes it insufficiently independent or professional to continue to monitor the outcomes of this Government's policy? Why is the Secretary of State dropping the Audit Commission in favour of a body that will be both judge and jury, setting targets and monitoring outcomes?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Lady has not listened to what I have said; fair enough. Perhaps she can read my statement. I shall briefly explain. The commission will be more independent not less. At the moment, I appoint people to the Audit Commission. She might think that that is a perfectly reasonable, independent system; I do not. In future, the people appointed to the Audit Commission—the commissioners—will be appointed independently from me. What is more, the commissioners will appoint the new chief inspector, who will have overall responsibility for ensuring that standards and accountability work in the NHS.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be warmly welcomed by my constituents, not least, I suspect, because one of the new hospitals that he mentioned is likely to be the community hospital in Gravesend? He will be aware that, despite quite substantial increases in resources, we have had considerable problems with social services in Kent. Will he give us an assurance that the annual report to Parliament on delivery in health services will include local authorities that, given the extra resources that they will be receiving, are failing to deliver effectively on social services?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. It is incumbent on all parts of the public services—particularly if extra investment is going into them, as it is into social and health care—to account for how money is spent and, indeed, for how standards are improving. As I said in my statement, just as we will have a new independent commission to ensure that standards are high and performance in the NHS is improving, so we will have a new independent commission for social services—effectively bringing together the social services inspectorate, which is currently part of the Department of Health, and the National Care Standards Commission. Once again, the new commission that will deal with social care inspection will be more, rather than less, independent than current arrangements.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Just how will the increases in national insurance contributions and taxation help the NHS in the Thames valley, where due to very high housing costs, we are suffering a desperate shortage of staff and difficulty in recruiting doctors, nurses and all forms of health professionals? Surely such increases will make matters much worse.

Mr. Milburn: All of that was taken into account in discussions on the Budget and the spending review. People are talking about £200 million for the NHS in increased national insurance contributions. To put that into perspective, it is worth remembering that the NHS will be getting an extra £5 billion. The question for the Conservative party is whether it backs that level of investment—yes or no? It is a very simple question.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I too congratulate the Secretary of State on his bold measures. I am particularly glad about the extra resources for social services because, as I am sure he will be aware, one factor that contributes to bed blocking, especially in my part of the world, is a lack of capacity in the private and nursing care home market. Will he consider encouraging where necessary public reprovision of long-term care beds?

Mr. Milburn: In the end, those decisions are best taken not by me, but locally. It will be a matter—*[Interruption.]*

[Mr. Milburn]

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) says no, but he is the one who continues to argue that the NHS, social services and local government are too centralised. Then, he rails against our saying that decisions are best taken locally. It is for social services and the health service to decide how best to spend the resources. There are many models of providing health and social care. Indeed, it would be good if there were more joint ventures between the public and private sectors precisely so that we could reap the benefits of both, and that way improve patient care.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the extra doctors and nurses who he has trumpeted this morning will not be recruited either directly by the health service or indirectly through private agencies from developing countries that need them much more than we do?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, we are very clear that we will not be doing that.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): In warmly welcoming the statement, I ask my right hon. Friend how successful innovatory practices are being communicated, as there are many in existence. I bring to his attention the Medical Assessment Unit at the James Cook hospital in Middlesbrough. It is in the process of putting together a multidisciplinary, rapid reaction force—if Members will excuse the use of Ministry of Defence language—with outreach nurses and social services. It is effectively discharging 40 per cent. of patients who would otherwise have remained in hospital. This is an excellent piece of innovatory medicine—other hospitals are discharging only 10 per cent. of such patients. How are these good practices being communicated?

Mr. Milburn: First, throughout the health service and social services, as in my hon. Friend's area, there are many examples of innovation, reform, modernisation—call it what we will. The Conservative party would like to pretend that reform has not taken hold when in fact it has taken hold in all aspects of the health service. The way in which we ensure that we learn from best practice is straightforward. First, we now have a modernisation agency that can help people to improve their services. In that way, we take good practices out of the ghetto and spread them to all so that they are not just for the benefit of the few.

Secondly, it is important to get in place the right incentives. I believe profoundly that we cannot simply tell people to change but must provide the incentive for them to change. The truth is that there has never been a system using the right incentives in the national health service and perhaps in social services too. By changing the way in which money flows around the system, we are trying to put the right incentives in place so that those who do best get most money and those who do less well have an incentive to improve.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The Secretary of State makes much of this independent inspectorate reporting to Parliament. Can he guarantee that when it does report to Parliament, there will be an opportunity, in Government time, to debate that report on the Floor of the House every year? Can he explain to my constituents how it will improve the morale of people who work in the national health service if their take-home pay is cut by national insurance increases?

Mr. Milburn: On the first issue, that is not a matter for me. I am trying to get rid of powers, not take them on. The Leader of the House deals with such issues. On national insurance contributions, I think that doctors, nurses, therapists, scientists and everyone who works in the national health service recognise that if we want world-class health care, we have to pay for it. The choice that we have made is to put the investment into the national health service. The choice for the hon. Gentleman, with respect, is whether he will match those extra resources.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I applaud the additional investment, especially in social services, and the announcement of additional resources to care for elderly people. That will certainly be welcomed by residents of Lancashire care homes and elderly people supported in the community. Will my right hon. Friend also discuss with local authorities the need to invest in children's services? There are increasing numbers of children at risk who need support and this is an opportunity to offer them that support.

Mr. Milburn: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am very aware of the pressures in Lancashire, which she has raised with me in the past. We have taken fully into account the problems and pressures that social services face not just in providing better elderly care services but in improving children's care services. I hope that there is an opportunity for social services to plan ahead with confidence for the medium term with a very generous settlement over three years that allows some of these problems to be addressed in a stage-by-stage way. I also hope that social services will recognise that the best way forward for children's care and elderly care is for the health service and social services to work more co-operatively together.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Does the Secretary of State agree with Mr. Stuart Emslie, a risk control expert in his Department, that the NHS loses between 16 per cent. and 20 per cent. of its budget each year through fraud and mismanagement? If he does not agree, will he tell us the correct figure?

Mr. Milburn: No, because he did not say that. The figures that the Conservative party bandy about include the costs to the national health service of staff who are off sick. I know that the NHS is a good service, but not even we have been able to solve problems universally of staff sickness for all our staff.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Although the chief inspector will be independently appointed, may I suggest to my right hon. Friend that one criterion for appointment might be not having been a chief inspector of any other public service?

I know of my right hon. Friend's commitment to mental health services. Waiting for treatment, either in hospital or in the community, can be debilitating for people with a mental illness and their families. Mental health is a

primary problem in trying to resolve the issue of rough sleepers. Will my right hon. Friend make a commitment that the additional funding will be aimed at mental health services as well as all the other health services?

Mr. Milburn: It is very important that mental health services get their fare share of the additional resources. It is also very important, in my view, that we keep a clear eye on the key priorities for the national health service, not just to get waiting times down but to improve outcomes from cancer and coronary heart disease and to improve elderly care and mental health services. I say to my hon. Friend, in the spirit of friendship and also candour, that if we try to do everything at once, we will achieve nothing at all. It is very important that we keep focused on the issues that count.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Before the Secretary of State imposes this new level of audit and inspection, will he undertake to read last night's Reith lecture on the subject? Will he tell my constituents why they should have any confidence in his NHS plan when he has shown himself prepared to corrupt the administration of government, compromise the health care of my constituents and the welfare of health workers in my constituency in order to promote the political interests of the Labour party?

Mr. Milburn: Frankly, those comments are beneath even the hon. Gentleman.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many hundreds of cancer patients in Grimsby and Cleethorpes have to pay £5 to cross the Humber bridge to gain access to treatment in Hull hospitals? Will anything be done, using the extra funding, to make journeys to hospital much easier for those people? I am finding it hard to convince them that the NHS is based on need, not ability to pay.

Mr. Milburn: I was not aware of the problem that my hon. Friend raises. Again, such decisions are best taken locally rather than nationally. There will be scope, more freedom and, of course, extra resources, for local health services to decide what their priorities are. However, people in the health service must understand that the extra resources do not come easy; there are strings attached. Most importantly, the health service must understand that every penny of extra investment must be properly accounted for. I do not provide the extra investment, the taxpayers do, and they must have a good deal, just like patients.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I could not agree more with the Secretary of State when he says that the NHS cannot be run by Whitehall. He will be aware of the significant staff recruitment problems that exist in parts of the country. Can he clarify what new flexibility he is prepared to give to foundation hospitals and whether those hospitals will be able to pay in accordance with local labour market conditions as opposed to being constrained by national wage bargaining?

Mr. Milburn: As far as the foundation hospitals and pay systems are concerned, I think that the hon. Lady is aware that we are negotiating with the various trade unions a new system of pay called "Agenda for Change" for the national health service. It will seek to combine a national framework of pay with local flexibility. Foundations hospitals will be able to use those local flexibilities to give appropriate rewards to NHS staff.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is important that we move on to the next business. However, we will be returning to debate this subject on Tuesday of next week.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [17 April].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

(1) That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) below, this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

(3) Paragraph (2) above does not exclude the making of amendments with respect to value added tax providing for relief on the acquisition from another member State of any goods in relation to which, if they were imported from a place outside the member States, relief would be given by an order under section 37 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

2.19 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): May I begin by declaring the interests that appear in the Register of Members' Interests?

Yesterday's Budget was the first since the Government's general election victory only 10 months ago. Pundits were critical of the quality of that campaign, but something clear and important was at the centre of the political debate. Time and again, Ministers and Labour politicians were asked what would happen when the end of their planning period for public expenditure, 2003–04, was reached. It was suggested that there would have to be either a reduction in the rate of growth of public spending, or a further round of tax increases if the Government carried on increasing public spending.

Time and again, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister went out of their way to deny that there would need to be further tax increases in the middle of the Government's second term to finance a further increase in public spending. For example, the Prime Minister was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on "Newsnight" about the guarantee not to abolish the national insurance ceiling. Paxman said:

"I am merely asking why you could give this guarantee last time, but you can't give it this time, and whether any reasonable person wouldn't suppose that you therefore propose to increase national insurance contributions."

The Prime Minister replied, "They shouldn't". That was on 22 May 2001, less than a year ago. In the same campaign, the Prime Minister wrote in the *Daily Express:*

"We are not going to clobber people on higher incomes . . . We have not the slightest intention of hammering people on £30,000 and £35,000 and the higher income brackets."

Yesterday, however, in the first Budget since those election promises were made, the Chancellor came to the House and broke the assurances that he and other Labour party members gave during the election campaign. The Chancellor took the first opportunity that arose, in his first Budget after the election, to trample on the promises that he had made to help get himself elected.

There was no apology, nor any humility. In fact, Labour Back-Bench Members cheered the tax increases even more loudly than they had cheered the promises made to secure their election in the first place.

Even more shocking than the cynicism with which those pledges were broken is the scale of the increase in the tax take. In the final year of the Conservative Government, the tax take was approximately £270 billion. Next year, it will be £407 billion. At the end of the Chancellor's planning period, it will be £520 billion. That is an enormous increase in the total amount of tax taken over the lifetimes of the two Labour Governments since 1997. We are entitled to ask—as we will throughout the debate—how the taxes are being increased, who will bear the burden, and what will be given by the Government in return.

At the heart of the tax increases announced yesterday is the dramatic rise in national insurance contributions. For employees and employers, the combined rate will be a very heavy 23.8 per cent. However, the Chancellor was up to his old tricks yesterday. He referred to the national insurance increases, and to a set of measures designed to help the environment and provide specific assistance for business. We have examined the way in which he presented the changes.

I entirely support the Government's aim of helping the environment. The Chancellor yesterday produced a set of measures to that end, and chapter 7 of the Red Book is entitled "Protecting the Environment". The measures add up to slightly less than £100 million. Some of the measures in the table to which the Chancellor referred in his Budget are marked with an asterisk, showing that their cost is "negligible".

The Chancellor gave his attention to environmental measures with a combined impact of less than £100 million, and devoted fewer words to the proposed rise in national increase insurance contributions, worth £7.5 billion. Those proposals include the abolition, in practice, of the upper earnings limit. The Chancellor will now collect additional national insurance contributions at the rate of 1 per cent. from people's total income, including any income above the old upper earnings limit.

National insurance now has a very odd structure, and one that no rational person would be able to defend. There are personal allowances, and rates for employers of 12.8 per cent. and for employees of 11 per cent. The latter rate has now been raised by 1 per cent., but what is to stop the Chancellor raising that figure again, by 1.5 per cent. or 2 per cent., in the future? The right hon. Gentleman has created a new revenue raiser that he will be able to use whenever he wants to raise taxes still higher.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions or the Chancellor will assure the House that the extra 1 per cent. added to employees' national insurance contributions will not be raised again in the future. If no such assurance is given, we will know what the Chancellor's future stealth tax is going to be. Whatever promises he makes on value added tax or personal income tax, the Chancellor will be able to return to that extra 1 per cent. on employees' national insurance contributions. Gradually—and it may take a few years—he will achieve what John Smith tried to do 10 years ago. The upper earnings limit will be abolished. Over time, the full rate of national insurance contributions will apply to the total of employees' incomes. This is the start of the process.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I should be happy to give way. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who was a policy adviser before he became an MP, will say whether he thinks the Government should give the assurance that there will be no further increases in national insurance contributions.

James Purnell: As someone once said, we ask the questions in this matter.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) wants to go back 10 years, but he advised the previous, Conservative Government between 1979 and 1992. In that period, the income of people in the lowest 10 per cent. fell in absolute terms by 17 per cent. He has said that he does not recognise those figures, as the *Hansard* record shows. However, the same figures were accepted by Nicholas Timmins, who I believe is a great friend of the hon. Gentleman's. The source of the figures is the Office for National Statistics, so they are official Government statistics. The hon. Gentleman claims to be on the side of the poor. Will he apologise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not begin to make a speech.

Mr. Willetts: I hope to turn to the Government's record on poverty later in my speech. I still do not recognise the figure to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I want to know where the extra revenues indicated by the extraordinary figures for the increase in the tax take are being spent. The Chancellor's Budget statement focused on the national health service. This morning, I asked the House of Commons Library to supply the figures for spending on health and benefits in 1996–97, the final year in office of the previous Conservative Government. The Red Book shows that health spending will amount to £72.1 billion next year. I also asked the Library what the total of spending on benefits and tax credits will be next year. Many of those credits ought to be counted as benefits expenditure. A lot of them used to be so counted, but they have been miraculously redefined by this Government.

I see that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), who asked about poverty, has left the Chamber. It is regrettable that he has not stayed to hear my answer.

Adding together the tax credits and the social security budget, one discovers that the total increase in spending on social security and tax credits between 1996–97 and 2003–04 is bigger than the increase in health spending.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): In cash terms.

Mr. Willetts: I am comparing cash spent on health in 1996–97 with that to be spent in 2003–04, and cash spent on benefits in 1996–97 with cash to be spent on benefits and tax credits in 2003–04. It is an entirely consistent comparison. What it shows is that the extra money—the biggest single increase—is not for health or education but for the Chancellor's personal preoccupation—tax credits—added back in to the social security budget. All those promises that we were going to save money on welfare to put the extra money into health and education have been broken, too. A big increase in welfare expenditure has been redefined and redescribed as tax credits.

Mr. Darling: I shall happily plead guilty to spending more on pensioners and more on children. Will the hon. Gentleman not accept that, as a result of getting more people into work, we are spending about £5 billion a year less on the dole than was spent when he was advising the Conservative Government?

Mr. Willetts: I am considering the total budget for social security and credits. I have observed that it is striking how, under this Government, the big increases in expenditure, for example, are in other areas of benefits. We welcome the fact that unemployment has fallen, but I am considering the total budget for expenditure on social security and credits. That is what has gone up—it has gone up by more than health and by more than education.

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures—I know that, in these debates, he cannot wait to bury his head in the figures, a fact about which I am happy in many ways—will he not accept that expenditure has gone up because we have deliberately increased expenditure on pensions and on support for families with children? If we had not done that, the rate of spending on social security would be falling compared with that under his Government. We are spending more because we have chosen to do so on children and pensions—spending which he and the Conservative party have vehemently opposed.

Mr. Willetts: All I can say is that the Government's original claim was that they would save money on social security to put more into health and education. We are now being told, "It's all right. Yes, we are spending a lot more on social security and credits but we've chosen to do it."

I now want to consider whether the extra increase in expenditure on social security and credits has been effective in terms of the objective that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State set themselves—the attack on child poverty. The Chancellor will recall not just the commitment that he gave to tackling child poverty—an entirely admirable objective—but his claim during the election campaign, repeated in the Labour manifesto, that the Government had reduced the number of children who

[Mr. Willetts]

were in poverty by 1 million. Let me quote the manifesto on which the Government were elected, which masqueraded as an accurate historical statement:

"over 1 million children have been taken out of poverty."

That is what the electors were told at the last election. However, I am afraid that, even buried in the Chancellor's Red Book yesterday, there was evidence that they have simply failed to deliver what was presented in the manifesto as a matter of historical fact. I shall quote from the discussion of child poverty on page 90 of the Red Book:

"By 2000–01 the number of children in households below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income"—

the measure of poverty that the Government used—

"had fallen by 0.3 million compared with 1998–99 and by 0.5 million compared with 1996–97".

There was thus no 1 million reduction in the number of children in poverty on the Government's preferred measure. The Budget showed that the performance was half that, at best. The Chancellor has shown in his own Red Book that the assertions that he made during the election campaign on the Government's record on child poverty were simply not correct.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the hon. Gentleman first accept that, as we have raised the level of incomes, the median income has also gone up? We have therefore set ourselves a higher target to jump over than was ever in existence under his Government. Will he return to the question that he did not answer previously: is it not true that, during the time he was giving advice to the Conservative Government, the bottom 10 per cent. of the population's incomes fell, in real terms, by 17 per cent.? Will he therefore apologise for the advice that he gave?

Mr. Willetts: As I said, I do not recognise the figure of 17 per cent. When I look at the Government's figures for households on below-average incomes, I see a pattern of the number of children in poverty, on various measures, rising in some periods and falling in others. In fact, if one compares the Government's record on child poverty not with 1996–97 but with a few years earlier, one finds that the Government have carefully chosen their base year—they chose a point when child poverty had gone up; child poverty was lower two years earlier. For all the huffing and puffing and extra expenditure, all they have done is to take the rate of child poverty back to what it was in 1994–95.

I therefore question whether the policy decisions that have been taken, supposedly with the justification of reducing child poverty, have achieved the results that were claimed for them on the Government's preferred indicator. The consultation document on poverty that the Government have just released—I have not yet had the opportunity to study it, and I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to discuss it further—is an attempt to redefine the target. When they fail to achieve the target, they redefine it. I want an assurance from the Secretary of State and the Chancellor that they will continue to be judged by the measure of child poverty that they used when they first set the target. That was 60 per cent. of median income, which was clearly the measure that they first used when they said that they were going to take 1 million children out of poverty during their first term, and that they were eventually going to eliminate child poverty. If, after four years, they have failed to achieve that target, it is not acceptable simply to announce that they are going to change the target. That is not good enough. I look forward to hearing an assurance from the Secretary of State that that is not the case.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The hon. Gentleman says that he does not recognise the figures for the increase in child poverty under his Government. What figures does he recognise?

Mr. Willetts: I recall, as I quoted them, the latest figures on the number of children in households on below-average incomes, on the measure of 60 per cent. below median income. I also recall a Social Security Committee report—I do not see the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in his place—that considered what had happened to the real value of benefits to people on the lowest incomes. That report showed that it had increased significantly during our period in office.

I would happily have a longer historical debate, but I want to challenge the Government on why they have not met the target that they thought they had met. It is not just that they have failed to meet it, full stop—I am genuinely sure that the Chancellor was not trying to mislead us when he said, during the election campaign, that 1 million children had been taken out of poverty. When he said that in the election campaign and put it in the manifesto, he thought that it was true. Why did he think it was true, then, when it is clearly not true, now, on his own figures? The explanation is very important. Instead of putting all this effort into redefining the target, he ought to be thinking about why what he thought had happened has not happened.

The reason for this failure is take-up. The modelling and the evidence that the Chancellor was using, to which he refers again in his Red Book, assumes that his benefits and his new tax credits were going to enjoy 100 per cent. take-up. We all see the marvellous captions and graphs that the Treasury puts into its Red Books—some of which appear in the newspapers and on the television—showing how much better off a family will be in various circumstances. Those illustrations assume that everybody receives those benefits and credits, but they do not. They do not do so because the Chancellor has made the system so complicated, and has changed it so frequently, that we face a catastrophically low level of take-up of his pet tax credits. That is why he thought that he had taken 1 million children out of poverty when, in fact, he had not; he had taken only half a million out of poverty.

I once asked the Paymaster General—I am sorry that she is not here—a simple question:

"To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families . . . are eligible for (i) the working families tax credit and (ii) the child care tax credit."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 842W.]

I did not get an answer about eligibility at all—I got an answer about the number of families in receipt of the working families tax credit. The Treasury will not answer questions about take-up or about the gap between the number of people who are eligible and the number who receive the benefit.

I am pleased to see that both the Chancellor and the Secretary of State are present, because I must tell the Chancellor that the Department for Work and Pensions provides much better information and explicitly investigates take-up of means-tested benefits in a way that the Treasury refuses to do. One of the problems is that, as the Chancellor gradually takes over these benefits, the level of public information, which enables us to assess take-up, declines. In fact, the only material that we have is a Department for Work and Pensions research report that suggested that take-up of the working families tax credit is running at an average of 62 per cent. among all eligible families. That is 10 per cent. lower than the take-up of the old family credit. It is running at an incredibly low 31 per cent. among eligible dual-earner couples, and at 49 per cent. among all eligible couples. In other words, fewer than half the couples eligible for the working families tax credit actually receive it. That is why the Chancellor thought that he had taken 1 million children out of poverty when he had not.

The gap in the Chancellor's strategy is that he has nothing to say about how he will increase take-up, apart from spending ever more money on the advertising budget. However, the real problem is not that the advertising budget is too low but the complexity and confusion for which he is responsible. He has imposed on families an incredibly complicated set of changes that go right back to 1999. That is when he proudly announced the working families tax credit—I now quote the normally sober pages of the *Financial Times*—assisted by

"Dennis the Menace, Postman Pat and a Womble."

After he had launched the working families tax credit, he took them back to the Treasury and asked them to help him to design the next credit—and the next one.

Between 1999 and 2003, we will have had the following: the abolition of family credit, the introduction of the working families tax credit, the introduction of the child care tax credit, the abolition of the married couples allowance, the introduction of an employment credit, the introduction of the children's tax credit, the introduction of a baby tax credit, the abolition of the working families tax credit, the abolition of the children's tax credit, the abolition of the baby tax credit, the introduction of a child tax credit, the abolition of the employment credit and the introduction of a working tax credit. That is what the Chancellor will have done between 1999 and 2003. It averages out as a new tax credit for families every six months.

Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): That is good, supporting families.

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Lady says that it is good, but how many of her constituents can find their way through the system that the Chancellor has created? That is why he has the problem of low take-up.

Further complexity was buried in the Red Book published yesterday. We thought that the changes would happen in April 2003, but that is no longer the case. Instead, the planned start is April 2003, and I hope that Treasury Ministers will give us a bit more detail about how the system is supposed to work. However, the child tax credit is no longer being introduced in one stage in 2003. Instead, we will have a process of migration whereby some people move on to the child tax credit in October 2003 and others do not move on to it until April 2004. The Chancellor will be running two systems in 2003–04.

At one point, the pension credit was supposed to be introduced in April 2003, but that will now happen in October 2003. The Child Support Agency was supposed to be introducing its reforms in April of this year—before that, it was supposed to be at the end of 2001—but those changes have been deferred with no new date given.

I do not know why the Government drove information technology experts abroad with IR35, because they will need them to introduce all the changes. The danger is that, between 2002 and 2004, we shall have nothing less than a total shambles as the Government try to introduce all the new schemes. The pension credit will be on the old computer and then it will be on a new one. We do not have a date for the Child Support Agency changes and the child tax credit will be phased in over three stages. Our constituents and poor people are expected to find their way through the system so that they can enjoy the increases in their incomes that Ministers have boasted about. The danger is that people will not be able to find their way through the maze that Ministers have created. That is the problem with their record.

Mr. Connarty: I can give the hon. Gentleman a figure. Some 1,881 families in my constituency will receive the increase in the working families tax credit that is coming in. He seemed to be suggesting—although he appeared to lose his way—that failures resulted from people's failure to take up the credit. However, he and his colleagues need to do what I am trying to do. Everyone who needs advice from me or from local authorities should be able to receive it so that they can fill in the forms correctly and take up the tax credits to which they are entitled. Will he assure me that he will campaign among his colleagues so that they will provide similar advice, thereby ensuring that their constituents receive the credits that the Chancellor is offering them? Or will the hon. Gentleman leave people in poverty because it suits his political ends?

Mr. Willetts: Of course I want people to receive the benefits to which they are legally entitled. I urge people to take up the working families tax credit. When that is abolished, as it will be in less than a year, and reappears in a different form, I will urge them to take that up as well. I will even put in a bit of effort to try to explain the Chancellor's changes. I ask the hon. Gentleman to do something in return, however. Will he table a parliamentary question that does not just ask how many of his constituents receive the working families tax credit but asks how many are eligible for it? Will he then come back and tell the House what he thinks about the take-up of that credit? We can then have a serious debate about the problem that I am trying to draw to the attention of the House.

The Chancellor has created a structure that is so complicated that we have a problem with take-up. If it were just a disaster for the welfare and social security system, we might be able to write it off as a tragic mistake. However, the same problem appears in a completely different area of policy that is the Chancellor's other great preoccupation. He is almost as interested in productivity as he is in creating new tax credits.

Lynne Jones: I do not know whether this will surprise the hon. Gentleman, but I agree with his concerns about

[Lynne Jones]

the complexities of the tax credits. But he has not said what he would do to increase work incentives and to assist poor families. Does he agree that it would be better to put additional resources into substantially increasing child benefit and to claw the money back from better-off families through a progressive tax system?

Mr. Willetts: Perhaps I might take this opportunity to say what I think the Chancellor should have done. He missed an opportunity when he came to office. He could have achieved everything that he wanted to achieve with the family credit. He did not need to go through four years of structural turbulence and change. All that he needed to do was put more money into the family credit.

We argued all along that there was no evidence to support the view that it was important to deliver the in-work top-up through the payroll. We asked the Treasury about the mystical significance of paying benefits through the payroll, but it did not provide any empirical evidence to support its approach. No such evidence exists.

In this Budget, in one respect at least, the Chancellor is following the advice that we offered him. He is returning to paying most family payments to the caring parent. He has abandoned the belief that that money needs to go through the payroll, but he has unfortunately created a new payroll benefit instead. The working tax credit, which will largely go to a different group of people, has been carefully designed so that it does not go to the people who tend to be poor. He has excluded the under-25s and they tend to have particularly low incomes. He has created a new payroll benefit, but most family payments will go back to being the benefits that they should have been all along. It is a pity that we have had to have this elaborate detour in the course of which many hundreds of thousands of people who are entitled to the tax credits have not been able to receive them.

Lynne Jones: Although the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the take-up of family credit was higher than for the working families tax credit, the evidence is that that occurred merely because the family credit was in existence for longer. His solution would still face the problem of inadequate take-up. For family credit, take-up was about 75 per cent.

Mr. Willetts: The take-up of family credit was, indeed, rising, and I hope that the take-up of the tax credits will rise. The increase in the take-up of the family credit is another reason why the Chancellor's policy in 1999 was a mistake. He had something that was becoming widely understood, and the take-up of family credit was up to 91 per cent. However, instead of sticking with the credit, he believed in a year-zero fallacy. Labour Members believed that nothing had happened before 1997 unless it was terrible.

The Chancellor could not bring himself to say that the incomes of people in low-paid jobs had already been boosted by family credit and that he wished to put more money into it. He had to pretend that there was no help for low-paid families before 1997, and that is why he had to have a new benefit with a new name so that he could write family credit out of history. That is part of what he did, and the losers are those who have suffered from the catastrophic fall in take-up. I hope that the take-up of the Chancellor's new tax credits will rise. However, the chances of the take-up of the new working tax credit becoming high are pretty slim. Let us hope that he achieves a high level of take-up.

I am trying to argue that the problem is not a one-off. I am arguing that exactly the same can be seen with productivity—the other thing with which the Chancellor is preoccupied. His record on productivity is exactly the same as with all his credits—endless initiatives, with the aim of improving the productivity of the British economy.

As with the attempt to reduce child poverty, it would also be a very good thing if our economy's productivity were to increase. We would like productivity to improve, and in every Budget—this one is no exception—we see a long list of specific measures that are supposed to improve the productivity of the British economy. Meanwhile, what happens to its productivity? The answer is that it is somewhere around average and, if anything, its performance is declining compared with our historical record of the past few years.

The Chancellor's measures to increase productivity are having no effect whatsoever on productivity. Given that we as a country spend rather more on information technology and have been at the head of its introduction—ahead of many countries in euroland—we would expect, other things being equal, our productivity performance to exceed theirs. In fact, our productivity performance is roughly similar to the European average, despite unusually high spending on IT, suggesting that we are significantly underperforming in all other respects. So we have exactly the same phenomenon—we have endless fiddling, tinkering interventions, with no impact on the thing that the Chancellor claims he is trying to address.

The pattern with this Chancellor is that he is best at the things in which he is not interested. His biggest single triumph as Chancellor was to take his hands off monetary policy and give independence to the central bank. *[Interruption.]* Yes, we now recognise that that has been a great success. We support it and believe that it has significantly improved the conduct of British macro-economic policy. The Chancellor's giving the conduct of monetary policy to an independent central bank has worked. Since then, however, he has put his restless intellectual energies and those of his Department into other objectives—productivity and the tax credits—and that is where he is failing to deliver. He is best at the things that he gives to others and worst at the things that he insists on fiddling with himself.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): For the record, will the hon. Gentleman remind the House of which of the three main parties included the independence of the central bank in its 1997 manifesto?

Mr. Willetts: I thought that there were only two main parties. I presume from the hon. Gentleman's leading question that perhaps the party that he represents advocated an independent central bank. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is in his place, and he will know that we had already made progress towards that policy before 1997. Nevertheless, it has been a great success, but if the Chancellor looks at his table on long-term interest rates, he will clearly see that those rates were already falling in the mid-1990s, as we gave greater operational independence to the Bank of England.

I will not cavil, however. We welcome the achievement of the independent central bank, but the Chancellor should not then have started to fiddle with other things instead. The more attention a policy gets, the less successful its delivery. That is the tragedy of his chancellorship. We would like the Chancellor or the Secretary of State to tell us about some of the other things about which they promised they would be radical, but on which the Budget was almost completely silent.

What has happened to the savings gateway and the child trust fund? We were told that that was the transforming idea for this Parliament and that it would change the nature of the welfare state. Needless to say—this is typical of the Government—there are three pilot projects in obscure parts of the country, with a report due in two or three years. The Government got their headlines during the last election campaign by promising radical delivery of that policy, but absolutely nothing has happened.

What about pensions? In the past few months, there has been a catastrophic decline in people's prospects of enjoying an income from their funded pensions when they retire, as one company scheme after another has closed to new members. That is a direct consequence of the decision that the Chancellor took in his 1997 Budget to impose a new tax on pension funds. What does he have to say about that in his Red Book? He says that

"the Government is concerned that a number of employers have taken the opportunity to reduce their pension contributions."

He can say that again.

The prospect of millions more people being dependent on means-tested benefits in future as a result of the closure of their final salary pension schemes is the most important single change currently taking place that will affect the Department for Work and Pensions, so the Government's being concerned is really not good enough. I hope that the Secretary of State will attempt in his speech to say what the Government will do about that very serious problem.

The Conservative party has been open-minded about the reform of health care. The Chancellor's Budget statement, the Red Book and today's statement make it clear that the Government have a closed mind. They do not believe that we can learn from the continent of Europe how to organise health care in future. I think that we can learn from Europe. The Budget represents a missed opportunity, and the reason why the Opposition will not support the Budget tax increases in the Divisions on Tuesday is very simple.

The Chancellor looks to the continent of Europe when it comes to increasing the tax burden, regulating the labour market and imposing new burdens on business. In other words, he copies the worst aspects of the continental European model. However, when it comes to how health care systems are organised in continental Europe and how those systems ensure the mixed financing of health care, which clearly works and is a success story, he closes his mind and rules out options that can be developed by learning from how things are done on the continent. He has got things exactly the wrong way around. He should learn from the things on the continent that work, not from the things there that do not work. That is why we oppose the Budget.

2.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Talking of continental Europe, I understand that the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is going to Germany tomorrow to address his sister party on the revival of conservatism. One cannot help but have a great deal of sympathy for the audience that he will address. I hope that what he has to say tomorrow will be rather more illuminating than what he had to say about the Budget this afternoon. I am sure that his audience will be absolutely fascinated by his critique of the wiring of the Child Support Agency computer system and by the fact that his mind has gone completely blank in relation to what happened to poverty 10 years ago, when he was advising the then Conservative Government.

Had the man from Mars arrived in the Chamber this afternoon, he would have been forgiven for not believing that this is the first day of four-day Budget debate, not least because the shadow Chancellor is not even in the Chamber—let alone opening the debate, as used to be the case on such occasions. The shadow Secretary of State certainly could not be accused of concentrating on the big picture. He had precious little to say about health. In particular, he could not tell us whether the Conservative party proposed to match the increased funding that we announced yesterday. He could not tell us whether he believed that we should spend more or less on the fight against poverty and helping families with children. He had absolutely nothing to say on the economy—which, after all, ought to be central to any Budget debate.

One of the key differences between this debate and the Budget debates that we used to have years ago is that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out his Budget proposals yesterday from a position of almost unprecedented strength and stability in the British economy. Five years ago and in successive Budgets, we set a course for stability in the economy not just for one or two years, but for the long term. We took the necessary tough decisions right at the start of that Parliament, and we took more necessary decisions yesterday.

It is interesting that the shadow Secretary of State gave us credit for one policy—giving independence to the Bank of England. As he rightly said, that has been one of the principal ingredients in building that long-term economic stability. The hon. Gentleman then had the gall to say that the Conservatives were secretly in favour of that policy and were working towards something that we always thought they opposed. That casts new light on what was going on in the Treasury when they were in government: they were making steady progress towards something that they said on every occasion they were against.

Indeed, the only time that I ever heard Conservative politicians say that they were in favour of an independent Bank of England was when a Chancellor left office. When they made their resignation speeches, they said that they were in favour of something that they had always said they opposed. Perhaps that explains why 10 years ago to this very year, the Conservative Government presided over a catastrophic mess in the economy, which largely contributed to their defeat four years later.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall now give way to somebody else to whom Labour Members owe a great deal, because he, too, contributed substantially to his party's defeat five years ago.

Sir Michael Spicer: On the Monetary Policy Committee and the independence of the central bank, is it not the case that, if that has been a success, one reason is that the Government have been protected from their own Back Benchers when they have pressed the Government to break the inflation target? When I was on the Treasury Committee, we were constantly faced with Labour Members trying to get the Government to break the inflation target. Is it not right that the reason why the Government have not is that they are hiding behind the Monetary Policy Committee?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman knows a thing or two about the trouble that Back Benchers can cause their Government. If the last Prime Minister were here, he would have something to say about the hon. Gentleman; indeed, my recollection is that he had a very unparliamentary term for the hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues.

We gave the bank independence, which helped to produce stability, low interest rates and lower mortgage rates, but we have introduced other important policies. The latest figures show that 1.5 million more people are in employment, which is a significant achievement when the House remembers that in the mid-1980s more than 300,000 young people were on the dole for over a year; today's figure is about 4,500, which is a measure of how far we have travelled and the changes that we have made. It is not just about the monetary decisions we have made, but about the other decisions that the Chancellor has made.

Yesterday, building on that strength and stability, the Chancellor outlined the three challenges facing us: encouraging enterprise; taking the next steps to end child poverty and providing more support for families with children, as well as making work pay; and building on our investment in public services, especially the health service, to which I shall return shortly.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: I want to deal with the steps that we have taken over the past five years to achieve our goals, but before doing so, I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) who, I recall, spent many happy years in the Treasury secretly working towards the independence of the Bank of England.

Mr. Jack: May I refresh the right hon. Gentleman's memory? The British economy has been growing for the past 10 years—five years under the Labour Government, and five under the Conservative Government. Yesterday, the present Government reaffirmed the 2.5 inflation target which we set and worked towards. We strengthened public finances, admittedly after a period of economic difficulty resulting from a cyclical downturn. Will the Secretary of State at least acknowledge that under the chancellorship of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), the foundations for the strength of the British economy were put in place?

Mr. Darling: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a great supporter and admirer of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), if not his predecessors. He referred to economic difficulties; they could also be characterised as two of the longest and deepest recessions of the last century. In the five years since we came to office there have been two economic downturns, the most recent caused by what happened in the United States last year. The key difference between Britain now and Britain in the past, not just under the right hon. Gentleman's Government, to be fair, but under Labour Governments as well, is that we could weather those downturns because we took steps to ensure that we have a fundamentally strong economy.

I dare say that, later in our debate, the good professor will bleat about what we ought to have been done in the first two years of the last Parliament. However, because we made a difficult and tough decision to stick to the spending totals that we inherited, we were able to repay huge amounts of debt to put the economy in a much stronger position. That is the key difference between what we have done in the past five years under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the miserable rollercoaster regime of the last Government, of whom the right hon. Member for Fylde was a member.

We established stability; building on it, we have been able to switch spending to our priorities. In addition, because we have cut debt and unemployment, we have been able to release resources to spend on public services and help families and pensioners, which simply did not happen in the past. It is worth remembering that as a result of the reduction in debt interest payments, we have released £8 billion and saved almost £5 billion in unemployment costs because we have been able to help more people into work. By cutting debt and unemployment, we have been able to tackle the backlog of under-investment that we inherited.

All that has been going on for the past five years. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out the way in which we can build on that work, setting out both the money that is now available for the next spending review period and, critically, plans to put more money into the health service, which everyone agrees is necessary.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Darling: Before I deal with what we are doing to get people into work, I happily give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty).

Mr. Connarty: My right hon. Friend may cover the point I wish to make when he talks about work. The Opposition gave money away to their friends when they privatised the utilities, but we took it back to create the new deal and put people back into work. They looked after the few, but we looked after the many, which is why we have the reward of so much employment while they had so much unemployment.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): But they were thinking about doing what we did.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East is right, but my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham

and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) is also right: we do not have the slightest doubt that the hon. Member for Havant will maintain that the Conservatives were secretly working towards a windfall tax on the utilities, but never got round to telling us that that was their policy.

It is worth reflecting that the figures from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work show that the number of people in work has reached a new high of more than 28 million. Last month saw the third consecutive monthly fall in the number of people claiming unemployment benefit. I have never sought to make too much of one month or even a short run of favourable figures but, bearing in mind the dire predictions last autumn, particularly by the shadow Chancellor, whose judgment on this is as flawed as it is on other subjects, it is a significant achievement that, because of the strength of the economy, we have got more people into work.

Despite that, however, we must do much more; many people are still not in work, but ought to be. A key step in the Budget is to make sure that we break down the barriers that prevent people from getting work; in particular, we must make work pay. The Budget will be remembered for a significant and major change in tax and benefit policy. For years, people have argued and campaigned for the integration of the tax and benefit system; we are starting that process with the working tax credit and the child tax credit, which the Chancellor announced yesterday. The Budget builds on the measures that we have already taken to make work pay; it supports children, whether their parents are in or out of work; it tackles child poverty; and it ensures, critically, that the tax and benefit system helps people when they most need it—for example, when they first start work or are looking after young children.

It is important that the House realises the difference that the Budget makes; perhaps the few Opposition Members present can tell their colleagues about that difference, because it will be directly relevant when they come to knock on their constituents' doors in a few years' time. The working tax credit, which helps single earners with wages of up to £10,500 a year and couples with incomes of up to £14,000 a year, provides significant assistance in ensuring that people without children, as well as people with children, realise that getting into work will result in a big difference to the money in their pocket. As the Chancellor said yesterday, the child tax credit will help families with incomes of up to £58,000; it will make a real difference by reducing the amount that many individuals pay in tax and will help many people.

Our central economic objective is to get more people into work, as that is the best way of getting people out of poverty and opening doors for them that would otherwise remain closed. As a result of the new deal and other measures we made work possible, but we still had to do more to make sure that we tackled a problem in the welfare system that we inherited—making sure that it is worth while to take up a job. Over the past five years, we have introduced measures such as the minimum wage and the working families tax credit, all of which were opposed by the Conservatives. It is pretty clear from what the hon. Member for Havant said that they are still against those measures, and will remain so.

The Budget takes those measures a step further. It will make work pay significantly more than benefits and it extends the help already available to families with children to all single people and couples on low incomes. From next April the working tax credit will provide extra help for people over the age of 25. For example, for a couple with no children it will pay at least £183 a week—that is £53 more than at present. For a single disabled person, it will pay £22 more than now. A lone parent working full-time will be guaranteed £237 a week, as well as help with child care, making work pay £70 more than income support.

That will make a real difference—something that never happened in the 18 years during which the hon. Member for Havant supported the Government or advised them behind the scenes, no doubt working secretly towards a policy of giving more to people when they got into work. Perhaps I will go to Germany tomorrow to see what else he was working towards but not telling us.

It is critical, as we have always said, that new rights are matched by new responsibilities. We announced previously that as we extend the new Jobcentre Plus network across the country, we will require everybody of working age on benefit to come in for work-focused interviews. There will be more conditions attached to the receipt of benefit, because we believe that it is only right that if we offer more assistance to get into work, people ought at the very least to know about it, and an increasing number of people will be required to do something actively to help themselves become independent. Last autumn I announced the new StepUp programme, which will start later this month in six areas and will be extended to 20 areas by the end of this year.

We have found that where we require as a matter of course that people go on a two-week gateway in preparation for going on the new deal, there is a better chance of them getting into work, so we will extend that on a compulsory basis not just in central London, but to Manchester, Swansea and Dundee. It is extra help with more responsibility, and it works.

We are also tackling a problem with which all hon. Members are familiar: older people who are continually drifting in and out of work. Because people cannot join the current new deal if they have been out of work for 18 months, many people miss out. Now, if they have been unemployed in any 18 of the past 36 months, they can join the new deal for the over-25s. Again, that is valued help and the evidence is that it works.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the measure will also help seasonal workers? There are many in my constituency in the seaside towns of Swanage and Weymouth who go into employment during the summer when work is available in the tourism industry and then leave it in the winter. They fall out of many of the statistics and certainly out of eligibility for the new deal. Will the new measure make them eligible for such help?

Mr. Darling: Those are precisely the people about whom we are concerned. Until now, because they came in and out of work, there was never a long enough period for us to help them. I cannot tell my hon. Friend when the programme will be extended to his constituency, but the preliminary evidence is that it works and we want to extend it.

As the Chancellor said yesterday, I shall shortly announce a national campaign with employers and others to help get more lone parents into work. I am convinced that

[Mr. Darling]

we can do far better to get more lone parents into work. For obvious reasons, they are often much more motivated than others to get into work, and we are offering them more help and support. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that because of the interventions that we introduced, there are well over 100,000 fewer lone parents on income support than there were when we came into office.

By building on stability, setting our priorities and cutting unemployment, we have been able to do more not just to make the country more economically efficient, but to make it a fairer country where more people can participate and get on. Sadly, the previous Government not only neglected that, but in many cases virulently opposed it.

Jonathan Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one aspect of people taking part and being treated fairly is that they have some protection in work? There have been 400 additional union agreements with employers this year, and we should be pleased about that. Working in partnership means that people have some sort of protection. I do not believe that the Opposition thought about that when they were in government.

Mr. Darling: The Opposition were never too hot on looking after people who worked. They were the party which said, for example, that the minimum wage would cost 1 million jobs. The shadow Chancellor said that, and he has a rocky record on reliability. He was wrong on that, and my hon. Friend's comments are right.

I turn to the measures that we announced yesterday to help families and children and the progress that we are making towards ending child poverty. It is an awful pity that although my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) asked the hon. Member for Havant a number of times—having given him notice of the question three weeks ago—the hon. Gentleman's mind was blank about what happened when he was the principal adviser to the Conservative party on these matters some 10 years ago.

It is worth reflecting that in total, following all the personal tax and benefit changes that we have introduced since 1997—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he should address the Chair?

Mr. Darling: I shall address you with great pleasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was about to tell you of the good things that we have done since 1997. Following the changes that we have made, families with children will be on average £1,200 a year better off after inflation, and the poorest 20 per cent. of families will be on average £2,400 a year better off after inflation. That is a measure of how much we have done in five years.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): My right hon. Friend will recall that when he spoke to the all-party group on poverty at the end of February, he promised that a consultation document would be issued shortly on how the Government measure child poverty. Can he say more about that?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I can. The hon. Member for Havant mentioned the document that we published. He had the decency to say that he had not read it, before going on to denounce its conclusions.

For the past three years the Government have published in their "Opportunity for All" series three separate measures of poverty—absolute poverty, persistent levels of poverty and relative poverty. We also set out measures of deprivation in relation to education, health and so on. All of them are important.

Over the past year or so, academics and others have asked whether we would consider measuring poverty in different ways, as is the case in other countries. Indeed, the hon. Member for Havant said that we should go to other countries with open minds to see what is on offer. That is precisely what we are doing. When he is travelling round Europe looking at health systems, perhaps he should also look at the way in which poverty is measured there.

We are setting out in clear terms what we have done and possible alternative ways of measuring poverty, many of which owe much to Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics. The Government are neutral on whether or not we change the measures that we use. We have an open mind. We are consulting and we will hear what people have to say. One thing is important, however. On any measure whatsoever, child poverty in this country is coming down. The Conservatives could never say that.

It is obvious, especially in respect of relative poverty, that as a result of what we are doing, even at a time when the country's wealth is growing spectacularly, we are narrowing the gap between the richest and the poorest in the country. That is a measure of how much we are doing. The child tax credit which comes in next year will for the first time provide a single system of income-related support for families and children. That in itself will make a major contribution towards the eradication of child poverty.

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I dare say that all the time—and I did not know it!—the hon. Gentleman was working towards an anti-poverty strategy. Let us hear all about it.

Mr. Willetts: I have a simple question for the Secretary of State. I look forward to reading his paper. Of course there are many ways of measuring child poverty, but we need an assurance that the target which he, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister set of taking 1 million children out of poverty and eliminating child poverty using the measure of 60 per cent. of median income still stands. The right hon. Gentleman can measure poverty in many different ways, but his target was formulated in terms of 60 per cent. of median income. Does he stand by that target?

Mr. Darling: The target that we set was to eradicate child poverty within a generation, and by 2004 to be a quarter of the way towards that. The public service agreement target is in place and we will stick to it. I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are about a third of the way towards meeting it in time, and about a third of the way along in terms of the number of children removed from poverty. I thank him very much for raising that point; I much appreciate it.

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I have answered the hon. Gentleman. He asked me about the PSA target, and I said that we were

sticking to it. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly, but I want to make some progress. I am very conscious that he overstayed his welcome; I do not want to do the same.

Let me return to the child tax credit. One of the big differences that it makes is that, for the first time, the tax system will recognise parents' obligations towards their children and the new demands that they bring. It allows parents to get help when they need it most and to take a break from their work without the catastrophic drop in income that they might otherwise have suffered. It treats families equitably. Alongside child benefit, on which it builds, the child tax credit provides support to families with incomes of up to £58,000, paid to the main carer. Some 90 per cent. of families will benefit, and many Budget commentators have noted the great effect that the policy has on so many families. Despite yesterday's national insurance increase, many families will gain from substantial reductions in the amount that they pay because of its implementation.

To pave the way towards the more generous credit, we will increase the child allowances in income support and jobseeker's allowance by £3.50 a week from October this year. That will mean that the amount paid to parents on income support to help them support their children will have gone up by 85 per cent. since 1997. We are also introducing other measures such as the extension of support for child care costs to help with approved child care in people's homes. That will particularly help people on shift work, who have had difficulties in the past.

All in all, we are introducing measures that will make a great deal of difference to many people and families in this country. Every single measure is opposed by the Conservative party. I listened to what the hon. Member for Havant had to say about these measures, but it returned us to the same problem that the Conservatives have with health. What they are against is spending more money, whether on health, tackling poverty or supporting families. I have considered the hon. Gentleman's argument; indeed, he has produced the same one month after month, so I can assure hon. Members who do not usually attend such debates that they get no better. He has a familiar style and always returns to the same point: he is against complexity. However, he has had to admit, as even the professor who speaks for the Liberals admits, that no matter what happens, support must be provided for people on low incomes. Inevitably, that means making some sort of assessment of people's need and income, but when it comes down to it, the Conservatives are against the fact that we are spending more money. When they say that they want a simpler system, they really mean that they want a meaner one. The hon. Gentleman kept mentioning family credit, but when we consider the family credit system to which he is so attached, we see that it is far from simple. Like the basic state pension, people think that it is simple, but it is complex when it is considered in detail.

When the Government came to office, lone parents were receiving an average of about £58 a week from family credit. By November last year, after the introduction of the working families tax credit, they were getting an average of more than £88 a week—£30 a week more. The amount will increase again as a result of the Budget. That is what upsets the Conservatives: the fact that we are spending more money.

So the argument is not about whether to help families on low and modest incomes, but about the level at which that help is set. There is nothing complex about that, as the hon. Member for Havant will find out when he knocks on doors at the next election. Even if he cannot do the maths, he will find that the voters can, just as he found when he proposed the abolition of the winter fuel payment, on which I seem to remember that the maths was also straightforward. Opposition Members need to focus on this point: for families with an income of less than £50,000 a year, the child tax credit will guarantee support for a first child of £26.50 a week, compared with only £11 in 1997. For families with an income of less than £13,000, it will guarantee an income of £54.25 a week, whether the parents are in or out of work. That is almost double the help that was available in 1997; it is about £28 a week more.

Even if the Conservatives cannot do the maths, families can. So too can pensioners, about whom the hon. Gentleman's argument is exactly the same. He is against the fact that the pension credit, which will take effect next year, will benefit about half of all pensioners. On average, it will give pensioner households about £400 a year. If the hon. Gentleman is against that, it is fine by me, but he will have some explaining to do. Not only are pensioners who pay tax not affected by the national insurance changes announced yesterday, but as their tax allowances are increasing above inflation next year, we will take a further 170,000 of them out of tax all together.

I find it very surprising that the hon. Gentleman had so little to say about health, especially as his party has had quite a lot to say—and very illuminating it has been, although unintentionally so.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Perhaps he will be talking about it in Germany.

Mr. Darling: As my right hon. Friend says, that might be what the Germans are getting tomorrow.

We have heard the Conservatives set out exactly the same approach on health that the hon. Gentleman has set out on families and pensions. They use exactly the same strategy: they rubbish the extra investment, say that it is impossible to do anything and then argue for cutting the money. The Conservative health spokesman said at a private meeting—it is a shame that he did not make the remark at a public meeting, but fortunately, somebody has made it public for us—that the Conservatives' strategy is to persuade people that the health service will not and cannot work, and then to argue that people should pay for their own health care in what he calls "self-pay". We can be clear what "self-pay" is, as the BUPA price list is on the internet and bears close examination, especially for people who will not get health insurance easily and would have to pay through the nose. The good doctor also said that he wanted to reduce public spending and that the most difficult part was to argue the Conservative alternative. He is not the only one. When I appeared on last night's "Newsnight", I saw that the shadow Chancellor was in some difficulty when he was asked about the Conservative alternative. After 18 years in government and five in opposition, he still does not know what the Conservative policy on health is.

Surely the central point is that there is cross-party consensus about the fact that the health service needs more money. Yet the Opposition cannot say whether they

[Mr. Darling]

would spend the same as us, or more or less than us. The question is fairly simple. We have said how much we think should be spent on the health service in the next five years, but the Conservatives cannot say whether they would match it.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservatives' difficulty stems from their deep hostility to the provision of public services? Far from seeing public services as a way of liberating and supporting individuals, they have always seen them as a burden, which is why they are so reluctant to pay for them.

Mr. Darling: The shadow Chancellor may secretly be working towards the same policy as ours. Perhaps that will be revealed on some suitable occasion. Many Conservatives have had an ideological objection to the national health service since it got going.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): No.

Mr. Darling: Come on; not even the hon. Gentleman can persuade me of that.

Mr. Bercow: I have used it for more than 30 years.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman would probably have used anything that he could have got his hands on all his life, but that still does not tell me that he is philosophically attracted to it.

People's ability to use the health service freely and on the basis of need is not only a question of social justice. It also makes economic sense. I can understand the Conservatives' aversion to equality or some sorts of fairness, but it does not make economic sense to take the route that they now appear to be taking. There is a consensus that more money needs to be spent, and there are two sources from which it can be obtained.

Mr. Jack: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: One moment; the right hon. Gentleman may wish to comment on this point, as he probably comes from the other wing of the Conservative party.

There are two sources of money, one of which is taxation. We have made it very clear that that is the best and fairest way of raising the money that our health service needs. The alternative is fees and charges. People can get insurance, but fees and charges would remain.

The Conservatives will have to face up to a problem as they travel around the world in search of a solution. They might want to fly to the United States to see what is on offer there. The Americans have a system of private insurance, and the average family insurance premium for the health service is about £100 a week. Problems would soon arise if we took that route. One does not have to go far in the United States before meeting people who say, "If you are very poor, you have Medicare; if you are fairly well off and in a company scheme, your company provides your health insurance"—that is a cost on the company, of course—"but if you lose your job you often lose your health insurance." Americans who are on the equivalent of our welfare-to-work programmes often say, "I'd love to go to work, but I'm terrified about health care for my children." Very many Americans are not covered, so they do not have health care. If that is what the Tories want, let them tell us, because that is the choice—taxation or the American style.

Despite everything that the Conservatives have led us to believe, they appear to have a new-found attraction to matters European, so why do not they take a day trip on the Eurostar to France? If they want social insurance, let them look at its cost. It costs French employers about £60 a week per employee. That is the reality of social insurance. Opting for what the shadow Health Secretary calls self-pay would mean that the sick pay for being sick.

There is a respectable argument to be had about this, so if the Conservatives want a debate, let them set out their policy. We believe that taxation is the fairest and the best way to fund the health service; they believe that it should be based on fees and charges. Whereas the shadow Chancellor says that he has not yet made up his mind and the hon. Member for Havant is vague, the shadow Health Secretary has made his view very clear: he has said in terms that he wants self-pay and that the great untapped market in Britain is health insurance.

If we are to have this great debate, I ask Conservative Members this. Under the Tory scheme, who pays, how much will they pay, and what will happen if they cannot? Until the Tories answer those questions, their credibility on this matter will be absolutely zero. In many people's eyes they have always been suspect on the health service, but if they cannot tell us who pays, how much they will pay and what happens if they cannot, people will have every right to believe, and to be fearful, that if the Conservatives got back into power the health service would be anything but safe in their hands.

Mr. Jack: May I take the Secretary of State back to the previous passage of his argument? Does he agree that the formulation of health policy is difficult? The Government's track record is as follows: first, accept Conservative plans; then, change through the 10-year NHS plan; and now, the Wanless plan. The Government have been in office for five years and have had three goes at trying to design a health care policy, and we still do not know whether it is correct. Is this not a complex and difficult matter?

Mr. Darling: Some aspects of health care are extremely complex and many decisions are difficult—I grant the right hon. Gentleman that—but the decision on whether to fund the health service from taxation or to make people pay through fees and charges is pretty simple: one has to choose between one or the other. No amount of travelling to Europe, the United States, or anywhere else in the world will solve the Conservatives' problem. They will have to answer the question. If they believe not in funding the health service through taxation, but in self-pay—as the shadow Health Secretary explicitly said—they must tell us who pays, how much, and what happens if they cannot. If they cannot do that, they are in real difficulty.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus) *rose—*

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: The idea that the Liberals have the answer is laughable.

I shall give way to both hon. Members, then move to a swift conclusion before I outstay my welcome.

Mr. Weir: The public funding of the health service is probably one of the few things about which I would agree with the Secretary of State. I want to add to the questions that he asked of Conservative Members. Under their proposed system, what would happen to those who are already long-term ill or disabled and cannot get health insurance at a reasonable cost?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Anyone who examines the small print of a private health insurance document will note that it seems absolutely great until one becomes ill or old. Today I asked someone to look on the internet at three of the main private health insurers' prospectuses. They all quote prices, but all have asterisks and footnotes saying, "If you are over the age of 60, you need to write separately and we will give you different rates."

The hon. Gentleman is probably right that this is the only thing that we agree about, but I am sure that he will acknowledge that one of the reasons why we have been able to increase health spending in Scotland by so much is that it is part of the United Kingdom, which has a Labour Government.

Mr. Davey: As the Secretary of State knows, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party agree that the health service should be paid for primarily through taxation. Can he explain how years four and five of the health service spending increases announced by the Chancellor yesterday will be paid for? Will they require any extra taxation?

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman looks at table C5 in the Red Book, that will all be explained to him. When it comes to giving us lectures on public spending, I remind the hon. Gentleman of what the Prime Minister said to his leader yesterday. The Liberal Democrats have commitments that would fill this Chamber three times over, all to by financed by 1p on income tax.

The differences between the two major parties are very clear. We have set out a clear course for building economic stability and for increasing investment in our public services. We will ensure that we do more to fight poverty and to help families with children; pensioners; and, in particular, the health service. We have clear, published plans that work, compared with a Conservative party that is increasingly evasive about its real intentions. Frankly, until the Conservatives are prepared to be straight about how much more or less they would spend and what their charging policy on the health service would be, they will have very little credibility.

I believe that the people of this country will trust our judgment and our belief in fairness and enterprise far more than they are tempted by the Conservative alternative. I commend the Budget to the House.

3.36 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): When our constituents see Prime Minister's questions, they often ask us, "Why do you lot always shout at each other and why are you always disagreeing? When you agree with someone, why don't you say so?" I therefore want to begin my remarks on behalf of the Liberal Democrats by saying that there are significant elements of the Budget that we welcome and agree with.

We very much welcome, and indeed had called for, the increased spending on the health service—a key issue in the Budget that I shall return to later.

On the specific areas for which the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is responsible, we welcome several of the changes to the children's tax credit arrangements which were announced yesterday. We welcome the fact that the difference between support for children whose parents are out of work and for those whose parents are in work has been levelled up. We particularly welcome the fact that that takes effect from October, as there was no requirement on the Government to do that—they could have started from April 2003, so it will be six months early.

I welcome the fact that the threshold at which support runs out altogether has risen from £42,000 to £58,000. Like several other hon. Members, I should perhaps declare an interest. So generous is the child tax credit that from April 2003 I will be entitled to it. It does make me start to wonder what is going on when even I start to be entitled to additional tapered support with the costs of my children. Nevertheless, raising that threshold has prevented some two-earner families from losing out.

I welcome the fact that the Government are addressing child care in one's own home, which will benefit people with irregular working patterns, among others.

Those are welcome, desirable changes, and it is important to put that on the record.

Lest my hon. Friends become too nervous and start drifting out of the Chamber more rapidly than they otherwise would, I should say that we have some important concerns to raise with the Secretary of State. On the child tax credit, it is not correct to say that the change that the Chancellor announced has avoided creating losers. I shall use the example of a professional couple who are both on £30,000 a year—say, senior public service workers such as a teacher and a nurse who have made some progress in their professions. At present, they get the full tax credit, which will be about £540 next year. From next year, when they have to add their incomes together, they will get nothing at all. In addition to the £300 or so each of additional national insurance, they will lose a £500 tax credit, so they will be £1,000 worse off overall.

If a scheme were defined from scratch, it is debatable whether it would provide for couples with a combined income of £60,000 to receive a means-tested version of support. That would be odd. However, they have been given the money. A few years ago, the married couples allowance was taken from them; a year later, they were given the children's tax credit to replace it. Two years later, in one fell swoop, they will lose £500 pounds on top of national insurance increases.

My colleagues and I sympathise with the view that direct taxation had to increase to pay for the health service. Although we would have used a different method, the national insurance rise is not an unreasonable way to finance the increases. However, removing a lump sum of £500 from hard-working families, some of whom work in the public services, is a swingeing loss on top of other tax rises.

[Mr. Steve Webb]

Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that those families have got used to having the £500, which will be taken from them overnight next April, and consider a transitional arrangement whereby families who have already benefited from the tax credit can retain it? Obviously, new families will not be entitled to it, but should not existing families have some protection? A tax rise of £1,000 in one go is substantial, and the Treasury should think again.

The Secretary of State used the phrase "making work pay". The Government constantly suggest that work always pays, but there is an exception that they have failed to tackle. Owner-occupiers who do not work can get their mortgage paid through income support, or whatever it will be called, or private insurance. When they take a job—of 16 hours a week under income support rules—they lose every penny of mortgage assistance. Perhaps the Secretary of State or the Financial Secretary can tell us whether work pays for families in that position.

Mortgages are a substantial part of the household budget, and if people lose all support when they take a low-paid job they can be worse off. The Government fail to grasp the nettle of housing costs. They have postponed reform on housing benefit, but, if anything, they have allowed private insurance to play a bigger role in providing help for people with mortgages.

I stress to the Financial Secretary that successive Governments have imagined that pushing mortgage support into the private market relieves the state of a burden. However, it creates a deeper unemployment trap. I know of constituents who have private mortgage insurance and cannot touch work because private insurers are even fussier than the Department for Work and Pensions. When anyone takes a job, all support stops and it cannot be given again. I hope that the Treasury will consider that new unemployment trap, which will become worse if, for example, house prices start to fall from their peak and there is negative equity. If unemployment rises by even a little, people who are increasingly likely to have private insurance will find that working does not pay. They are an important and growing group, which are excepted from the Government's goals.

If the Government had come clean about child poverty, we might have supported them and said, "Well done." On any definition, taking 500,000 people out of poverty is an achievement of which to be proud. However, we are disappointed, to put it charitably, by the way in which the Government have handled the matter. Instead of admitting that they promised to take 1 million children out of poverty but that they have barely done half the job, they tried to fiddle the figures.

On "Newsnight" recently, the Secretary of State said that when the Government claimed they would take 1 million children out of poverty, they meant that some children might fall into poverty if they took no action; that had not happened, so that accounted for some of the children. Politicians are mocked enough for breaking promises. If the Secretary of State says that he will take 1 million children out of poverty, one imagines that he means 1 million children who are currently in poverty. That is not an unreasonable assumption.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) tried to intervene when the Secretary of State made his confession. He said that the first goal was to take 1.1 million out of poverty by 2004 and that the Government were a third of the way there in time and in numbers. The same Secretary of State sat in the "Newsnight" studio and claimed that the Government had achieved their goal of getting 1 million children out of poverty. The Chancellor made the same claim during the general election campaign. The Secretary of State has now admitted on the record that the Government are a third of the way towards getting 1 million children out of poverty. Who was right—the Chancellor in the general election campaign or the Secretary of State today? I know of old that when the Secretary of State engages in fevered conversation with a ministerial neighbour, he is uncomfortable.

There is a serious debate to be held about child poverty. As the Secretary of State said, a report has been commissioned, inviting comments on how the Government should measure child poverty. It was published in good time for our debate this afternoon. It would be disrespectful to the hon. Member for Havant to suggest that I had leafed through it during his contribution. I therefore speculate on its contents. I shall be charitable, as is my wont, towards the Government, and assume that the wider debate about defining poverty is the sort of discussion that I called for when they published the figures last week, rather than an attempt to get off the hook about missing their original target. I shall assume that they will retain the target and be judged against it. In that context, I welcome the document.

If we are to have a popular front against child poverty, we must do it in a way that folk can grasp, not through percentages of medians below thresholds.

James Purnell: I confirm that the hon. Gentleman welcomed the figures because I heard him speak at the End Child Poverty Campaign meeting last week. He said he believed that different methods of examining figures should be used. However, I am not clear from that meeting or his comments today whether he supports the child tax credit or whether he is worried about the means-testing involved, as he said last week.

Mr. Webb: If the hon. Gentleman consults the record, he will discover that I led for the Liberal Democrat party in the debate on the children's tax credit and that we voted for it. There is no ambiguity about that.

Mr. Willetts: I think that the hon. Gentleman means the child tax credit.

Mr. Webb: I do. The hon. Gentleman is right; I got the name wrong, as did the Secretary of State on several occasions. That probably proves a point.

Perhaps the Secretary of State would be so kind as to record my comments as representation No. 1 in response to his consultation paper. I believe that we should have a measure of child poverty that permits headline figures, not 50 indicators. The "Opportunity for All" approach and the thick documents that the Government have produced are right to highlight the fact that poverty is multidimensional, but the political sting is taken out of it because they contain no summary of progress. Instead, we get, "This measure's gone up, that measure's gone down, this measure's unmeasurable." The latter is the most common problem with the Government's figures. We want a

summary of progress on tackling poverty that catches the public's imagination and has relative as well as absolute dimensions.

The Government are right to have a poverty target that is about one's standard of living relative to society. We do not want to freeze the target in the Victorian or post-war eras. As we become more prosperous, our expectations for our children increase and any good poverty measure should provide for that. The Secretary of State will be familiar with the "Breadline Britain" studies of the 1980s and 1990s. They were not perfect, but they asked people what they needed to be a part of society.

People could grasp the basics—for example, that children should be able to have a family holiday once a year, and new, not second-hand clothes; that parents should be able to afford to send children on school trips rather than keeping them off sick because they could not afford it. The studies surveyed the number of children who could not get those items. If we track them over time, the list changes. Fifty years ago, having a television was not a necessity, but nowadays a child whose parents cannot afford a television is probably missing out at school. The list changes but a Government who ensure that no child has to live in a damp, draughty house or miss out on a school trip and who make progress on those matters are rewarded.

The Chancellor has been accused of doing good by stealth and putting money into tax credits but hoping that nobody will notice because there is no public support for tackling poverty. However, poverty is defined obscurely. If we defined it in a populist way, many people would say that they wanted their children to have a holiday or new shoes and that therefore they wanted that for other people's children. They would sign up to the expenditure.

I support the Government's relative measure. I should like them to set out a headline measure—of course, there will be reams of supporting statistics—for which the Government can be held to account. I hope that that is a constructive response to the consultation process.

At the risk of deviating from being constructive, I want to draw to the House's attention a line in yesterday's Budget speech relating to the treatment of teenage single parents. It has not attracted a great deal of attention, but it was a rather strange line. It stated that teenage single parents who are not living with their parents should not be allowed council houses. That rang bells, and I have done some research on the matter. In 1996, *The Independent* referred to a speech made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) at the Conservative party conference as long ago as 1993. It states that

"the then housing Minister Sir George Young invoked an image of teenage girls leaping up the council house waiting lists with new babies".

This is the origin of the present idea.

The concept was taken up with enthusiasm by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in 1996. This is rather intriguing. I am again quoting from *The Independent:*

"Mr. Redwood, whose Conservative 2000 Foundation will be launched on Wednesday, said young mothers should be housed in hostels rather than leapfrogging 'the couple in their twenties who decide to wait before having a child' in the queue for council housing. He deplored the assumption that 'the illegitimate child is the passport to a council flat and a benefit income'."

The most intriguing aspect of all this is the Labour party's response as reported at the time:

"John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, said: 'The Tories want to return to the 19th century and put mothers and babies in the workhouse.'"

The newspaper went on to describe the scheme proposed by the right hon. Member for Wokingham:

"Mr. Redwood's hostels would offer a mix of studying, working and childcare".

If I understand the provision correctly, that is precisely what the Government are proposing. The idea resurfaced in the social exclusion unit's paper of 1999, which advocated something similar. There are two possible responses. One is to assume that new Labour has adopted a right-wing Conservative agenda. Far be it from me to suggest that. The alternative response is to suppose that this proposal is entirely benign and that the Government are saying that chucking teenage single mums into council flats and leaving them to rot is not a good idea. I am with them on that. I think we would get that far together.

The question is, what is going to happen instead? What will be the element of coercion in this proposal? Perhaps the Secretary of State, or whoever is going to wind up this debate, could respond to that question. How much coercion will there be? To what extent are existing teenage single mums in council flats going to be forced out against their will? To what extent are the incoming teenage lone parents going to be forced to live in hostel-type accommodation? Are we talking about a small number of units of good-quality, supportive accommodation that will provide a basis for work and child care, or are we talking about large institutions?

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): May I give the hon. Gentleman an example from Aberdeen? The Foyer organisation is a voluntary sector organisation working with the homeless. It takes lone parents and helps them, gives them support, and ensures that they will be able to sustain any kind of tenancy. It also assists them in the job market, helping them into work. It often has to help people to overcome a drug habit, and gives a high level of support to very disadvantaged youngsters in Aberdeen. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited it more than once; he complains that we keep taking him there. It is an excellent model of how we should be helping young people to come out of poverty and a dreadful lifestyle and into accommodation and work that they can sustain.

Mr. Webb: We would all agree that that is entirely desirable. Will the hon. Lady reflect, however, on whether that sort of project would work if the lone parents in question had been forced to go there? Presumably they go there of their own free will at present, because they are attracted by what is on offer. The key question is whether lone parents in this position will be enticed by what these schemes have to offer. If so, they will probably be queueing up.

If the schemes are as good as the hon. Lady suggests, if they are to be extended nationwide, and if the money is going to be put in to them, great. People will not need forcing, because the schemes will be an attractive alternative to being left to rot in a council flat. My suspicion, however, is that that is not exactly what is

[Mr. Webb]

being proposed. The amount of detail is very scant. We have looked through the documents, and we have found scarcely an item about the provision.

Mr. Willetts: I might be able to help the hon. Gentleman with the history of this idea. He has referred to discussions that took place on it pre-1997. He omitted to say that the Prime Minister made great play of it in 1998 in one of the Labour Government's classic welfare crackdowns. We get those every few months. At that time, there was a welfare crackdown story on the front page of the *Daily Mail*, with a signed piece by the Prime Minister, which stated that teenage lone parents should not have houses of their own and that they should all go into hostels. He spun that idea for a week in 1998. Nothing happened then, and we have no reason to believe that anything will happen this time.

Mr. Webb: I am not sure whether I welcome the idea that nothing will happen this time. We have been reflecting on what the Conservatives might have done, had they been allowed to continue. Perhaps they would have taken action on this front; perhaps that is where they were heading. They have not needed to do anything, however, because the present Government have taken up that agenda.

Miss Begg: The hon. Gentleman has still not given us any evidence as to why he thinks that this Government are proposing what he seems to think is a worst-case scenario. Where is the evidence for that?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Lady is well versed in the language of new Labour, and the rights and responsibilities agenda. What will be proposed here, as in so many elements of the welfare reform package, is compulsion. In this Budget, lone parents with children under five are going to be compelled to have interviews on pain of loss of benefit. The partners of the unemployed and of the disabled are also going to be compelled to go in for interviews.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: In a moment. Compulsion is central to the new Labour agenda. That is why I suspect—more than that; I am almost certain—that coercion will be central to this proposal. If the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Rosemary McKenna) wants to tell me that there will not be any compulsion, I shall be delighted to hear it.

Rosemary McKenna: Will the hon. Gentleman tell me what is so wrong with ensuring that young, vulnerable people come for an interview to see how they can be assisted into work and into a better lifestyle?

Mr. Webb: If all these things are so good for people, why do we have to force them to do them? That is the key question. If the provision is self-evidently good for people—if they are being offered support, not threats—why do they need forcing?

The Financial Secretary will have the chance to respond to the debate and to put on record today whether there will be compulsion in these schemes. I will happily take an intervention from him now if he would like to tell us the answer. This is a simple yes or no question. He does not want to intervene on me because he cannot say whether there will be compulsion. This is why we want to put this on record.

Mr. Darling: I am aware that I spoke for a long time earlier, but I can answer that point. For the avoidance of doubt, it is a condition of receiving benefit that anyone of working age comes in for an interview to find out what help is available. Will the hon. Gentleman tell me what is wrong with that? If it is obligatory to send our children to school, surely it cannot be too great an obligation to say to someone, "You have got to find out what help is on offer." Even for the hon. Gentleman, that was a daft point.

Mr. Webb: The House will have noticed that the Secretary of State did not answer the question. The question was: will teenage single mothers be forced out of council flats into hostels, or some sort of supportive accommodation?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): That was not the question.

Mr. Webb: The Financial Secretary says that that was not the question. It may not be the question that he wants to answer, but it is the question that I am asking. We have not had an answer. The House has not been told whether teenage single mums will be forced into hostel-type accommodation. We do not know how big the accommodation will be, or what level of support it will provide. We do not know what the penalty for saying no will be.

If these projects are to be paragons of virtue, like the Foyer project that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South described, they will be wonderful. People will queue up to get into them, and we will not need to use force. If they are not, there might be some resistance, which is where the Secretary of State's penchant for using force will come in. The House will notice that that possibility has not been denied.

Mr. Connarty: I am amazed. I now know why my colleagues in England dislike the Liberals so much. The hon. Gentleman's use of this scenario is a scare tactic. Does he not think that there is something wrong with saying that we will leave people socially alienated and excluded? That is what happens to people who are slapped into council flats with no support and no compulsion to go and see an expert who has strategies to get them out of their social exclusion and alienation. The hon. Gentleman wants to leave those people to languish, and he should take responsibility for that. That is what he is advocating at the moment.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. The only distinction between my approach and his is that I want to offer teenage single mums the chance to have such attractive accommodation and he wants to force them into it. He obviously thinks that they may not find it attractive. We have had no denial of that. If that

accommodation is attractive, why are the Government so afraid that teenage single mums will not take it up that they are forcing them to do so?

Mr. Connarty: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: No. We have pursued that issue sufficiently.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Webb: I suppose I should give way to both my right hon. and learned Friend and the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Campbell: Does my hon. Friend remember the terms of the speech that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made to the House of Commons yesterday? He said:

"Where there are lone parents under 18 who cannot live with their family, the policy is that, instead of independent tenancies, they will have supported housing that combines accommodation with counselling and help with child care."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 587.]

Is not the ambiguity that my hon. Friend is highlighting a direct result of the ambiguity of the Chancellor's speech?

Mr. Webb: My right hon. and learned Friend is exactly right. We have looked through the documents and we cannot find any clarification on this issue. I invited the right hon. Members on the Treasury Bench to intervene, but no one has explained the position, which means that it must be compulsory. We can come to no conclusion other than that teenage single mums will be coerced into taking up this accommodation. If that is in their interests, why do they need to be forced to take it up?

Mr. Connarty: It was interesting that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) used the correct term "supported housing", not "hostels" or "institutions". Even Women's Aid in Scotland has supported housing for women who are alienated and excluded from society. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) does not seem to accept that single parents who are out of a family situation become broken away and hide from society. There needs to be some way of compelling them to go for an interview with someone who can help. There is nothing wrong with compelling people to go for interview with someone who will help them, if the alternative is social unrest, which is what the hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing, because he thinks that it is good for Liberal Democrat votes.

Mr. Webb: There was a slightly bizarre conclusion to the hon. Gentleman's intervention. At least he is honest about being comfortable with compulsion and coercion, but it is not clear whether the Secretary of State is because he will not tell us. The part of the Chancellor's speech that my right hon. and learned Friend referred to said that lone parents under 18 will not have an independent tenancy. If it is not an independent tenancy, what is the difference between supported housing and a hostel? I do not know what this accommodation will be like.

The other substantial area of the Budget that we should touch on is the plans for health spending. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) asked the Secretary of State to clarify the Government's plans and to say whether there is a hole in them. The Government have set out detailed spending plans for the national health service for five years, but detailed tax and revenue plans for only three years.

The Secretary of State referred my hon. Friend to table C5, which contains the grand totals and which I have read, but Budgets do not spell out which taxes that percentage of gross domestic product will come from. They do not give that detail several years ahead. In response to my hon. Friend, the Secretary of State failed to put on the record whether more discretionary tax increases will be required to fund the planned health service spending. If the Secretary of State or the Financial Secretary think that there is a danger of the wrong impression being given on the record, I am happy to give way so that they can clarify whether any further discretionary tax rises will be needed, over and above those that have already been announced, to meet the spending plans for the health service that were given yesterday. They do not want to intervene, because they do not want to answer that question. The chances are that there will need to be more discretionary tax rises, and they should come clean about it.

That brings me to the central point of the Budget. A year ago the Labour party wrote its manifesto. There are two possibilities. One is that it knew it would have to raise direct taxes to pay for improved public service, and it failed to disclose that fact, which would be dishonest. The other is that it did not know it would have to raise taxes to improve public services, which would be incompetent. I shall not judge whether the Government are dishonest or incompetent, but they must be one or the other.

Yesterday's tax rise was predicted by us during the election campaign, by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and by all independent commentators. It was predicted that the Government would have to raise direct taxation to pay for their public spending plans. They declined to tell the electorate that. It would have been better to come clean, because they would then have had a stronger mandate for the tax rises that they announced yesterday.

The Chancellor rejected the notion of hypothecation, so yesterday's national insurance rise was just a general tax rise; it would go into the pot with other tax rises, which would pay for public spending. There was no link, not even between the 1 per cent. on national insurance and the health service, because most of that 1 per cent. will not be spent on health but on pensions and other services, or it will go into the national insurance fund surplus.

The Chancellor rejected hypothecation for one reason: he did not want the cyclical effect of the economy to undermine the funding of the health service. I gave him, in my usual generous way, an offprint of an article that I wrote for *New Economy*, the journal of the Institute for Public Policy Research. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, it made his day. He promised to take it to bed with him, but he obviously did not read carefully the section about how we should deal with the ups and downs of tax revenues. The Chancellor does that all the time. He sets fiscal targets that work over the economic cycle.

Mr. Edward Davey: Cyclically adjusted.

Mr. Webb: Cyclically adjusted, as my hon. Friend says. The Chancellor of the Exchequer does not expect every year to meet all the rules: he says that we will meet

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them over the cycle. The health service could be funded in precisely the same way. National insurance rates, if that were the hypothecated tax, could be set so that over the cycle the health service was funded in a predictable and stable way. In the good years it would raise more than was needed, in the bad years it would raise less, and when those figures were cyclically adjusted, as the Chancellor is so fond of doing, there would be no problem. That is not a fundamental objection to linking tax and spending.

The electorate do not trust the Government on tax because they failed to tell them at the election that they would need to raise taxes, and then went and did so yesterday. We need a method whereby the electorate know that they can trust politicians on tax. Politicians could bind themselves to spending every penny of a particular tax on a particular service and not siphon that money off. If the public were asked to pay more, they would know where the money was going. It would not need an Audit Commission report or anything else: they would know by statute.

The Chancellor said that he wanted a debate on how public services should be funded.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: No, because I am about to finish.

These ideas will be a way of reconnecting the public with taxation. The Government and the Liberal Democrats both want good tax-funded public services. We are united on that against the Conservative vision. The danger is that, if the Government blow it by raising taxes that they did not tell people about and do not spend them entirely on the things that people want, the public will not give a second chance to parties that believe in tax-funded public services and they may be seduced by the Conservative dogma.

In a spirit of constructive friendship, I say to the right hon. Gentlemen on the Government Front Bench that the Government should come clean on tax and link what they are spending with what they are raising, and then the public may trust them. By not telling people during the election what they intended to do and then putting taxes up yesterday, they betrayed the public.

4.8 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I do not intend to follow the same route as the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), except to say that I do not believe that the Government are dishonest or incompetent. We can debate hypothecated taxation, but the hon. Gentleman said himself that if we had hypothecated taxation, money could be spent year on year in a certain area to the detriment of other areas. As for whether the public knew that we were going to raise taxes to fund the national health service, up until yesterday the world and his dog knew that we would do that.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said that Labour is comfortable only when it raises taxes to spend money. That is not the case at all. Labour Members do not welcome tax increases. Like anyone else, we would rather the health service were funded, as it has been funded in the past five years of the Labour Government, through the good stewardship of the economy. The money has been available because of increased employment—1 million people are back in work—and increased tax revenues. It would be much better to fund the health service in that way, but if it needs extra funding I am not afraid to say to my constituents, "Yes, taxes must increase to provide you with the national health service that you want." Over the past year or so, the public have made it clear exactly how they want their national health service to operate. They want more money put into the service. I am comfortable with the increase in taxes to fund the national health service.

As I have said, it is Labour's prudent management of the economy that has allowed considerable investment in our public services over the past few years without those tax increases. I shall not repeat the list that was given yesterday, but it included low interest rates, low inflation—the lowest for many years—and higher employment. I believe that only this week unemployment fell again.

I welcome the extra money for working families: increases in the working families tax credit, working tax credit and child tax credit. Those moves will greatly assist my constituents. The extension of the new deal is also welcome. Over the last few years my constituency has experienced high unemployment, but, although the level is still slightly higher than the national average, it has fallen recently as a direct consequence of the Government's policies.

I look forward to the pension credit that will be introduced next year. That too will help many of my constituents, especially those who qualify for pensions under the mineworkers pension scheme or who qualified for it prior to 1975, before it was index linked. A very small occupational pension has prevented such people from obtaining other benefits.

I welcome the tax concessions for small businesses. Because of our attempts to regenerate the Barnsley area over the past two years, we have had to seek assistance for such businesses—surprisingly enough. I am happy to say that my constituency contains some world-leading small businesses. I also welcome the reductions in beer duty for micro-brewers and local brewers. I should declare an interest as honorary adviser to the northern branch of the Licensed Victuallers Association. The move will help breweries in rural areas and rural pubs; one of the issues in such areas is the decline of the traditional country pub.

I am pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is present, as he is responsible for the climate change levy. I am glad that electricity produced from coal mine methane will be exempted from the levy. Only a few days ago, my right hon. Friend opened a plant in my constituency that converts methane leaking from old coal mines to electricity in order to power a local glass factory. I understand that next year such methane will be exploited on some 80 sites.

While I am on the subject of glass, let me say—I know my right hon. Friend will expect me to make this point—that the glass industry has been hit hard by the climate change levy, especially as a result of the exemption and rebate system that revolves around the integrated pollution prevention and control regulations. A company registered under the regulations will receive an 80 per cent. rebate.

I understand that, to qualify, a company must melt glass. Some companies use a lot of electricity, but do not melt products in order to make glass. They may bend substances, for instance to make motor-car windscreens; some, such as Potters Ballotini in my constituency, use 100 per cent. recycled glass—coloured glass. That is an environmentally friendly operation in itself. Such companies, however, are subject to the full rate of the climate change levy.

Potters Ballotini must pay £160,000 per annum, in return for which it receives only £2,000 in national insurance rebate. It points out that because it uses 100 per cent. recycled materials, it should not be subject to a levy that is intended to make companies focus on being environmentally friendly and on emissions targets. I hope my right hon. Friend will look again at the way in which the IPPC regulations affect such companies. I have heard it said many times that the climate change levy is revenue-neutral, but it is not revenue-neutral for the companies paying £160,000 in order to receive £2,000.

As I have said, I welcome the extra funds for the NHS and the five-year stabilisation plan. As I said after the statement by the Secretary of State for Health, however, my constituency and others are in a bizarre position: NHS funding appears to be decreasing when examined against target funding for the health authorities involved. It is a question of distribution.

Last year my authority received 98.5 per cent. of the funding target; at the end of the current year, it will have received 97 per cent. of that target. Although more money is going into my health authority and the NHS in general, the amount provided for its core functions appears to be falling. That 3 per cent. shortfall equates to some £6 million, which the health authority simply could not find. In fact, its budget was rejected by Trent regional health authority on two occasions because it simply could not find a way of disguising a £6 million shortfall, or making any further efficiencies to reduce the amount. It had already taken £1.5 million out of the budget through efficiencies.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on an important point. Ministers consistently tell us that NHS spending is increasing. In my area, the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire trust has been called on to make 2 per cent. efficiency savings in consecutive years. It says that its budget is way below what it needs. I am talking about the sixth largest hospital trust in the country, which received no stars in a recent survey. The hon. Gentleman has identified the difference between the Government's claims and reality.

Mr. Illsley: I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Similar points were made following the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

I readily admit that the amount being spent on the health service is increasing, but the manner of its distribution, and the fact that it is sometimes attached to initiatives, tends to move it away from the core. That is one of the main problems in my area. Initiatives have been imposed on the health authority—the other day the pro-chancellor of Hull university described the syndrome as "initiative-itis"—to which the money is tied. It is tied to an initiative and to a target. That tends to move the money away, because part of the health service concentrates on achieving the target. Meanwhile, another part of the service may receive less money and experience neglect.

My area is desperately short of general practitioners. Apart from, I think, Sunderland, it has the fewest in the country. We had a training surgery providing initiatives with the aim of recruiting and training more GPs, but the funds had to be withdrawn because the health authority had to concentrate on other initiatives and targets imposed by the Department of Health.

We have experienced shortfalls year on year. It is not just under the present Government that my health authority has been underfunded. More than a year ago, inappropriate prescribing by GPs led to a shortfall of about £1 million. Perversely, this year—because we have addressed the issue—we have more problems because prescribing is very good. GPs are now prescribing according to the Department's instructions in terms of best practice. That has increased the cost of prescribing and left us with a £2 million shortfall, as part of the overall £6 million.

We would appreciate some targeting of funding for the health service. The new independent audit and review must assess each health authority to determine which are providing value for money, but doing so on a shoestring because they are underfunded, and which are being wasteful. We must ensure that there is a balance of the scarce resources.

My local health authority has the worst rates of lung cancer, heart attack and stroke in the Trent region, which covers most of south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire, and probably among the worst in the whole country. We have among the lowest rates of heart attack survival and the highest of morbidity. A recent Commission for Health Improvement survey of Barnsley district general hospital came out with the bald statement that anyone aged between 35 and 75 admitted to that hospital suffering from a heart attack had a 50 per cent. higher chance of dying than in any other hospital in the country. That alone tells me that our funding problems must be tackled.

We hope that the NHS audit will solve the problem. I have yet to get an answer to a question that I have been asking for many years. We are 3 per cent. short of our target, but no one can tell me why my local health authority, which probably has among the highest need in the country, continues to be underfunded. When they consider the whole idea of the distribution of funds for the national health service, I hope that the Government will revisit the targets and sort out those problems.

I am also concerned about other public services, and especially those delivered through local government. A few years ago, we were promised a review of standard spending assessments, but that appears unlikely to occur according to the time scale set out last year. We were looking for a vast improvement in the mechanisms for local government funding, reflecting need rather than proceeding on the current formulaic basis.

My local authority has been underfunded ever since 1990, when poll tax capping was introduced. This is the area in which the public come face to face with the delivery of services, and they often find that the service that they expect cannot be provided because of lack of funding.

Our education funding has improved dramatically, with grants now given directly to schools to improve facilities, and I very much welcome the new school building

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programme. I am happy to say that the rate of staying on at school post 16 has improved in my constituency, as has our performance at GCSE, which has traditionally been poor. However, the services known as the "other services block", such as street cleaning and environmental services, have suffered over the past few years as the Government have, quite rightly, targeted education. I hope that they will look again at the funding of local government.

Housing, and the lack of money being made available to local authorities to meet the demands of repairs and other services, continues to be a problem. The Government have set out their policies on council housing clearly: sell it off to other landlords, form arm's-length management companies or simply maintain the status quo. Tenants in my area voted against sell-offs and the Government will not allow the local authority to construct an arm's-length company, because its rating in housing management is only two stars rather than three, so we are left with the status quo and council tenants cannot get repairs or improvements to their properties because the funding is not available. I hope that the Government will do something about that in the near future.

This is the point at which I usually say something about excise duties, but as none of them was increased yesterday there is very little to say. Let me repeat yet again, however, that cigarette smuggling remains a problem. It is a huge industry—a black economy—in my constituency. I agree that cigarette prices need to be increased for health and social policy reasons, but that tends to increase smuggling in areas such as mine.

I warmly welcome the Budget and the fact that the Chancellor has grasped the nettle and taken the right decision on the future funding of the national health service. I fully support him on that and look forward to a much improved NHS in my constituency.

4.26 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said that raising taxes is not enough. I agree.

I declare my interests as set out in the register.

It is highly appropriate that we should be debating today the work and pensions implications of a Budget that has produced the highest tax rise on jobs since Labour introduced the selective employment tax in 1966—and this on top of a substantial tax on pensions in a previous Budget.

The proclaimed essence of the Budget is a massive £8.5 billion tax increase on jobs to pay for more health spending. If we are to go down the crude tax-and-spend route, the first question to ask is, will it do the trick? Are taxes set to go even higher? What about other expenditure requirements, such as defence, education, transport and indeed pensions?

Liberal spokesmen have popped up throughout the afternoon demanding more discretionary tax increases. One of them asked for more to be spent on education, and another wanted more money for social services, and now the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), in his line of questioning to the Minister, seemed to be asking for yet more discretionary taxation.

The Wanless report, published yesterday, argues that if all the extra funding for the NHS is to be found through taxation, tax may have to rise by an average of £5 billion every year for the next 22 years. To put that in perspective, if the whole amount of the extra revenue were placed on income tax, it would rise by 2p in the pound each year, reaching a maximum of 66p in the pound, just to cover health funding alone, never mind extra spending on pensions, education and the rest—the mind boggles.

The Chancellor seems to be contenting himself with a massive one-off tax rise of almost £9 billion next year, and an implicit claim that the Government will match future expenditure to economic growth. A critical issue, therefore, is whether the target for economic growth—2.5 per cent. in this Budget—is likely to be met. So far, the Government have had luck on their side. In part because of the strong economy inherited from the Conservatives, and in part because of a massive expansion of imports into our economy, we have had reasonable economic growth over the past few years.

That is unlikely to continue in future. On the contrary, genuine investment-led growth is grinding to a halt.

The one word that the Budget dare not speak is productivity. Even the Government's recent White Paper did not include a table showing productivity rates over the past 10 years. That is strange and does not follow precedent. Table 1.1 on page 3 of the White Paper "Productivity in the UK" published in November 2000 shows that the average productivity rate was 2.1 per cent. between 1990 and 1997, declined to 1.6 per cent. between 1997 and 1999 and has been 1.9 per cent. thereafter. Since its publication in that report, table 1.1 has never been seen again. It has been airbrushed from all subsequent publications on productivity.

Despite this censorship, the secular decline in the rate of productivity ever since the Government took office remains a fact of life. We know this to be true because the Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted as much in a recent interview on the "Today" programme. The issue is not whether productivity rates have fallen, but why. That question is absolutely critical to a proper assessment of the Budget.

The rate of productivity is the performance measure of the structural changes occurring in the economy. The figures tell us that the rate at which the competitiveness and efficiency of the British economy was catching up and even overtaking other countries under the Conservative Government has now slowed down and gone into reverse under Labour. This is why, from being the sixth most competitive country in the world in 1997, we have crashed to 14th place and the plummet shows no signs of slowing down. The rate of investment has crashed from a peak of 13 per cent. in 1998 to 2 per cent. in 2001. Last week's figures show that inward investment fell by more than one third last year and that our European Union share fell from 26 per cent. to 19 per cent.

Not surprisingly, as a result, old ailments are beginning to recur. Since 1998 there has been a dramatically steep rise in our balance of payments deficit from an annual average of around £5 billion in the first half of the 1990s to nearly £20 billion in the second half. If that reversal of the fundamentals of our economic fortunes had been unavoidable it might at least have been forgivable. It might also have been insolvable. It was avoidable, is unforgivable and remains unsolvable. It requires, above all, a change of Government.

There are at least four reasons why the necessary investment to improve productivity and competitiveness will never be forthcoming under a Labour Government. Special circumstances apply to the present Labour Government, but the general rule persists: in the end a free-enterprise economy always comes unstuck under a Labour Government, even one as fortunate as the present Government in their inheritance from the Conservatives.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he accept that the reduction in inward investment is to some extent due to the fact that Britain remains undecided on the euro and many inward investors would like us to take a decision on that? Does he also accept that his party's position, which is for Britain never to join the euro, would lead to an even bigger drying up of inward investment?

Sir Michael Spicer: I shall turn to the euro in a moment. However, in the past the rate of inward investment has been high and it is still higher than that in most euro countries. So that argument does not wash. Indeed, in a moment I shall argue that the Government's commitment to enter the euro is one of the problems currently affecting confidence.

The first reason why the Government's economic policy will end in tears is that Labour does not understand capitalism and free enterprise. Many Labour Members do not even try to understand capitalism because the basis of their ideology and motivation into politics is antithetical to it.

One might say that the dividing line between old and new Labour is between those who try to comprehend the ways of competition and free enterprise and those who contemptuously do not. In practice, the distinction does not matter very much because it all comes down to the same thing in the end: free enterprise never works very well under Labour. The reason is that free enterprise, especially the incentive to invest, requires confidence, particularly confidence that the rules of enterprise will not be changed meretriciously as they were twice for Railtrack investors and as they were for investors in power stations faced with a sudden moratorium on gas.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. If free enterprise worked so well under the Conservative Government and people were so motivated to invest, can he explain why nearly 20 per cent. of the manufacturing industry in my constituency was destroyed?

Sir Michael Spicer: I cannot speak for the companies in the hon. Lady's constituency; perhaps they were not very efficient. I have no idea. However, I can refer to the massive growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s which the Government inherited. They had managed to keep the momentum going, but it is now on the brink of slowing down. The hon. Lady must accept that productivity and investment rates are so low compared to what they were five or six years ago that Britain is on the brink of a severe economic problem which is reflected in the volume of imports and other factors that I have mentioned. I certainly cannot speak for the hon. Lady's constituency as I do not know the circumstances there, but there is a dramatic change in the structure and the fortunes of the British economy.

Mr. Connarty: As we are talking about capitalism which I studied long and hard when I took my degree in economics, is it not the case that the great capitalist economy of the USA has a much larger balance of payments problem than the UK yet, despite the events of 11 September, it has strong growth and is fundamentally a thriving capitalist economy apart from the fact that it imports more than it exports?

Sir Michael Spicer: In recent years, because of the strength of the dollar and the fact that US companies would pay in US paper—a commodity which reflects the strong internal economy—the US has imported more than it has exported. That is a matter for the US economy to put right. I accept entirely what the hon. Gentleman says. The US cannot continue using paper to pay its way in the world, at least without depreciating that commodity. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point but I am talking about the UK economy, which in many respects is unlike that of the US. The Americans make almost a conscious decision to use their paper to buy in goods. Our economy is increasingly being forced to buy goods because it is not sufficiently competitive to pay its way. There is a fundamental difference between the American economy, which is highly competitive in most sectors, and the British economy.

The fundamental point is that Labour does not really understand how capitalism and free enterprise works. This is illustrated by its chopping and changing on Railtrack, the sudden moratoriums on power stations and financiers being faced with dramatically changing rules for the funding of London Underground.

At best, new Labour sees the private sector as providing a reserve of funds to be turned on and off at the will of the Government. Capital markets simply do not work in that way. Investors cannot be ordered around, otherwise they take their capital away, and there are signs that they are beginning to do precisely that.

The second reason for falling confidence under Labour is regulation, which has been mentioned today. It is partly a matter of the sheer quantity and the burden of the new rules, but it is more significantly a matter of their quality and direction. Together, the new regulatory regimes add up to socialism by stealth, and investors do not like it.

The Labour Government have contorted and perverted a regulatory structure laid out by the Conservatives to ensure maximum competition when they privatise utilities and certain state monopolies. The Utilities Act 2000 gives powers and roles to the regulatory bodies that have nothing to do with improving economic performance, let alone competition, and everything to do with socialist ideology, specifically the redistribution of income.

The gas and electricity regulator is empowered to relieve fuel poverty. The telecommunications regulator sets out to ensure universal coverage, the Financial Services Authority must achieve social banking as a priority, the water regulator must ensure fair investment, and the rail regulator must provide a total transport strategy. Ofgem has even been used to try to protect jobs in the mining industry through its implementation of the gas moratorium. It would seem that the prospect even exists of regulators coming together to agree a total strategy for governing the commanding heights of the economy. As I say, this is socialism by stealth and investors do not like it.

As the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) said, the question also exists of the Government's commitment to entering the single European currency. Investors know

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that we would either enter at a rate that would be a permanent and artificial handicap for British sales to the continent of Europe, or that the Government would be forced to take action through interest rates to lower the value of the pound, which would prove inflationary and further undermine British competitiveness. Indeed, if they were carrying out the rules of the Monetary Policy Committee—assuming, as we were discussing earlier, that it were still an independent body—they would have to raise interest rates at that point, which would itself prove counter-productive. Contrary to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, the whole process of commitment to entry is a destabilising factor.

Mr. Hendrick: The Monetary Policy Committee would not raise interest rates, because if were joining the euro, the interest rate would, by definition, have to be the same as that of the European Central Bank.

Sir Michael Spicer: There is considerable argument as to whether we would have to be within an equivalent of the exchange rate mechanism, but I am talking about the process of entry into the euro. The Government would be faced either with an artificially permanently uncompetitive rate at which to enter—that would certainly scare off industry from investing in this country—or they would try to talk down or work down the rate of the pound. As a result, inflationary pressure would come into play and the MPC would have to put up interest rates.

Mr. Hendrick: If we entered the euro as a result of a referendum, the Government would not try to manage the exchange rate; the markets would take care of it.

Sir Michael Spicer: I should be delighted if that were so, and that is exactly how exchange rates should operate. They should be market-led, and should reflect the economies of the countries in question. However, that principle is denied under the permanent and indefinitely fixed exchange rate that entry into the euro requires. It is exactly because we do not want fixed rates that some of us are dead against the euro. Whether one is against it or not, my point is that the very commitment to enter the euro is itself a destabilising factor in British economic policy.

The final element of destabilisation is taxation. Despite the denials and obscurantism of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, taxes have gone up continuously under Labour. In 1994, they constituted 34 per cent. of gross domestic product. They rose to 36 per cent. in 1997, to 37 per cent. in 1999, and to 38 per cent. in 2001. According to the Red Book, yesterday's Budget will push that figure above 40 per cent. in a year's time. Of course, this Budget is the one in which Labour has broken its cover; it has been outed as a high spend, high tax party.

It is not just investors who will be put off. At a level of more than 40 per cent., taxes are bound to be regressive, and will hit the standard of living of people on lower incomes. What does all that add up to? Britain's economy, which was one of the most dynamic in the world, is moving back to being one of the more sluggish. Once that happens, the spiral will be downwards. More public spending will mean even higher taxes. That will mean lower growth, which will lead to yet higher taxes, and so on. That downward spiral is implicit in this Budget.

The challenge for a future Conservative Government is to reverse the spiral, as past Conservative Governments have done, by removing the shackles from businesses and by releasing the energy not only of the private sector but of the so-called public services. However the Government caricature such matters, new ways will have to be found of running and funding public services. In particular, we must break up the monopolistic position of the providers, and return powers—especially purchasing powers—to the customer. Achieving that—particularly improving the effectiveness of health care provision expenditure—by adopting one of the many funding models that operate throughout the world is the debate that the Government should have launched today, and in which they seemed to want to engage as recently as last year. At some point during this winter, they seemed suddenly to change their mind, and retreated into old-fashioned socialist dogma. That has pleased their own Back Benchers and got them cheers, but we shall have to see what the result of that shift will be.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman should consider what happened when we introduced the market into other utilities. The trend has been towards monopoly, not competition. As an expert told many of us in the parliamentary group for energy studies in some detail last night, that is particularly true in the energy field. There are three major energy suppliers in Europe. What we have is not a free market, with lots of competing small suppliers that help the consumer, but large monopolies that, without regulation, would force prices up. It is the regulator that keeps prices down for the consumer. Free market capitalism always leads to monopoly, because monopoly leads to super-normal profit, which is the whole purpose of capitalism.

Sir Michael Spicer: I shall not only defend my position; I shall tell the hon. Gentleman how wrong he is. Contrary to what he has just said, one massive effect of the electricity legislation that as the Minister I piloted through the Commons was the complete break-up of monopoly power. We had a monopolist—the Central Electricity Generating Board—but now we have a multitude of companies, only one of which has more than 9 or 10 per cent. of the British generating market. That is absolutely contrary to the hon. Gentleman's argument. The same applies to the distribution side of the industry—an outcome that we did not fully expect. The hon. Gentleman is factually 100 per cent. wrong. Given that he obviously knows something about this field, and that he attended last night's lecture—I was not there myself—I am very surprised that he takes the view that he does.

Mr. Connarty: As has been pointed out, 10 Downing street's electricity is supplied by a French company that bought London Electric. Such developments are happening throughout Europe. No. 10 would be paying much higher prices if were not for the fact that a regulator controls domestic prices.

Sir Michael Spicer: I do not know the hon. Gentleman's views about the future of Europe. If he wants a united Europe, he should be pleased about the free flow of capital. Personally, I am very relaxed about the free flow of capital around Europe; I simply object to the fact that the rules are such that our capital does not flow into

continental Europe as easily its capital is allowed to flow into Britain. The hon. Gentleman's basic point that free enterprise leads to monopoly—a good socialist thing to say—is the exact opposite of what has happened. In fact, we broke up a thoroughly inefficient state monopoly—the CEGB—that was running massive overcapacity. Now, prices have come down and there is tremendous competition. We have a thriving industry, into which people want to buy because it is thriving. That is the exact opposite of the hon. Gentleman's argument, and I am very grateful to him for making it.

The sadness for the country of the Labour party's change of heart on a more radical approach to funding for public services, especially the health service, is that it will further delay the time that our people will benefit from the quality of service to which other countries have become accustomed. We discussed health yesterday and today, but Labour Members have not once accepted that other comparable countries with different funding systems have much better health systems. We are looking at those systems because they are better. It is no good shutting our eyes and denying that there is a better way. The result has been that the British taxpayer is paying for our people to receive treatment on the continent of Europe that they cannot get here. Sadly, that will continue to happen for longer because of the Government's refusal to consider alternatives ways to give consumers the purchasing power that they have in other countries.

Those methods do not necessarily require lower funding by the state. For example, France does not spend much less than we do, but it gives the consumer more power, so monopolies are broken up and the health service is provided far more effectively. Because the Labour party has balked on that issue, the electorate will turn against it. This is a turning point in the electoral fortunes of the Labour party and it will be left to the Conservatives to pick up the challenge and put things right in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): It probably has not escaped the attention of hon. Members that the average length of speeches by Back Benchers so far has been 21 minutes. If that continues, we shall hear from few other hon. Members this afternoon.

4.52 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Before I commend the aspects of the Budget that will encourage people into work, make work pay and bring more children out of poverty, I must tell the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who unfortunately is no longer in his place, that it will come as a big surprise to my constituents with severe disabilities who have moved from hospital wards to supported accommodation, run by such worthy organisations as Cornerstone, Archway and the Richmond Fellowship—I am sorry if I have missed any Aberdeen organisations out—that they are regarded by him as living in an institution. Other disabled constituents have moved out of the family home into supported accommodation to gain more independence, but—according to the hon. Gentleman—they are now living in an institution. The biggest surprise of all will be felt by the hundreds of pensioners who live in sheltered housing complexes, if the Liberal Democrats now believe that that means living in an institution too. Many of our constituents already live in supported housing—that is the exact phrase that the Chancellor used yesterday—for very good reasons. I do not understand why the Liberal Democrats have taken against such accommodation for lone parents under 18, as the Chancellor mentioned yesterday.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was making a point about choice. He expressed the strong concern that people might be coerced into certain actions and wished to be assured that they would be able to choose. In fact, Liberal Democrats welcome many schemes around the country in which young people are supported.

Miss Begg: We take a slightly different view of the case. If people are vulnerable and in need, we should not leave them to their own devices. This case concerns lone parents under 18, which in England and Wales means that they are under the legal age at which they can get married. In Scotland, young people can marry at 16 without their parents' consent. However, we could be talking about children as young as 14 or even younger. The earliest age at which young girls get pregnant is about 14, and some are no longer able to live in the family home—as the Chancellor said yesterday. We do not think that such vulnerable young people—some of them are still children—should be left alone in a council house. They should be in supported accommodation. It is not a matter of choice—children should not live alone.

Mr. Connarty: I remind my hon. Friend of the landmark case in my home town of Monklands. A 16-year-old obtained a legal judgment to the effect that she should be allocated housing on her own. She was allocated housing in a flatted block, but she was violently and sexually assaulted in her flat within a few months. It was an unprotected and unsupported environment, and we think that we should do better for those young people.

Miss Begg: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. I detected nothing in what the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions have said that would suggest that any coercion will be used to make lone parents under 18 live in accommodation that is not suitable for the purpose.

I commend what the Budget will do to encourage people into work, to make work pay and to bring children out of poverty, and I shall concentrate my remarks on those aspects. Not long after the introduction of the working families tax credit and the minimum wage, I received an irate letter from a constituent who complained that everything was being done for children but nothing was being done for those of working age who were in work but on low incomes. He claimed that he would be better off on benefit than he was in work. I asked the Library to do some calculations, and he was right. Because of the way in which housing benefit, jobseeker's allowance and other benefits worked, some people in full-time work would have been better off not working, so they had no incentive to work. Those people felt left out and unable to share in the growing prosperity.

One answer to the problem is to raise the minimum wage and I am glad to see that it is increasing, albeit not as fast as I would like. I accept the arguments about the need not to destabilise the economy and we do not want unemployment to start increasing, as the Opposition

[Miss Begg]

claimed would happen when the minimum wage was introduced. Unemployment did not increase, and I still think that the minimum wage should be increased further.

I welcome the new employment tax credit introduced in the Budget. It will ensure that people such as my constituent, who are just above any kind of minimum income but paying high housing costs—as often happens in Aberdeen—will have an incentive to work. The figures for the employment tax credit cited by the Chancellor yesterday show that a single-earner couple will have a guaranteed income of £183 a week, while a family with one child will have an income of £237 a week.

The integration of the employment credit and the working families tax credit to form the new working tax credit will make it absolutely certain that in all cases work pays. I know many hon. Members find it difficult to persuade constituents who are looking for work in the low-wage end of the economy to take such work unless in every circumstance their constituents will be better off. The working tax credit will ensure that.

I also welcome the extension of the new deal. I remember many people in Aberdeen asking why we needed the new deal—unemployment in Aberdeen is extremely low: 1.5 or 1.8 per cent.—when anybody who was any good would get a job anyway. Therefore, it was argued, the only people who were not in jobs, particularly young people, were those whom nobody would employ. In fact, the opposite proved the case. Youth unemployment in my constituency has dropped by about 80 per cent. because there are jobs if people of working age are ready for them.

It is interesting that a fairly affluent constituency such as mine has benefited from many of the Government's policies, such as the minimum wage and the working families tax credit, and that is because most of my constituents are in work but often in low-paid jobs. There are many highly paid jobs in Aberdeen—we have a fairly buoyant economy—and because of the oil industry, there are also many service industry jobs. There is a need for cleaners and there is a lot of bar work available in the local hostelries. Very often, those involved are paid low wages, so they obviously benefit from the minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Well over 1,000 families—2,000 in the case of the minimum wage—have benefited from the working families tax credit in my constituency alone.

Any extension of the new deal to those over the age of 25 who have gone in and out of work—a pattern we see in Aberdeen—is welcome. I have seen constituents who have been out of work for just over six months but do not yet fit into any of the new deal categories. They have felt left out—that somehow, Government policies have not catered for them—so I am glad that they no longer do.

I undoubtedly welcome the increases in the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit. It is very important that disabled people share this country's increasing prosperity, and one of the best ways of doing so is by entering the labour market. In Aberdeen, there are jobs available if such people are given support to get them.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to getting back to work, particularly for lone parents and other working parents, is the issue of child care. The problem is not just affording child care—the Government have gone some way to solving that problem by introducing the child tax credit—but finding appropriate child care. That problem is faced by those who work shifts. There is much shift work in Aberdeen, and there is a lack of child care. Any help that the Government can give to encourage more people into the child care business would be welcome. If people are going back to work, why should they not become child minders? That would certainly ease difficulties in Aberdeen. There is certainly a need for high-quality child care.

I particularly welcome the move toward integrating the tax and benefit systems. Until those systems come together, there will always be poverty traps and always some who lose out. I hope that there will be a seamless system. If everybody has to declare their income, eventually those who do not receive enough will get money back, and those who receive too much will pay tax. We will therefore remove the stigma of means testing and ensure that any help is well targeted.

I also commend the Government's work on bringing children out of poverty. I know that there was huge controversy last week over the Government's figures, but by any measure, 500,000 children is a lot. That was not an accident; it did not happen because the economy improved or it just so happened that parents went back to work. It was specifically because this Government were the first in history to introduce measures aimed directly at tackling child poverty. As a result, 1.4 million children have been lifted out of absolute poverty, and 500,000 out of any relative poverty.

I have not had time to read it, but I welcome the Government's consultation document on measuring child poverty because it is time we had a proper measure that everybody can trust and understand. There is more to poverty than just income.

By any measure, the Government have done well in reducing childhood poverty. I was surprised at the amnesia displayed by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). The reason so many children were living in poverty when we were elected was that when the previous Government were in office, from 1979 to 1997, the number had multiplied by a factor of three. If the then Government had made a promise to take 1 million children out of poverty in 1979 and had done it, there would be no children in poverty now. It is important to have a clear definition of poverty and that the Government continue to pursue these measures.

With those comments, I commend the Budget to the House. There is no doubt that its proposals mean that more and more families will move up the income scale and be able to share in the country's prosperity.

5.5 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am grateful to be called to speak in the debate. I remind the House of the declarations of my business interests that are properly put into the Register of Members' Interests.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) on a characteristically good speech about her constituency. I sympathise with some of her observations about the child tax credit and child care. I congratulate the Government on responding to representations that I and many others have made on helping parents who work irregular hours to have child care provided in their own

home. That will be of particular benefit to those working in the care and nursing home business. They have to work antisocial hours, and this will mean a great deal for them.

Mr. Connarty: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jack: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would be so kind as to let me make a little progress, in the light of your comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also welcome the fact that venture capital trusts will be used in inner cities. I still feel that it is an indictment on us all, in the 21st century, that we have some really bad spots of urban dereliction. We struggle to get to grips with them but they are often the centre of so many social and crime problems.

Finally, I welcome the Government's acknowledgement that some more money will have to be found in the Budget for social care. I hope that some effort will be made to ensure that some of that resource goes into child care, in the sense of being responsible for children. Like every other right hon. and hon. Member, I was shocked by the information that came out of the Victoria Climbié inquiry. We hope that this will never happen again but, to a certain extent, that is possible only if child safety is given the resource that it needs.

Mr. Connarty: I do not know the right hon. Gentleman's interests. It is possible that I may be called to speak next, but I would lose that opportunity if I left the Chamber and would then be debarred from speaking. The right hon. Gentleman has not declared his interests, so if he speaks in favour of or against something and has an interest to declare about a particular organisation, I would be grateful if he named it as he speaks.

Mr. Jack: If I had felt that there was anything so specific, I would have done, but I followed the precedent that has been followed throughout the debate of making it clear that I have business interests as a non-executive company director and as chairman of an agricultural consultancy company. I do not propose to say anything about that, or the business that the company trades in. Those declarations are properly and publicly made and we have all followed that precedent. I have made it clear to the House that I have business interests and am grateful to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) for allowing me to tell him a little more about some of the things that help to inform me about the real world in which I live. It illustrates the fact that many on the Labour Benches have little understanding of the world of business, because they have not been directly involved in it.

One of the areas that I hoped the Budget might touch on was Britain's responsibility in the world to deal with the sources of discontent that have given rise to some of the terrorist outbreaks that we have seen. Perhaps the Financial Secretary could consider giving some form of credit or tax allowance to encourage British companies to invest in those parts of the less developed world where the growth of good markets and good business may help to be an antidote to the discontent that manifested itself in the terrorist events of 11 September. Our private companies have a tremendous record of involvement in the less developed world. We can be proud of that role, but we should give them some encouragement, especially in those hot-spot areas identified by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That would be of particular value.

The detail of the Budget can be interesting. One note—Rev Bn 20—is entitled "Denying tax relief to bribes". Even when I was in the Treasury, I was not aware that we gave tax relief for bribes. In the fevered discussion about donations, the note may offer some interesting further reading.

Our debate has already touched on the tax burden borne by our citizens, and on the tax increases in this and previous Budgets under this Government. The Centre for Economics and Business Research has produced some figures that paint a rather different picture of the tax burden in this country. The centre found that, after deductions,

"British families have only 68 per cent. of their total gross annual income left to spend."

That is less than France, where the level is 75 per cent.; in Spain and Italy it is 61 per cent. The level in Germany is 66 per cent. The finding is interesting, because the figures will worsen as a result of the changes in national insurance announced yesterday.

I want to bring another matter to the Financial Secretary's attention. In 1981, as a Back Bencher, the present Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs initiated an attempt to assess the impact of the Budget on the direct and indirect tax paid by individuals. The present Labour Government found the results deeply embarrassing when they came to power, and concocted a set of words to explain why they would not provide that information. They said that the request was unrealistic and that they could not meet it.

With respect to the Government, they must realise that it is legitimate for Members of the House of Commons to seek that information, and that the Labour party in opposition requested it first. Will the Financial Secretary say whether the Treasury will reconsider its position? The previous, Conservative Government provided the information, even though it was embarrassing to them. It would be useful if the Government continued to provide the figures.

It is all a matter of openness. In that connection, does not the Financial Secretary also think that more information should be regularly released about what is happening to the UK economy in cash flow terms? I keep tabling questions asking for projections of tax revenues, but am always told that the matter is too difficult. However, I am also told that 18 people in the Treasury are busy working on projecting tax revenue. If they are employed to make such projections, why cannot we—the representatives of the people and the taxpayers of this country—know what is happening to the cash flow of the economy? That information would give us more sense of the dynamics involved.

The question of what comes next has already been raised in the debate. Anatole Kaletsky's perceptive column in *The Times* this morning draws attention to the work being done by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The institute has calculated that sustaining the real annual spending growth of 4 per cent. projected in the Red Book would require that an additional increase in taxation amounting to some £6 billion would have to be announced in each Budget of the next Parliament. That is the

[Mr. Jack]

institute's opinion, and I appreciate that much can change. However, the point is that more tax is in prospect, unless other factors—as yet unknown to us—change.

The article, like others, points out that the rather subtle change in national insurance has allowed the Chancellor to get around his promise not to raise the higher rate of tax by sneaking in an additional 1 per cent. tax on all higher-rate taxpayers.

The Chancellor has done something else that is significant: he has ended the contributory principle of the national insurance fund. Most people pay national insurance contributions because they think it a good thing to do so. The most recent report from the Government Actuary found that 0.9 per cent. of the national insurance fund goes to the national health service. That proportion will now be much larger.

We have witnessed the true birth of hypothecation under this Government, but at the same time the end of the contributory principle. Other hon. Members have noted in this debate that the Government from now on will use the national insurance fund as some sort of cash milch cow.

The Red Book contains a whole list of the Government's tax measures. One of the items that I was interested to note was the amount of money that will be paid for the research and development tax credit. It will rise from £200 million in the current financial year to plateau out at £400 million for the next two financial years. What is the reason for that plateauing? Do the Government not think that the measure will suck in more and more investment to be relieved? In business terms, the changes in employers' national insurance are comparable with putting another 3p back on corporation tax.

There are also some other interesting things. I am delighted that the Government have come to their senses and ended their love-in with the film industry in their changes to film tax relief. That, at least, is a note of realism that I applaud. The Government will get some flack from the City, however, in response to some of the changes, particularly in terms of foreign companies. The Government were right to consider that question, but they will find some difficulties there.

The other mysterious thing is the oil fraud strategy. We all know that there may be some funny goings-on in relation to red diesel, but the build-up in the countering of fraud seems to be incredibly slow, given that, in year three, according to the Red Book, a projected £550 million will be put in as a result of this exercise. It will be very interesting to learn more about that matter.

I am surprised, too, that we have not heard anything from Ministers about the National Audit Office's observation that VAT fraud amounts to some £6.4 billion to £7.3 billion of lost revenue. If that nut could have been cracked, the Government would not have had to raise the national insurance contribution by anything like the amount by which it has been increased. I admit that exercises are under way in relation to fraud, but if £6.4 billion to £7.3 billion is going missing and there is no discussion on the Treasury Bench about additional resources to go into that area, that says something about where the Government's priorities lie.

I shall comment briefly on expenditure on health. I was interested in the observations of Patience Wheatcroft, whose column in *The Times* I have grown to enjoy. She contrasts Mr. Fred Goodwin with Mr. Wanless, from whom he took over as chief executive of NatWest bank, and writes that Mr. Goodwin would have been harder than Mr. Wanless—rather than giving the money away first, he would have got the reforms. I want to share with the House the thought that, in delivering this health care package, one of the problems that the Government will face will be actually getting people in for treatment.

The Wanless report gives us some counsel. First, it points out that it is difficult, in various scenarios, for spending growth of between 7.1 per cent. and 7.3 per cent. to be spent wisely on the health service; that is pushing it. It is not surprising that paragraph 5.54 of the report refers to the problem of the shortage of doctors, which it predicts for after 2005:

"If 20 per cent. of GP and junior doctors' work were shifted to Nurse Practitioners, this would eliminate any potential capacity constraints in doctor numbers."

That is worth considering. However, it continues:

"On this basis, the demand for nurses would increase by around a further 10 per cent. This could be filled if 12.5 per cent. of nurse workload could shift to health care assistants (HCAs). But on the basis of a transformation rate of 1.5, this would require additional recruitment of almost 70,000 HCAs in addition to the projected increase in demand of 74,000. Although there is scope to increase the number of HCAs, it may be difficult to recruit this many HCAs on top of the current workforce of around 350,000."

The whole report is littered with ifs, buts and assumptions. If the Government's policy on health care is founded on solving such problems, that illustrates the difficulty of spending the money quickly to deliver front-line services.

I hope that some of the money will contribute to relieve the wait to see consultants. Under the current arrangements in my area, as far as the Blackpool Victoria hospital is concerned, since January 2000, large numbers of specialties have vastly increased waiting times, which are well above the Secretary of State's current target of 15 weeks—soon to be 13 weeks for the first consultant appointment, I think. In only those disciplines in which clinical priority was changed by the waiting lists initiative has there been any decline in waiting times. The worst-case scenario is neurosurgery; someone with a brain problem has to wait 72 weeks to have it sorted. That is unacceptable, but I hope that the problem will be solved. I also hope that the policy will mean that the Blackpool Victoria hospital will get an additional CT scanner. I say that because I fight for the health care interests of my constituents and because I am personally dependent on the national health service. We want rapid progress.

I draw attention to another contrast. I talked to the new chairman of our primary health care trust who was involved with the primary care group until this month. He told me that it had taken him nine months of battling to try to get more chiropody services into the local health authority. No one could understand why what he described as "foot care maintenance" mattered. Now that he is the chairman of the primary health care trust, he says that he will change that. However, people have had to wait nine months to receive chiropody services, and we have all received letters from elderly people who desperately need help. This issue illustrates the problem and the complexity of the task of trying to put the health service right.

My right hon. and hon. Friends are right to examine alternatives. We should not be criticised because we have the courage to consider different approaches. We share

the common agenda of wanting better health care in this country. I am glad that we at least share such common ground, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Budget.

5.21 pm

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am grateful to be able to take part in this important debate. We should welcome the gracious comments of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) at the beginning of his speech. It was nice to hear such words from a Conservative Member.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on a superb Budget that will be of major benefit to all the people of the United Kingdom. It is worth noting the impact that it will have on Scotland, where it is good news as it will provide an extra £2.7 billion for public services over the next three years. That is equivalent to £528 per man, woman and child in Scotland. A further £5.5 billion will be provided in years four and five.

The 2002 Budget will go down in history as the one in which the Labour Government began to reverse decades of under-investment in the national health service and returned it to the type of health service that people want and deserve. The development of modern techniques and the fact that people are living much longer create an even greater burden. I believe that the vast majority of people understand that massive investment is required to make the health service, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor,

"the best insurance policy in the world."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002: Vol. 383, c. 592.]

I refer those Members who argue that the public will not understand our policy and will not continue to support the Labour party to the words of the taxi driver who brought me to Westminster this morning. His comments will certainly reassure Labour Members as we all know that London taxi drivers are a great barometer of public opinion. He said, "We want a good health service and we know we have to pay for it." His views reflect what the vast majority of people think. They want an NHS that is free at the point of need and that is not based on anyone's ability to pay.

The reforms demanded are crucial. We need an audit commission, and I welcome the creation of such an independent body. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made it clear just how independent the process will be. There must be an explanation for why some areas of the country are so much better served than others. I hope that the commission will provide such an explanation, as well as the accountability that has been sadly lacking in the health service for a long time.

I also welcome the improvements in the help given to working families through tax credits, which will further help people into work. I wholeheartedly support the efforts to get people into jobs because that is the only way to begin to lead people out of poverty. That is the principal way in which we can achieve our target of eradicating the scourge of child poverty. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg)—she put it so well—that helping even one child out of poverty is worth celebrating. It is appalling that, in 2002, so many children are denied the prosperity of the majority.

I will continue to work with others in my constituency to improve take-up. I assure the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) that Labour Members continue to remind the Secretary of State about that very important issue.

I was appalled at the attitude of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and the scare tactics that he used. I was a housing convenor in the mid-80s and one of the things that worried me most was having to give young, pregnant, vulnerable girls the keys to flats because we were putting them into such a dangerous position. To have to look after a young baby in isolation and without support is probably one of the most frightening experiences in the world. As a mother of four, I completely understand what that is like. Fortunately, I was never left alone, but it must be absolutely terrifying. That is why we should welcome the proposals in the Budget statement.

Supported living accommodation is needed. In my constituency, we have the first foyer project in Scotland, and it grew from a council initiative. Way back in the late 1980s, together with the YMCA, we set up supported accommodation not just for girls, but for young vulnerable people, and that has grown.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): We welcome that initiative only if it is voluntary.

Rosemary McKenna: Believe you me, those young people welcome it, and it is not appropriate in this day and age to put young pregnant girls—some are 14 years of age and all are under 18—who cannot be supported by their parents into a situation that would make their lives worse. They are vulnerable financially and sexually. What happens to some of those young girls is just unbelievable, and we want to ensure that they become responsible citizens and better parents. Surely that is the aim of all hon. Members.

My constituency has benefited greatly from the Budget and certainly since the Labour Government were elected in 1997. We have an unemployment statistic of 3.5 per cent.—a reduction of 43.3 per cent. since 1997. That is an amazing figure in anyone's book. I also congratulate our local jobcentres on developing their own initiatives. They have not waited for instructions to be handed down from on high. They have encouraged people into work, and they have done some superb work.

The people of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth will benefit hugely from the child tax credit, and even more families are benefiting from the working families tax credit—more than my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) says benefit from it in his constituency. More than 1,700 families benefit from it in my constituency.

Mr. Connarty: May I correct my hon. Friend? In fact, I said that it was 1,881.

Rosemary McKenna: I am sorry; I misheard. The number in my hon. Friend's constituency just beats mine. My aim is to get even more people to benefit from that credit and to continue the work on its take-up. Helping people to stay in work is very important. That is why we have to make work pay.

The additional assistance for child care is also greatly welcomed. In my constituency, that is particularly welcome for those who need to have their children looked

[Rosemary McKenna]

after at home. A great many of those in the work force in my constituency work shift patterns. Many of the jobs are in distribution, with a 24-hour working day. Having child care in the home will make a huge difference to those people; indeed, it will be a good reason for more individuals to get into work. At the moment, a lot of women are prevented from working and cannot take up much-needed jobs.

I welcome the guarantees for pensioners, especially those on state pensions or small occupational pensions. People who were able to provide for their retirement often found themselves in a poverty trap; the Budget will make a tremendous difference to them. Many pensioners in my constituency have asked me to thank the Chancellor because they are better off than they have been for many years; we should not be afraid to express such sentiments. Eight hundred and fifty businesses in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth will benefit from the cuts in the starting rate for corporation tax and the small business rate, as well as other measures to encourage enterprise and new business. New businesses are crucial to future employment prospects, and the Chancellor has provided genuine incentives to improve the business rate.

I am delighted that the Budget will benefit everyone, but I have one concern. How are areas like Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, where people are not highly paid but where there is low unemployment, to help adjoining communities with unacceptably high unemployment? Areas of deep deprivation and poverty, which often adjoin successful constituencies are one of the biggest challenges facing the Government. A significant target for us is to find a way to help them out of poverty.

Cumbernauld and Kilsyth give a sincere welcome to the Budget. We are a hard-working community; most people are in employment, but are not on high incomes. We hoped that the average income would rise in the near future; a well-known Scottish footballer, Henrik Larson, suggested that he would move to the constituency but, sadly, he has changed his mind, disappointing 50 per cent. of my constituency; I do not know what the other 50 per cent. are saying.

It is a great honour to be a member of a Government who have made a commitment to improving our public services. The Budget will ensure that resources will be available to both the Government and the Scottish Executive to deliver improved public services. I believe in our public services, and I want them to be the best in the world.

5.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I draw attention to a registered interest: I am non-executive director of a hotel or catering conference company that is relatively labour-intensive, so I anticipate that it will be adversely affected by some of the provisions in the Budget.

I originally intended to make just two points. Bearing in mind the edict of the Chairman of Ways and Means, I shall restrict myself to one point which, however, I shall extend a little by regretting the fact that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) is no longer in the Chamber. I appreciate that he has legitimate business elsewhere, but I was genuinely interested in his contribution to our debate. There appear to be affinities between Barnsley and Basingstoke. My constituency is situated in a relatively affluent part of the country, but has pockets of deprivation. I therefore identified with the hon. Gentleman's observations about Barnsley. In particular, our health authority has incurred a recurring deficit. Both today and yesterday, I listened carefully to all the Government's statements and observations; I have yet to hear, but look forward to doing so, clarification of the way in which the Government's increased expenditure plans will bear on health authorities with a historic recurring deficit.

I shall confine my further comments to just one point: the impact of the Budget on industry and commerce. Earlier in the debate the Secretary of State referred to the unprecedented strength and stability of the economy—I believe that I quote him accurately. It would be churlish to deny that that is the case in many respects, and I give credit to the Government for that. However, it is not the whole story.

During the previous Parliament, according to the Confederation of British Industry, business was burdened with an extra £6 billion a year in tax and some £5 billion in the estimated cost of red tape. Even before yesterday's Budget, those burdens have been impeding companies' ability to win orders and create jobs.

There is a further down side to the current generally healthy situation. The Government have so far only paid lip service to another important matter—the burden of bureaucracy on UK businesses, which increases remorselessly. Opposition Members have grown accustomed to pointing out that there has been the equivalent of one new regulation every 26 minutes of every working day during the lifetime of the Government. Whether or not that figure is disputed, it is irrefutable that UK businesses are spending more and more time filling in forms and less time chasing orders and creating jobs. Consequently, the UK is becoming a less attractive place to do business.

That is potentially very serious for a constituency such as Basingstoke—there are many similar constituencies, especially in the south-east of England—where a great deal of the locally based economic activity flows from inward investment. Over the past five years the UK has fallen from ninth to 19th in the league of world competitiveness, according to my figures. My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) had slightly different figures, but we are making essentially the same point.

The Government inherited a legacy of low taxation, a mobile work force and low non-wage costs for employers, but that legacy has largely been eroded. We have lost and are losing much of our advantage. That is important to towns with a high-tech industry component, such as Basingstoke. The Minister may recall the table that appeared earlier this week or perhaps last week in *The Times*, which showed that in towns such as Newbury, Basingstoke, Woking and Bracknell, the rate of unemployment has increased relatively dramatically over the past year or so, admittedly from a very low base. Our productivity growth used to be faster than that of the United States, but under the present Government productivity growth is slowing.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the gradual increase in the rate of unemployment in the

towns that he mentioned is due to the nature of the industries in those towns—high-tech industries, which have been greatly affected by the downturn in the high-tech sector in America?

Mr. Hunter: Of course that is right. I briefly pointed out that the downturn in the American economy is a significant contributing factor, but there are also other factors. My general point is that the UK is becoming a less attractive place for inward investment, which has consequences for employment in areas such as those that I have mentioned.

On trade, we keep reminding the Government that the UK's share of world exports has fallen and continues to fall. Our balance of trade has been in deficit every month for the past four years. I make those points simply to counter the Government's assertions about the strength and stability of our economy. Although I do not substantially disagree, I am saying that those factors are not the only picture, because there are other growing areas of concern that are relevant to the Budget, as I shall explain. The experience of my constituents is that, over the past five years, taxes have increased, public services have generally become worse; and business has borne the brunt of increased taxation. The essential point that I want to make is that from the point of view of business, the tragedy of the Budget is that some of its positive features are wholly negated by the increases in national insurance contributions.

The positive features are commendable. One of them relates to payroll burdens and the Government's response to the findings of the Carter report. They have responded, albeit modestly, and acknowledged that businesses have been hit severely by payroll burdens in the past four years. Nowadays, businesses are acting as unpaid tax collectors and administrators for the Treasury with regard to the working families tax credit, stakeholder pensions and student loan repayments, and no doubt in other respects. The Budget's payroll burden measure goes some way towards addressing the issue.

On the extension to large companies of the research and development tax credit scheme, I think that we are entitled to remain agnostic until we know the precise details and have seen the measure in practice. It is right that the Government should encourage companies to invest in research and development, but as a general rule, they can best do so by creating a climate that is favourable to the growth of business. That climate will consist to a significant degree of low taxes and fewer regulations, rather than a tax credit scheme that is burdensome to operate.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunter: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I wish to accelerate my remarks so that other hon. Members may contribute.

We know about the measures that the Chancellor has announced with regard to corporation tax and capital gains tax, but they are all very small fry. They account for virtually nothing and fade into insignificance in comparison with the increases in national insurance contributions, which represent a £4 billion-a-year tax on jobs starting next year—the equivalent of an increase of almost 3.5 per cent. in corporation tax. The impact will vary from company to company, but every company, and also the self-employed, will be hit. As has been pointed out in this debate and earlier during questions on the statement, the largest employer in this country is the national health service.

So it is happening again: for virtually every business, the overall tax burden will increase. Digby Jones, director general of the CBI, said yesterday that the Budget brings a net increase of £2.5 billion in the cost of doing business in the United Kingdom.

Most commentators are saying today that the Government have taken an enormous gamble, and I am sure that that is an accurate assessment. There was media speculation, not supported by my own observations, that some Labour Members had the jitters earlier this week when a national opinion poll stated that 70 per. cent of the population remain unconvinced by the argument that higher taxation is the way forward for public services. Irrespective of whether that is so, I am certain that we will see jitters in the years to come.

5.45 pm

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I very much welcome the Budget, not least because of the greater security that it gives to jobs in the city of Lincoln, where unemployment is just two fifths of what it was in 1997. In an already increasingly vibrant economy, the reduction in red tape for small businesses will be greatly welcomed by the local branch of the Federation of Small Businesses. The tax cuts for more than 1,600 businesses in Lincoln will also help to continue the positive local developments.

Engineering has received a great boost from the exemption from the climate change levy that has been given to the combined heat and power industry. I have worked for some time on behalf of Alstom, the largest private employer in my constituency, which makes gas turbines. Following its representations, I led an all-party group of MPs to meet my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to press for an exemption from the climate change levy. In an attempt to hold him to ransom, I reminded him that the heat and light that was being provided to Whitehall through a combined heat and power system was driven by a Lincoln-made gas turbine. Clearly my attempts were successful, and there was no need to get Lincoln to pull the plug on Whitehall.

There have been two years of unrelenting damage to the combined heat and power industry, and I hope that the exemption will be part of a mix of measures that are needed to deliver the Government's target of doubling combined heat and power output by 2010. I urge the Government to continue to take action and give support. Nevertheless, this step is extremely welcome and greatly increases job security at Alstom.

I turn now to the health service. Over the next five years, the Government will spend nearly half as much again as they are spending now. I know how warmly that is welcomed in Lincoln, where people have demanded—and, indeed, deserve—a better health service. The extra money that my right hon. Friend announced yesterday is extremely welcome. It gives the health service a financial footing that mirrors its place in people's lives and affections.

However, as has been acknowledged, extra money is just part of the solution. I want to press for a shift in approach, because we have the opportunity to do that.

[Gillian Merron]

Disease prevention must be much higher up the agenda than it is currently. The funding for the NHS is long term and, as I am sure hon. Members agree, prevention is better than cure. Not only will prevention save the NHS billions of pounds in the long term, but it will improve the quality of life that people can enjoy.

In 1996, coronary heart disease—the single leading cause of death in this country—cost the health service £1.6 billion, yet only 1 per cent. of that money was spent on prevention. Diabetes and its associated complications account for just under one tenth of the whole NHS budget. The incidence of adult obesity has tripled in the past 20 years, so that one in five adults is dangerously overweight, as is one in 10 children under the age of four—twice as many as 20 years ago. Obesity carries a tremendous cost—£500 million per annum for the health service, but also a personal cost in sickness, and, sadly, premature death for many thousands each year. This is a serious matter that needs serious and dedicated action.

The Budget is about much more than extra money for the health service. It also covers reform and independent inspection of standards. However, we must plan carefully to ensure that we move from having a national poor health service to a national good health service. Sport and exercise is proven to improve mental and physical health and to tackle many life-threatening conditions; I have mentioned some of them.

The Government should take positive action to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to take part in more sport and exercise. I am sure that the film "Bend It Like Beckham" will do a tremendous amount for women's football—that is not lost on Lincoln City Ladies—and especially for Asian women's football. However, we need a plan to improve the uptake of exercise and sport as part of a national health service strategy. I shall make some specific suggestions.

First, the Government should ensure that primary care trusts and groups, doctors and nurses better understand the role that sport and exercise can play in promoting healthy living. We should set national physical activity targets, as already happens in Scotland. We should ensure that health improvement modernisation plans include specific guidance on physical activity. General practitioner exercise referral schemes need long-term funding. They currently receive only short-term funding, the provision is patchy, and the Department of Health does not keep statistics on them. We must move beyond that.

Secondly, the Government could consider amending planning law to ensure that private developers pay a business contribution towards improving sport and recreation facilities. In Lincoln, the Ruston Marconi sports ground was recently acquired by Ashtenne Holdings for development. I share and have expressed the tremendous local anxiety about the provision for sport and recreation in that part of the city. We need better, not worse facilities. A change in the law would assist the local community in bringing pressure to bear to ensure that we have better facilities.

Thirdly, we should promote and quantify local authorities' role in sport and recreation. We expect local councils to provide facilities and a number, including Lincoln, find that such provision is under extreme financial pressure. It is difficult for councils to make the provision that they would like. I urge the Government to ensure that the review of local government finance takes account of our expectations and funds them accordingly. We must make a decision about the role of local authorities. I believe that they play a strong role in making local provision as part of a national health strategy.

As sponsor of a ten-minute Bill that advocated tax relief to community amateur sports clubs, I welcome that move in the Budget. I know that the Lincoln canoe club and Lincoln Wellington athletics club, which has offered to help me train for next year's London marathon after my first appearance in the Lincoln 10 km run this year, will welcome that support as well as the £20 million to renovate and improve community sports facilities.

I would like to finish by referring to the Wanless report, and to its conclusions and recommendations, which state:

"The Review has concluded that the UK must expect to devote a significantly larger share of its national income to health care over the next 20 years."

The report goes on to say that there are five factors which would result in the health service needing fewer resources. One of those factors is

"more success in public health".

It is clear to me that, in addition to the extra funding and monitoring, we must have a greater emphasis on prevention, not just on cure.

There is something for everyone in this Budget—we have the framework and the resources; I hope that we can make it work for the benefit of people in this country.

5.55 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to have the chance to participate in this debate. I want to speak mainly about education and students in particular. It is interesting that those two subjects were scarcely mentioned in the Budget speech yesterday. It is also interesting that the Government have chosen not to allocate a particular day to the subject of education during the Budget debate. After all, it is the subject that they originally based their whole government on, saying that it was the most important aspect of public spending. Now it seems to have dropped way down the list of priorities, and I deeply regret that.

I want to make two other quick points before I move on to education, the first of which concerns the question which was, in a sense, at the heart of the Budget—that of the 1p extra tax on incomes for health. This is an interesting concept because it is neither a direct income tax nor a direct national insurance tax. Under this new tax, 1p is being levied on everybody's income above a certain basic allowance, which is very similar to how an income tax works. Indeed, if one were beginning to introduce an income tax with no suggestion of its being progressive, that is exactly what it would be: 1p tax on income above a certain allowance.

On the other hand, national insurance for employees is at present levied above a certain allowance, as is income tax, but it also has a top-level cut-off. In that sense, it is very different from this new tax, which goes right the way through the income scale up to the top. Although, sadly, this new tax is not as progressive as the present income tax system, it is nevertheless closer to an income tax than to a national insurance tax. It is interesting, by the way,

that people talk about a 1p levy, because, of course, 2p will be levied on income: 1p from the employee and 1p from the employer.

If anyone doubts that there is a close connection between the new tax and income tax, it is worth thinking about what would have happened at the last general election if the Labour party had pledged in its manifesto not to raise national insurance contributions, but had made no such pledge about income tax. If it had done that, it could have done precisely what it did yesterday. It could have said, "All right, we will introduce a new 1p levy on income tax—because we did not promise not to raise income tax—but you can be sure that we won't touch national insurance. That is not changing at all." It could then have done precisely what it did yesterday, and said, "We are keeping to our pledge, because we are only raising income tax." That demonstrates clearly that the Government are simply playing with words when they claim that they have kept to their pledge not to raise income tax, by raising only national insurance.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Rendel: I shall give way, but I will take only one intervention.

Mr. Connarty: The Chancellor said that everyone, businesses as well as individuals, will benefit from a better health service. It is correct to levy the business community as well as the working population.

Mr. Rendel: I did not say that it was not right to levy the employers. That was not the point I was making. I was saying that the employees' side of the provision is much more like an income tax than a national insurance contribution. The Chancellor's and the Labour party's pretence that they have carefully kept to their pledge because they have raised only national insurance and not income tax is, frankly, an attempt to fool the populace at large, but I do not think that they will be fooled.

I also want to make a brief point about social services. We were promised today that there would be a 6 per cent. increase in the amount allocated for social services. That is desperately needed, as everyone in the country knows that social services are particularly underfunded at present. What horrified me in the Secretary of State's statement this afternoon was that he seemed to think that 6 per cent. was going to be enough. He seemed to suggest that, with that increase, it would to be easy for local authorities to end the problem of bed blocking, and to take everyone out of hospital who was ready to come out. Indeed, he threatened that he would fine local authorities if they did not do that.

In West Berkshire, we have had cuts worth much more than 6 per cent. Our social services funding has been cut by about 30 per cent. in the past few years. In spite of that, West Berkshire is still spending 50 per cent. more than its standard spending assessment—more than the Government say it should be spending now, let alone when it has taken on the extra people who are blocking the beds in our hospitals. If my local authority is fined in future for failing to take people out of hospital when it has been given this pitiful amount compared to what is needed, it will feel very hard done by, and I would not blame it.

I shall now deal with the problems of students and education as a whole. It is a glaring omission that students were not mentioned in the Chancellor's speech. There was little about education, and almost nothing about higher education. The only time he mentioned higher education was when he said that

"education will receive the priority to deliver further substantial improvements, not just in our schools but also in"—

here it comes at last—

"our universities and colleges."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 588.]

That was the only mention of higher education, and there was no mention at all of students.

Liberal Democrats welcome the extra money for universities and colleges. Although the figures came out in a parliamentary answer to a question that I tabled, the Government have not yet fully admitted that funding per student from the public sector has fallen by 6.7 per cent. since Labour came to power in 1997. It would therefore take more than 7 per cent. to put that back up even to the figure the Government inherited from their predecessors. It is welcome that we are at last getting some of that money from the public sector.

That money may be going to universities and colleges, but nothing is going into the student finance package. That is a criminal failure by the Government to finance a sector of the public service that desperately needs more funding. It is in line with what we are told the Chancellor keeps saying to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State, which is that whatever happens in the student finance review, there will be no more money overall. Most of us had hoped that that was the Chancellor's position, and that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State would have the strength to overrule him and to insist that more money should be available as a result of the student financial review to be published in the summer. It looks as though that will not be the case.

That is odd, because the Labour party is well aware of how many votes it lost in the general election on this issue. At the end of last year, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills said that the Government had

"got the collywobbles . . . after a successful campaign by the Liberal Democrats during the election."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 144.]

He said that that was why they had set up their student financial review.

The Secretary of State has explicitly recognised that debt is a great barrier to access, which the Government are rightly determined to improve. She said:

"I recognise that for many low income families fear of debt is a real worry and could act as a barrier to higher education. I want to make sure that our future reform tackles this problem."

How can it tackle the problem when no more money will be made available?

It is also odd because of the effect on students. Students now leave university with an average debt of £10,000 and rising. The National Audit Office has confirmed the danger to the student population that that lack of finance is causing. It reported on student participation, and

[Mr. Rendel]

confirmed that people from poorer backgrounds are significantly less likely to participate in higher education following the Government's changes. It said:

"Since 1998–99 . . . final removal of the means tested grant is likely to have widened the gap between social classes."

Is that what the Government were elected to do?

The NAO has reported that 47 per cent. of students have to take on work to fund their educational experience. According to the National Union of Students, full-time students work on average 11 hours a week—what does that do to their educational experience? Research at Newcastle university suggests that 35 per cent. of students with a job would get a higher-class degree, and a better grade for every year they spent at university, if they were not in employment.

For all those reasons it is odd that the Government have failed to put more into student finance this year, but one thing is even odder. At the heart of this Government and this Budget has been the theme of the NHS and what should be done to improve it. This afternoon's statement made it clear that the Secretary of State for Health expects to employ some 15,000 more doctors as a result of these changes. Doctors have to undertake not just a three-year but a five-year course, at least, before even qualifying—and they must undertake much more training after that. The five-year course must often take place in London, which is one of the most expensive areas for students.

For doctors, it is not just a question of a £10,000 debt when they leave university. Even now the amount averages £13,350, and 40 per cent. of those qualifying end up with a debt of at least £15,000. The sum is increasing constantly as the new system becomes fully operational.

My early-day motion 875 was tabled some time ago. It refers to the problems of students who undertake long courses. It has attracted signatures from Irish Members and nationalist Members, and I am pleased to say that there are signatures from Labour Members as well as members of my party. Sadly, however, there has not yet been a single signature from a Conservative Member. The Conservatives are simply not interested in the problems of students undertaking long courses.

In case anyone has any doubts about the disincentive caused to those considering taking up medical careers, let me point out that the intake of one London medical school this year consists of some foreign students—that is good news, of course, because it means more money—and some students who have been educated at independent schools. Not one of those students was educated in the public secondary school sector—there is a disincentive for you.

If we really want to encourage those from poorer backgrounds to enter the medical service, we must do something about the funding of medical students. It is idiotic to aim for an increase of 15,000 in the number of doctors in this country unless we are prepared to ensure that there is a much smaller financial disincentive for those who want to take medical courses at medical schools. We need a bit of joined-up government, between the health and the education services.

Many students and their parents had assumed that the current review would lead to a better, more generous financial package. The Chancellor has now made it clear that students can expect nothing overall. The Government admitted that they were shocked by the effect of this issue on their vote at the general election. Well, students and their parents will have one last chance, before the spending review is out, to send the Government the message that we need more money for student finance. That chance will come on 2 May, and I hope that the voters will take it.

6.8 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): It is a pleasure for me to speak in this debate, especially on a day when we have heard a statement describing how the increase that the Chancellor announced for the health service yesterday—the largest-ever sustained increase in health service resources—will be implemented.

This is a good Budget for my constituents. The child tax credit will provide a tremendous boost for many of my constituents on very modest incomes. The same applies to other measures announced by the Chancellor, such as the raising of pensioners' income threshold, which will take many pensioners out of the tax system altogether. That will be a marvellous boost for many of my constituents who have very small occupational pensions to top up their state pensions.

What I expect my constituents to welcome most of all, however, is what the Chancellor has announced for public services. They will welcome not only the health announcement, which builds on the £43 billion that we have already committed to the public services up to 2004, but our plans for education. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said, the Chancellor made it clear yesterday that education spending would continue to rise as a proportion of national income and that there would be an immediate £100 million extra for school improvements.

Those announcements are both economically and morally right. They are economically right because a sound economy can afford to invest in its public services, and if we are to create a society in which people are prepared to take risks, be enterprising and start new businesses, we need the underpinning of public services that makes them feel secure in doing that. The announcements are morally right because they show clearly that we have an obligation to one another in society and that we can achieve more by acting together to provide communal services than by acting alone.

I support the arguments for extra investment in public services that the Chancellor advanced yesterday. The Conservatives continually denigrate those services and have set out on a sustained mission to try to convince the public that public provision cannot and will not work, as a prelude to further privatisation. That is the same argument that we heard from the last Tory Government, but simply packaged more prettily. It is based on the fundamentally flawed belief that public services, far from being a help to individual effort, are a hindrance to it, and that libertarianism produces a better society.

That idea is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the history of this country. All the great advances for individuals have been achieved through public provision at a very basic level: the provision of clean water, sewerage and mass vaccination did more for people's health than any individual effort could achieve. Public housing took people out of slums, and the creation of a

public education system allowed individuals to achieve their potential in a way that was unknown several generations ago.

I always cite my own family as an example, not because we are in any way exceptional but because we are so typical. My grandparents brought up their children in the direst poverty. My older relatives still remember what it was like to have to struggle to pay the doctor if a child was ill or a new baby was born. There was no hope of staying on in education past 14. Yet my grandmother lived to see her grandchildren born in national health service hospitals, living in decent public housing and going to university. That was achieved not because we were clever or because we worked hard—I do not believe that my generation ever worked harder than my grandparents did—but because the public provision was in place to make it possible.

We have to achieve that again for a new generation. Quite rightly, the public services that we put in place have raised expectations. People demand more of the services that we provide now. That is why what my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary said about a clear and proper audit of the extra provision for the health service is so important. Governments have a duty to tax fairly and spend wisely, but our individual citizens also have the right to expect that we will make it clear that the extra spending is truly improving provision.

Hon. Members' readiness to support that will speak volumes about their beliefs about the future direction of this country. The Conservatives' position is clear, however much they may try to obfuscate it: it is Thatcherism with a smile. They talk about better provision of public services and about the disadvantaged, while at the same time they are committed to cutting public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product. That would have a profoundly regressive effect, giving tax cuts to people on higher incomes. The poorest and those on modest incomes will have to pay for it.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) kindly told us exactly how the Conservatives plan to pay for health care. They want more people to take out private medical insurance. The trouble with that is that schemes do not take on people who are sick, have a long-term chronic condition or are elderly. The Conservatives want more of what they call "self-pay". Do they mean hip operations that cost between £5,000 and £8,000, cataract operations that cost between £1,500 and £2,500 or people having to pay to see the doctor? They have not explained exactly what is involved, but it is clear that their plans would put an end to medical care free at the point of need, which has always been the key to health provision in this country.

In my view, it is much fairer and more equitable to fund health care through direct taxation, as the Government have decided to do. We must also be honest enough to tell people that we expect to see changes in the service for the money that we put in. There is no longer a something-for-nothing deal. Public services must be much more responsive, because what was appropriate for people's needs in the 1950s is not appropriate in the 21st century.

We have already seen that the public sector can deliver more responsive services if it is given the opportunity to do so. Examples are NHS Direct, walk-in centres and the personal medical service pilots. The one in my constituency has been able to tailor its services to the needs of the population and train its front-line staff to do much more.

The money will provide an opportunity to look carefully at the services that are currently provided and ask some fundamental questions about them. For understandable reasons, health care has been focused on acute services. I trust that we will, with the extra money going in and the primary care trusts coming on-stream, we will be able to spend much more on community services.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) rightly mentioned the need for more chiropody and podiatry services. They are not glamorous services that attract a great deal of publicity, but they do more to keep elderly people mobile, prevent them from developing other diseases and keep them out of hospital than other services in the acute sector. Similarly, we need to make sure that therapy services are properly delivered and that we integrate hospital and community provision so that people have a proper package of care when they come out of hospital. That will end the revolving-door syndrome whereby patients leaving hospital do not get proper therapy and therefore have to be re-admitted.

The health service can be flexible and respond to changing needs only if we invest in front-line staff and allow them to take the lead in developing services. They are often fizzing with ideas. We have to accept that some of those ideas will not work, but we cannot make progress without drawing on the experience of the staff, not simply the extra doctors and nurses whom the Wanless report makes it clear are required, but other health service staff. Many are on low grades, but they have a great deal of experience to offer the health service. We should design a proper career path that rewards their commitment to public service with the ability to progress. The Government have made a start by allowing health care assistants to train as nurses and I hope that there will be more progress in future.

I conclude with a few words about education, which I hope to expand on at some future date. The Government have improved standards in primary education beyond recognition through use of the literacy hour and the numeracy hour, which, it is fair to say, were viewed with great suspicion at the beginning. We now need to focus on how we deal with secondary education, and to ask some fundamental questions about the values that we want to pass on to our children, and what they ought to be learning to equip themselves for a vastly more complex world than we ever had to face. We must address not just the teaching of basic subjects, but how we teach our young people to deal with the vast amount of information that they receive through various media. We must teach them how to discriminate between, and value, types of information.

We must look carefully at the practical skills that children need, and we need seriously to consider when we should begin language teaching in our schools, because we in this country have not been good at that. We must also look at how to develop scientific literacy—not just the teaching of science, but an appreciation of how science has changed our world and how people can learn to assess scientific risk—because recent examples have shown that our society is very poor in that regard.

We can consider many things, but the key is that this Budget has given us secure funding for public services, which will allow us to ask those questions and to build

[Helen Jones]

up our services for the future. That will enable us not merely to firefight in the public sector, but to develop the best possible provision for the people of this country. That is why it is a good Budget. It enables our people to look forward to the future with confidence, and I hope that the House will support it.

6.21 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am fortunate to be called late in this debate, because it gives me a chance to follow the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), who, in a thoughtful and obviously sincere speech, expressed a point of view with which I fundamentally disagree. This Budget is one of the worst that I can recall. Why, oh why, do Chancellors not follow the example of Mr. Derick Heathcoat-Amory, who, in a lengthy Budget speech some years ago, changed the excise duty on chicory—and nothing else? More Chancellors should realise that, as they tinker, they do damage.

When I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Treasury, I discussed with others the fact that any measure taken by a Chancellor of the Exchequer inevitably damages somebody. The then Chancellor was quite proud of his measure to reduce the duty on environmentally friendly, "green" petrol. He said, "There is a change that won't damage anybody at all", but it virtually drove out of business the main manufacturer of anti-knock additive to lead petrol. I gather that that manufacturer was a strong supporter of the Conservative party. Every change damages somebody.

Although they are probably not directly relevant to my remarks, I should declare my interests, which are properly recorded in the register.

This Budget is extremely damaging: it is damaging to employment, through the 2 per cent. increase in national insurance, and to investment. Anyone listening to yesterday's statement would have thought that the Chancellor was actually helping oil companies in the North sea; in fact, he was adding a 10 per cent. duty on profits. The Budget was far too complicated, consisting as it did of various children's benefits and working families tax credits. I gather that the take-up rate for the working families tax credit is about 31 per cent. This Chancellor simply cannot resist tinkering. We would be better off without this Budget and, in my view, without this Chancellor.

I am not the only one to think so. The "Lex column" in today's *Financial Times*, which refers to "Tax tinkering", deserves extensive quotation:

> "If you want to raise the rate of income tax, the simplest thing to do is raise the rate of income tax. That, however, would be too straightforward for Gordon Brown. Hemmed in by an election promise to raise neither the basic rate nor the higher rate of personal income tax, he has furtively accomplished the same thing by introducing an additional 1 per cent national insurance contribution on all earnings . . . This is evasion, not avoidance, of the election promise.
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> If this were the first time that Mr Brown had introduced needless complexity in pursuit of some private whim, it would be bad enough. The Chancellor is, however, a serial offender. He has turned the British tax system into a monstrous thing, riddled with complexities and inconsistencies."

We have a bad tax system that is far too complicated. If the Chancellor were a company director he would be banned, and if he were a bookie he would probably be warned off the course.

The Labour view, well expressed by the hon. Member for Warrington, North in her thoughtful speech, is that the Government know best and that any problem can be resolved by Government. That is why the top rate of tax is now effectively 41 per cent., but for those earning between £28,000 and £30,000 it is effectively 51 per cent. because of the total of the national insurance payments.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who is of course a former Financial Secretary and knows what he is talking about, made a very good point when he said that we should look globally at taxation. That is true. If someone works overtime and earns £50, half of it will go in tax and national insurance. If he then spends £25 on petrol for his car and a packet of cigarettes, more than 90 per cent. of those overtime earnings will go to the Government in revenues of one kind or another. Perhaps it is time for a study that shows the inter-relationship between direct taxation and indirect taxation. We are being very heavily taxed and little money is left with which individuals can make their own choices.

We forget also that universal benefits cost around 1 per cent. to 1.5 per cent to administer, but means-tested benefits cost some 10 or 11 per cent. on average. The increase in means-tested benefits under this Government is costing a great deal in administration. For example, in the past four years, the Government have introduced five new tax credits for families, scrapped four of them and introduced two more. That level of complexity is confusing and expensive. Occasionally I meet constituents who really know their way around the tax and benefit system and they are usually doing well. However, for most of us it is far too complex. The present tax system is beyond many people's comprehension, take-up rates are poor, it is unfair and expensive, it encourages dependency and it discourages independence.

The main theme of today is work and pensions and I wish to return to a point that I put to the Secretary of State on Monday during questions. I am glad to see that he is in his place today and I congratulate him on that. Unlike many of his Front-Bench colleagues, he is a good attender in the House and we appreciate that. My point was that the Government and the Chancellor, in his single biggest act of taxation, changed the rates of advance corporation tax on pension funds, thereby damaging them—perhaps irreparably.

I made the point that millions of people in their 30s and 40s now find that pension funds are phasing out final-salary schemes. Those people will no longer be able to make provision for their retirement. The Secretary of State responded by saying that, not for the first time, I had misled the House. He pointed out that reductions in value on the stock exchange and longevity were more responsible for changes in pensions funds and the phasing out of final-salary schemes than was advance corporation tax. That is not true, because pension fund trustees can take account of long-term variations in stock exchange values. They know that values on the stock exchange go down as well as up, and they can plan for the long term with the advice of their actuaries. They can take a view on long-dated bonds and AAA-rated bonds and invest for the long term so as to allow the pension fund to reflect the requirement for pensions to be drawn from it. Longevity is also taken into account by actuaries when they advise the trustees on the proposed benefit schemes.

Final-salary schemes are being phased out because the Chancellor, in his biggest single stealth tax, which he introduced in his first Budget in 1997, has placed a massive burden of £5 billion a year on pension funds. The cumulative effect is that many pension funds are phasing out their generous final-salary schemes and introducing instead money-purchase schemes. I repeat the point that I made on Monday: millions of people in their 30s and 40s will be deprived of the independence in retirement for which they were hoping. They will be forced into dependency. One is forced to believe that this Government do not want to encourage independence.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Viggers: I am sorry, but I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has intervened frequently this afternoon.

I think that the Government like to have people on means-tested benefits. They estimate that between 56 and 59 per cent. of pensioners and 40 per cent. of people generally are on means-tested benefits. According to departmental estimates, 65 per cent. of pensioners will be on means-tested benefits by 2050. We on the Conservative Benches deplore that and believe that independence is the single most important thing that people seek. This Government have done a massive amount to destroy that.

6.31 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): This has been a good, stimulating and robust debate, to which so far no fewer than 13 right hon. and hon. Members have contributed. It was opened with his usual style and incisiveness by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who offered the House a forensic dissection of the complexities and minutiae of the Government's tax credits policy. The Secretary of State followed, with what I must confess, by his standards, was a highly humorous and witty speech—though I am sorry to say that, in my mind at any rate, that did not compensate in any way for its relative lack of intellectual substance.

The Secretary of State was followed by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who gave us a scholarly disposition on a range of Government policies. When I observe the hon. Gentleman, I am always rather worried on his account. He has so many brains that I am always a little apprehensive that at any moment one or other of them might spew forth from his head and on to the Floor of the Chamber. He made a good speech and I enjoyed listening to it, as I did to that of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), who offered a penetrating critique of the Government's climate change policy based on his experience in his constituency. I am sure that it was greeted with respect and understanding on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) commented with authority and expertise on the Government's tax policies, the declining competitiveness of UK plc and the alarming problems of the productivity gap. There was a potent contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who is a distinguished former Financial Secretary to the Treasury. He focused among other topics on venture capital and the burden of corporation tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) offered a general critique of the Government across the field of public policy, including their failures in respect of economic performance and the delivery of public services.

The hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) talked about energy, the health service and her particular pleasure in respect of Government policy in the Budget on community amateur sports clubs. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) lamented the Government's position on student finance. We had a powerful contribution just a few moments ago from my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), one of the merits of which from my selfish point of view was to remind me of how moderate in my criticisms of the Government I am progressively becoming. I am grateful to him for providing a yardstick against which I must measure my efforts in future.

I hope that I have not missed out too many hon. Members. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) made a powerful speech, but I shall not be hypocritical about it. Sadly, I was not present for most of it, but I am well aware that that was my loss and not hers.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) made a brilliant, skilful, eloquent, passionate and sincere contribution to the debate. I recall, as she will with some pain and anguish, that I lavishly complimented her in a newspaper interview about a year ago. Whether there is any causal relationship between that compliment and the inexplicable fact that she continues to languish on the Government Back Benches, I know not, but I do not wish to embarrass her any further.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Why not?

Mr. Bercow: Because I am a naturally generous-spirited fellow, and I do not wish to damage the hon. Lady's prospects in any way.

In the short time available to me, I wish to focus on a number of aspects relating to business, the children's tax credit, national insurance and the health service. On business policy and the contents of the Budget impacting on companies, we will certainly look dispassionately and constructively at the research and development tax credit, the Government's proposals for VAT reform, the pilot schemes to encourage the provision of training and the attempted reduction in the payroll burdens on business following the Carter report—burdens that have been substantially imposed by the very Government who are now pledging to review them.

Similarly, we will look critically but with interest at the Government's policy on gains from substantial shareholdings, on tax relief for intellectual property and other features of the Budget that have been highlighted in contributions this afternoon. However, I have to say to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is winding up for the Government, that any progress in relation to enterprise, any assistance to companies that has been provided and any betterment of the business climate that might result from particular measures in this Budget must be viewed in the context and against the background of two important facts. First, the consequence of the changes—let us be explicit and say the huge increases—in national insurance contributions will be extremely damaging to large numbers of companies the length and

[Mr. Bercow]

breadth of the United Kingdom, as the authentic representatives of British business, whose word I trust on these matters, have eloquently testified over the past 26 hours.

These measures must be viewed in the light of the damaging regulatory imposts that have spewed forth from Whitehall since May 1997. The Government said just before they were elected that they would not impose burdensome regulations upon business because they understood that successful businesses must keep costs down. Since then, they have progressively increased regulatory burdens so that the sea of regulation with which businesses have to contend is deeper and more hazardous than at any time in the history of the United Kingdom.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke said, the Government have imposed one regulation every 26 minutes of the working day. In 2001, from the Treasury alone, we had no fewer than 188 regulations in the form of statutory instruments, running to 1,352 pages—a veritable cure for insomnia—and weighing 4.074 kg. That is the record of a Government who do not understand business, have not worked in business, have never run a business and have certainly never owned one. That is the context in which we must view what they say now.

The Government have talked with enthusiasm and no little pride about their child tax credit and the measures that they are taking, the better to assist families. As a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out over the past 24 hours, that must be considered in the light of the fact that between October 1999 and April 2003 the Government will have introduced five new such credits, withdrawn four of them and then added another two on top. Many of those measures require substantial swathes of regulation if they are to become effective in practice, and that means regulation on businesses. When we talk about regulation on businesses, we do not mean businesses including small businesses, we mean predominantly small businesses. Some 99.6 per cent. of companies in Britain employ fewer than 100 people; at my last examination of the matter, they accounted for approximately 57 per cent. of the private sector work force and they now generate about half our national output. Those companies are being belaboured by the regulatory leviathan so favoured by this Administration.

We know that the increase in national insurance contributions will hurt some people badly. It has been imposed even though, on 29 May last year, in a debate on the "Powerhouse" programme towards the end of the election campaign, the present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that there was no question that national insurance contributions would be increased. She said that the Government had no such plans, and she added that it simply would not happen.

In defiance of those apparent commitments, the increase has happened. The Forum of Private Business said yesterday that the additional bill would be £2,361 a year for companies with 10 employees. For any firm daring to grow and become more prosperous, to generate greater wealth and employ up to 100 people, the additional national insurance burden as a result of yesterday's Budget will be £23,606.

The change also has a relevance for public services. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) pointed out to me today that each of the six secondary schools in his constituency will each face an extra bill of £40,000 a year as a result of the 1 per cent. increase in employer national insurance contributions. I think that even the Financial Secretary will be able to do the arithmetic readily enough. The extra bill will amount to almost a quarter of a million pounds a year for those schools.

In the education service, for 361,200 teachers, the extra bill will be £79 million a year. The police service has 124,970 officers, and the additional bill there comes to £32 million a year. The NHS is now the largest employer in western Europe, following the collapse of the Red Army. The extra national insurance bill for the NHS as a consequence of yesterday afternoon's deliberate and calculated imposition by the Chancellor is £336 million a year.

That is the reality of what is about to be implemented by the Government. They say that the purpose is to finance improvements in health, and that those improvements will be accompanied by reform. However, before the Budget, I made a cursory examination of speeches by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Since 1998 there have been no fewer than 23 references to the matter but, although we have had the extra £100 billion in taxation and some of the promised increases in expenditure, we have not had the reform.

The Secretary of State for Health made a statement today, but on reform he gave us only woolliness and gimmickry on a grand scale. Problems of bed blocking and cancelled operations—77,818 of the latter last year—persist. The problem that there are more people waiting to see a consultant remains—there are 113,000 more of them since the Government came to office. The problem that our NHS has more administrators than beds persists and is exacerbated almost every day. To be precise, there are 12,290 more administrators than there are beds.

All those problems persist because we have a monolithic, bureaucratic, over-centralised, inflexible and unresponsive system. About £10 billion a year is wasted in the NHS in various ways.

A little while ago, I praised the hon. Member for Warrington, North generously and perhaps extravagantly. She spoke about the danger that more people will have to pay for operations. She is a keen student of the facts of political debate, and she must know that, last year alone, an extra 250,000 people in this country did just that, even though they had no insurance.

The two-tier system already exists under this Government. Many Conservative Members, including those who have used the NHS for decades of our lives, do not think it right that people should have to use their life savings to save their lives. That is what is happening under this new Labour Administration.

I shall take no lectures from the Financial Secretary, and certainly none from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I hail from the wing of the Conservative party whose members pay mortgages and buy their own furniture. I have used the NHS for 35 years of my life. I did not go to a Scottish public school called Loretto, and I will not take lectures from the Secretary of State about

the importance of standing up for and tailoring policies that are in the interest of people who do not have money. I believe in treating people on the basis of their need. We have an open mind about how to improve health care, and the Labour party has a closed mind. It has learned nothing over the past five years, and it is arrogant and stupid enough to think that it has nothing to learn in the course of this Parliament either.

This Government have failed on their public service agreement targets. They have failed on truancy, they have failed on numeracy levels for 11-year-olds, and are failing now in terms of the growth of passengers on the railway system. They are failing in terms of the reduction of congestion on our roads, which increased in 2001 by 3 per cent. They are failing in relation to their criminal justice targets, too. They say that they want to cut robbery; they are failing to do so.

The Government know how to tax and they know how to spend, and, as my right hon. and hon. Friends and millions of people the length and breadth of the country are increasingly aware, they also know how to waste money on a monumental scale. They have failed, and they are failing. With their approach, they will continue to fail.

The Government have been sussed. That is why they are becoming rattled—they have no new ideas. They have lived by spin, and they will die by spin. They are a useless shower.

6.46 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This has been a good debate. I fear that its tone and content plummeted with the contribution of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). I would not dream of lecturing him; it is not in my nature. I feel called on, however, to counsel him slightly, which is in my nature. The last person whom I witnessed using visual aids at the Dispatch Box, as he has just done, was one Neil Hamilton. We all know what happened to him. I would hate the hon. Member for Buckingham to end up in freak show television. He is due for another destination entirely—languishing on the Opposition Benches for many years to come.

In this Budget, we are building on the prudence of our first five years in office the principles for the next 50 years. I say that in the light of two contributions that I have heard from Opposition Members. If I may, I should like to compare and contrast them, as one was invited to do in response to exam questions of the sort set by the professor—the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on this issue—and even, I suspect, from time to time, by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), in his own mind at any rate.

The two contributions in question came from the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer). They were interesting and contrasting contributions. That of the right hon. Member for Fylde was reflective and considered. It bore all the hallmarks of someone who has been responsible for the publication of the Red Book, and it raised a number of important issues, not least about oil fraud. I am bound to say that, just as Calais was found to have been carved on the heart of Mary Tudor, so oil fraud will be found—when that unhappy day comes—to have been carved on mine. I will therefore write to the right hon. Gentleman about his detailed points in relation to oil fraud.

A contrasting speech was made by the hon. Member for West Worcestershire. His contribution was that of an energetic Europhobe and a fanatical free marketeer, who characterised the Government's economic policy in the most grotesque way. For him to suggest, having heard yesterday's Budget speech by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Government had a downer on competition and did not recognise the benefits of the market parodies belief what the Government have stood for over the past five years.

The hon. Member for Buckingham invited the House to consider what has been said about the Budget by those responsible for industry, business and the creation of wealth in our society. I am happy to do that. I refer him to the comments of Mr. Digby Jones of the CBI, who said that the Chancellor had left businesses in no doubt that he was committed to encouraging enterprise. The tax improvements, he said, including those relating to the red tape burden, were welcome. He especially welcomed the financial help for small businesses gaining accreditation as Investors in People. Although the two sides of the House disagree about the issues and about the balance of the Budget, to characterise the Budget, as the hon. Member for West Worcestershire sought to do, as anti-competitive and anti-market does not do justice to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's statement.

Sir Michael Spicer: Will the Minister at least accept that the Government have fundamentally changed their minds about tax and spend in the past six months? Is that why the Prime Minister has been going around looking so washed out over the past few days?

Mr. Boateng: I do not accept that, or the hon. Gentleman's description of the Prime Minister, any more than I recognise his description of the state of the British economy today. We must not forget what we inherited from the Conservative party.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Will the Financial Secretary give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, not at the moment. Conservative Members do not like being reminded of their past, but they will have to hear about it for a bit.

We inherited from the Conservatives in 1996–97 a debt that was 44 per cent. of national income. Three years ago, we brought it down to 36 per cent. and, last year, it was 31 per cent. That is in stark contrast to the United States, which has a debt of 41 per cent., the euro area as a whole—this will be music to the ears of the hon. Member for West Worcestershire—which has a debt of 53 per cent., and Japan, which has a debt of 59 per cent.

The difference between us and Conservative Members is that we have the prudence and capacity to manage the economy, whereas they are incompetent and have a wanton disregard for sound public finances. That was the Conservative party's legacy. The Labour party is now the party of government—that rankles with all too many Conservative Members—and we have cut interest debt payments by £8 billion and saved almost £5 billion more on the cost of unemployment.

The hon. Member for Buckingham is concerned about waste. What about the waste of idleness and the obscene waste of unemployment? That is what Conservative

[Mr. Boateng]

Members were responsible for when they had stewardship of our economy. We have made the Bank of England independent, a step that the shadow Chancellor described at the time as damaging to the future of this country. Conservative Members have changed their minds. I listened to the right hon. Member for Fylde, and I could actually believe—this may stretch the imagination of some of my hon. Friends—that, somewhere deep in the bowels in the office of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, he was secretly working away at just such a plan. However he did not have the guts to implement it. It took a Labour Government and a Labour Chancellor to do that, and the economy has benefited ever since.

We have freed up the resources for public services in a sustainable and responsible way. We are delivering on our commitment to improve the public services in the Budget. That was recognised by my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Rosemary McKenna), for Lincoln (Gillian Merron), for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) and for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell). All of them recognised in their contributions what the Government have done for the public services.

This Budget rightly places an emphasis on health—I want to deal with that in detail in a moment—but my hon. Friends have also recognised what we have done for education and law and order in their constituencies. Importantly, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln also emphasised in referring to community sports clubs what we have done for social cohesion—what we have done about the business of bringing together people and communities.

Yes, we are desperately concerned as a Government about the importance of social inclusion. Yes, we are concerned to take the practical measures necessary to bring together sections of our community, one of which has been mentioned in the debate: teenage mums—girls under the age of 18 who find themselves with child. Yes, we are determined to do all we can to bring them back into the mainstream of society, to give them the opportunities to gain an education and to make work pay for them. Yes, we are absolutely determined to use all the resources and measures at our disposal to ensure that they do not just allow themselves, or that they are not allowed, to languish alone, unsupported and isolated, in council estates or in unfurnished or furnished bedsits throughout the country.

Yes, there is another way: it is right to make available the resources by which those young girls can be helped in supported accommodation. For those who speak for the Liberal Democrats to characterise that as a form of compulsion is a travesty of what we seek to do. This is a matter not of compulsion, but of support and encouragement.

Mr. Willetts: Is the Financial Secretary aware that in an article headed "Why we should stop giving lone teenage mothers council homes" that appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 14 June 1999, the Prime Minister announced that that was the Government's policy, and that nothing has been done in the three years since then?

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken forward that cause in the Budget, as he has a range of other issues.

The Budget sets out our response to three key challenges. The challenge of enterprise involves a low-taxation environment, incentives for investment and innovation and support for small businesses. There is the challenge of child poverty and family prosperity. We are helping families to help themselves with a radical reform of the tax and benefits system. All families with an income of up to £58,000 a year will be better off. There is also the challenge of the public services, which were starved of investment under two decades of Conservative rule.

We are seeking to address decades of underinvestment in the NHS. The Opposition have failed to explain in all their wanderings, like flying Dutchmen going from place to place, how they will deliver the resources necessary for the NHS. Above all, they have failed to say how they would pay for the NHS and who would do the paying. We know who would pay—the public, through charges and private insurance. The Budget defends the NHS and takes forward our economy. I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Debate to be resumed on Monday next.

Former British Coal Employees

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

6.59 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I wish to raise an issue that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on 7 November last year: the dilemma of canteen workers and cleaners who used to work for British Coal and its forerunners. The debate on 7 November was well attended.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy met nearly two dozen Members of Parliament in the Department of Trade and Industry on 13 November. He listened to what we said about the situation and heard our many points about the plight of former Coal Board canteen workers and cleaners. At that meeting, I made a handwritten note that the Minister acknowledged that

"an injustice had been done between those who were registered and those weren't"

under equal pay legislation. He also said that he would see if there was a mechanism for making an ex gratia payment, as he was anxious for the Department to make progress on mining issues.

The Government have made good progress on mining issues, and have learned in the past five years that the legacy of the coal industry runs deep and wide, ranging from cleaning up the environment to compensating workers who have become victims of ill health. It is claimed that there are many victims, not least the women who worked in the industry, who were denied equal pay, given fewer holidays and refused help with concessionary fuel, and who received inferior pensions because they were women. Their fight for justice turned into what can only be described as a war of attrition between the unions in the industry and the Government which went on for many years.

Those women did not have claims in on time, as the legislation stipulated, but many of my hon. Friends and I believe that that was not their fault. As my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out in a letter to me today, it was the responsibility of union representatives to keep their members informed; if the claims had been lodged in a timely manner, the problem would not have arisen. Somewhere along the line, someone did not process their claims. Since our meeting with the Minister, there have been two lobbies of Parliament by those ex-workers. I was invited to the second one on 21 March, which was addressed by the president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I was invited to that meeting by women with claims in my constituency. Did my right hon. Friend, like me, find it bizarre that that was the only lobby of Parliament in which the sole speaker was the president of the NUM? All those women had travelled down to London to lobby their MPs, but the only person allowed to speak was Arthur Scargill.

Mr. Barron: I did indeed find it bizarre. It was the only parliamentary lobby I have ever attended at which the person sitting on the platform asked people to ask questions, then said if there was time MPs could ask, not answer, questions. I dare say that many right hon. and hon. Members would love all lobbies to be like that; we could go along and ask questions of people who had come to make a case to the House.

At that meeting, the NUM president once again claimed that in April 2001 the then Minister for Energy and Competitiveness, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), had agreed to pay women who did not have a valid claim under the legislation. I have spoken directly to my right hon. Friend, who categorically denies the allegation made by Mr. Scargill.

I have a copy of my right hon. Friend's letter dated 23 April 2001 which outlines what was agreed between the Department of Trade and Industry and the NUM regarding the women who had valid claims under the legislation. There is no mention in the agreement of any promise of payment to women who did not submit a valid claim. There were three points in the agreement: first, the level of compensation that the women would get; secondly, the minimum payment that they would get; and thirdly, an agreement to fund arrears of subscription and an administration fee in accordance with the ruling handed down at York county court on 2 October 2000.

The third point may sound a little obscure to my hon. Friends, so I shall clarify it. They may be interested to know what the York county court case was about. I have a copy of the court's decision. The court was in fact the Barnsley county court, which happened to be sitting in York that day. No reason is given for that.

In 1999 the DTI offered a settlement to the women who had valid claims, and some of them accepted. Included in the 1999 offer from the DTI was an offer of indemnity against the women having to pay money to the NUM out of their settlement. As some hon. Members know, the NUM asks ex-members to sign a form agreeing to pay arrears of subscriptions and an administration fee if their claims are successful. The women who had agreed the DTI settlement therefore refused to pay the union, given that they had indemnity. As I understand it, the level of settlement would have meant the women handing almost all their compensation over to the NUM.

As a consequence of the women's refusal, the National Union of Mineworkers took three of the women to court—its own ex-members—in a test case. The women were defended by the DTI, but the NUM won the case. It won the right to take a cut of the women's compensation money.

When the rest of the cases were settled by agreement in April last year, the Government gave the NUM £1.7 million under the terms of the agreement to which I referred,

"on the basis that the Union would not seek to recover those costs from the compensation amounts being paid to each former canteen worker—who will therefore receive their full entitlement without any deductions."

The NUM can hardly justify seeking to recover those legal costs, because it was paid a further £600,000 to cover legal costs incurred over the years in connection with the claims. Out of a total settlement of some £14 million the NUM received £2.3 million. Some people might argue that legal costs paid for in the 1980s and 1990s were paid out of the women's contributions while they were at work.

When the former canteen workers and cleaners who had received no compensation lobbied Parliament on 21 March, I asked Mr. Scargill whether, if the

[Mr. Barron]

Government were to offer ex gratia payments to those women, he would want any of it. He said that he would not. I should think not, given that none of the women had submitted valid claims. It is clear that his union had not represented their interests in the matter.

Hon. Members may be interested to know that the NUM is making a huge profit from the operation of the current compensation schemes for chronic bronchitis, emphysema and vibration white finger. Former coal miners suffering from those industrial diseases who approach the NUM are advised to use a firm of solicitors, Raleys, in Barnsley. When their claims are submitted to Raleys, they are asked to sign a form agreeing to pay fees to the NUM. I have spoken to ex-miners who thought on that basis that the NUM was progressing their compensation cases, but it is not doing so. It is the solicitors who are progressing their claims. One of the fees that they agree to pay to the NUM by signing the form is an administration fee of 3 per cent., up to a maximum of £750, which is different in total from that of the canteen women. The other fee is NUM contribution money for a maximum of three years, which is not dissimilar to the amount that the NUM attempted to take from the canteen workers and cleaners who settled with the DTI in 1999.

I have an example of how much the NUM receives by getting the claimant to sign the form, but letting someone else do the work. The example involves a man who made a successful respiratory claim. Out of the total amount that he received—£6,390—the NUM was paid an administration fee of £184 for pointing him in the direction of Raleys solicitors, plus £308 for back payment of union dues. Some £492 was thus paid to the NUM. Even on claims in which compensation is low, the NUM still takes at least 15 per cent. from claimants through Raleys. Raleys itself is paid large amounts of money by the DTI to administer the scheme, as are other claims handlers, so the firm is not on its own in that respect.

In an answer that I received today to a parliamentary question that I tabled last week, the up-to-date figures show that Raleys has received £4.8 million for chronic bronchitis and emphysema claims and £3.2 million for vibration white finger claims. If we look at how much money is paid to claimants through Raleys, we see a total for respiratory diseases and vibration white finger of some £60.5 million. That is the total that has been paid through Raleys to claimants in the area that my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) and I represent.

If we accept that the vast majority of Raleys claimants are NUM members and that the bulk of the money paid is for final settlement—indeed, this must be the case because, as my hon. Friends know, interim settlements are only £2,000 per claimant—it is reasonable to assume that the NUM, on the basis of its lowest fees of 15 per cent., has had or will have at least £9 million out of that money for doing nothing more than getting its members to sign up to Raleys solicitors in Barnsley. Furthermore, about 40 per cent. of the claims are settled posthumously, so they are taking dead men's money.

It is clear that the union has been taking millions of pounds for doing very little, while the former canteen workers and cleaners have been left out in the cold through no fault of their own. We need to find a solution to this mess. In his letter to me today, my hon. Friend the Minister reiterates his difficulties in finding a legal basis to solve the problem. However, he says that he will continue to explore whether there is any reasonable way of addressing the matter. I hope that a mechanism can be found to make these women an ex gratia payment of at least the minimum sum that was paid out to their more fortunate colleagues in last year's settlement. The NUM was a party to the dilemma in which these women find themselves, so I think that it should also make a contribution to them in an act of solidarity, given that millions of pounds have gone into its coffers over the past few years for doing next to nothing.

I hope that my hon. Friend can tell us about how he would like to make progress with me and other hon. Members on justice for these mineworkers, who have been left out in the cold through no fault of their own.

7.14 pm

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on securing this debate and on bringing this issue before the House. He extended his comments, perfectly properly, in order to draw parallels between the treatment of various former miners and former NUM members. I think that the court of public opinion will be very interested in his comments about the NUM's behaviour. However, I shall restrict my remarks, for reasons that I am sure my right hon. Friend understands, to the subject of canteen workers and cleaners.

The subject has become very familiar to me and to all Labour Members who are present. Indeed, the Minister for Employment and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), stood in for me in a similar debate on 7 November. I appreciate that this continues to be a matter on which there are strong feelings within the coalfield communities. I have experienced those, having gone out of my way to encounter the people involved at first hand. I wish that it was within my gift, or that of any Minister, to resolve the issue in a simple, straightforward and just way.

Before discussing the details of where we are now, it might be useful briefly to recap the history of the equal value issue. Originally, certain British Coal women workers, mainly cleaning and canteen staff, lodged claims under the Equal Pay Act 1970, which required

"like pay for like work".

The claims lodged in the 1970s proved unsuccessful, and in the event British Coal won the litigation. The 1970 Act was amended in 1983 so that claims could be made on an equal value basis. Subsequently, a majority of the women who had lodged the earlier claims went on to lodge equal value claims. In all, between 1986 and 1992 around 1,300 women lodged claims at the employment tribunal.

The amended Act enabled the women to seek compensation if they could show that they were being paid less than men in comparable jobs. British Coal resisted that on the grounds that the legislation did not apply to their situation. The arguments about those legal technicalities went on for many years, culminating in hearings in the Court of Appeal and in the House of Lords. Settlements were reached with members of the

Union of Democratic Miners and, subsequently, several members from the NUM. However, the NUM urged the majority of its members to hold out.

To fast forward a full decade, a deal to settle the outstanding claims was finally brokered in April last year by the then Minister for Energy and Competitiveness, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain). Under that agreement, all the women with valid claims lodged with an employment tribunal stood to receive settlements based on length of service, the average settlement being around £10,000. It was also agreed that those who had accepted British Coal's earlier offer would, as they had lodged a claim, receive top-up payments, ensuring that all those eligible would receive settlements on the same basis. I am pleased to say that almost all—98 per cent.—of those with tribunal cases have now been paid.

Up until that point, it was clearly a story of a Labour Government accepting an historic liability and acting in an extremely honourable way towards a group of people who had registered claims that had not been paid out during previous years. Unfortunately, as we all know, the story did not end there.

When the deal was brokered last April, it was apparent that some women who had not lodged equal value claims at the industrial tribunal might otherwise have had valid cases for compensation. It now appears that there may be more than 3,000 such individuals—more than twice the number of those with valid claims. I recognise that at that time, between 1986 and 1992, they may not have been informed of the possibility of making a claim or may have been let down by those acting on their behalf.

The trade unions were well aware of the equal value rules and the procedures that had to be followed. In such matters, it would have been the responsibility of union representatives to keep their members and former members informed.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): I thank the Minister for giving way on that point. He is very well briefed and he knows that the issue is not quite as simple as that—in fact, it is extremely complicated. In my constituency I sent out forms to about 100 of my former canteen workers and cleaners who fall into this category. I received 79 back, of which only 42—or 53 per cent.—were from NUM members. The other 47 per cent. were either in a different trade union or, in 33 per cent. of cases, not in any trade union. I therefore accept that to some extent the NUM is culpable as regards the situation of their members. However, some women who were not trade union members received no advice at all. My canteen workers are not especially interested in who is to blame; they want to know who will sort out the mess. Arthur Scargill and the NUM will not do that, and I hope that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has timed his intervention wrongly. However, he should not make a speech.

Mr. Wilson: Obviously, we could debate the matter for much longer than half an hour. I cannot begin to tackle the list of reasons why, between 1986 and 1992, each woman did not register a claim or have a claim registered on her behalf. The bottom line is that although 1,300 people registered claims, and there were channels for communicating information, others have emerged—in some cases, 10 or 15 years after they should have registered a claim—who have not done that. I am now confronted with that problem.

As I said, the trade unions were well aware of the equal value rules. I did not mention a specific trade union. Although the Administration at the time were very different, steps were taken to communicate the fact that the claims could and should be registered. I acknowledge the specific difficulties that existed in coalfield communities, especially in the earlier part of the period that we are considering, but they cannot explain the failure to take action that was clearly so much in the interests of members, especially women members. I cannot help wondering whether the interests of male union members would have been so lightly regarded.

Whatever the reasons for claims not being made or pursued, there is no legal basis on which British Coal or the Department of Trade and Industry can simply pretend that the claims were legally registered. The terms of the Equal Pay Act 1970 impose a time limit on bringing a claim before an employment tribunal—a time limit of six months from the termination of employment. There is no discretion to extend that limit. Anyone who fails to register a claim in the employment tribunal system within six months of termination of employment does not have a legally valid claim to equal value pay under the terms of the Equal Pay Act, and is not eligible for any payment.

It is important to note that the legislation does not apply only to the coal industry, but to all employment sectors. Of course, I sympathise with the women who are in the position that we are discussing, and I have therefore agreed to reconsider whether anything can be done for them. I am giving the matter detailed consideration; I have gone down several avenues in an attempt to find a solution. I have listened carefully to representations. However, none of the options that I have identified so far can overcome two key difficulties.

First, there is no legal basis for paying out money on large numbers of claims that have turned up more than a decade late when there is no other legal reason for doing that. Secondly, it is hard to understand how special treatment for British Coal employees would not be unfair to all those other people who have had claims disqualified under the tribunal system because of time barring. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider carefully the significance of that point. All hon. Members have such people in their constituencies. In resolving one apparent anomaly, we would create a much bigger one. The 2,000 claims did not appear until the 13 had been settled. In the same way, if the other 2,000 were somehow settled by sleight of hand, tens of thousands of people throughout the country who have had tribunal claims time barred would be in the same position as the 2,000.

Mr. Barron: I understand the difficulty that my hon. Friend outlines, but, as he said, many of the problems occurred under a former Administration. I know that some of the cases relating to equal pay claims were around in 1985. A constituent, Mrs. Peggy Craig, who, in the 1970s, took over from a man as manageress in the canteen at the coal mine where I worked, received letters in 1985 from her union, the NUM, about the action that it was taking. The case did not progress. That was partly to do with the battle in the courts between the National Coal Board and

[Mr. Barron]

the Government. The Government were trying to frustrate small victories that the unions gained on behalf of their members. Much of the problem stems from the war of attrition that I mentioned earlier. That did not apply in any other industry to my knowledge. It makes the people whom we are considering a special case for that reason, if not in law.

Mr. Wilson: As I said earlier, if we start going into every individual case to find out why a claim was not registered in 1986 or 1987, that would be an extremely complex matter to determine. Let me assure the House that every legitimate case will throw up an anomaly with someone else who will have a different set of circumstances attached to their case. An awful lot of injustices occurred during that period, in the coal industry and in society in general. The idea that the Government can now address retrospectively 10, 15 or 20 years later every tribunal case that was not registered as a result of these injustices is evidently unsatisfactory.

I want to nail the untruth that an assurance was given to Mr. Scargill in April 2000 that these claims were going to be dealt with. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath confirmed, no such undertaking was given. Incidentally, I have looked at the press coverage on the day after that meeting, and there was not a word from Mr. Scargill about unregistered claims. The coverage was all about the 1,300 registered claims, which have been met in full at a cost to the Government of £14 million—honour due and honour paid to the credit of this Government—and what we are talking about here are the 2,000 or more claims that have subsequently turned up, which were not registered within the proper time frame or, indeed, until a decade or more later.

I want to say something about addressing historic injustices when there is a legal basis on which to do so. My right hon. and hon. Friends have referred to what we are doing in that context. This is not about the money. If one looks at the amount of money that is going into the coalfield communities as a result of actions taken by this Government, it is clear that the amount of money involved in dealing with this issue is absolutely tiny. What is not tiny is the fact that there is no legal basis for addressing these claims under the tribunal system, and that to do so would create an anomaly that would represent a gross injustice to all the other people who have time-barred claims under the tribunal system before and after the episode that we are discussing.

I shall give the House an example of what we have done to try to address real injustices, when there has been a legal basis to do so. On 11 December, I announced that, following the consultation process, I was persuaded that a number of miners who were dismissed in connection with the 1984–85 strike and not subsequently re-employed by British Coal were harshly treated. I concluded that the most appropriate way forward would be to enhance the pensions of those miners in recognition of the years of further service they had lost. I am about to write to the interested parties about the process that will be followed, and to ask them to inform former miners who think they might qualify for a pensions enhancement to register their interest.

On coal health, we have addressed the liabilities of the past that were ignored for 20 years. On low pensions, we have picked up the injustices of the past that were ignored for 20 years. On dismissed miners, we have picked up the injustices of the past that were created almost 20 years ago. On the issue of canteen workers, there is a genuine difficulty in picking up injustices of the past that involve claims that should have been registered 10 or 15 years ago and that were not brought to our attention until 2001 when a Labour Government had come to power. I think that my colleagues can understand that difficulty. I do not expect Mr. Scargill and his like to want to understand it. I have placed our general record on dealing with historic injustices in the coalfields in front of the House tonight, and I believe that we have a very good story to tell.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 April 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Industrial and Provident Societies Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

POWER TO MODIFY, ETC. TO ASSIMILATE TO COMPANY LAW

'(1) If, on any modification of the statutory provisions in force in Great Britain relating to companies, it appears to the Treasury to be expedient to modify the relevant statutory provisions for the purpose of assimilating the law relating to companies and the law relating to industrial and provident societies, the Treasury may, by order, make such modifications of the relevant statutory provisions as they think appropriate for that purpose.

(2) The "relevant statutory provisions" are the provisions of the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 1978 as for the time being in force except the following provisions of the 1965 Act—

(a) section 1 (societies which may be registered);

(b) section 10(1) (amendments of registered rules);

(c) sections 16 to 18 (cancellation, suspension or refusal of registration of society or rules);

(d) sections 23 to 27 (nominations, provision for intestacy, payment in respect of mentally incapable persons and validity of payments);

(e) sections 50 to 54 (amalgamation, transfer of engagements and conversions);

(f) section 55(b) (dissolution of registered society by instrument);

(g) section 56 (power of registrar to petition for winding up);

(h) section 58 (instrument of dissolution); and

(i) section 59 (restriction on dissolution or cancellation of registration of society).

(3) The power conferred by subsection (1) of this section includes power to modify the relevant statutory provisions so as to—

(a) confer power to make orders, regulations, rules or other subordinate legislation;

(b) create criminal offences; or

(c) provide for the charging of fees but not any charge in the nature of taxation.

(4) An order under this section may—

(a) make consequential amendments of or repeals in the provisions listed in subsection (2) of this section; or

(b) make such transitional or saving provisions as appear to the Treasury to be necessary or expedient.

(5) The power to make an order under this section shall be exercisable by statutory instrument and no such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(6) In this section—

"modification" includes any additions and, as regards modifications of the statutory provisions relating to companies, any modification whether effected by any future Act or by an instrument made after the passing of this Act under an Act whenever passed; and

"statutory provisions" except in the expression "relevant statutory provisions" includes the provisions of any instrument made under an Act.'.—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.33 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 4, in clause 3, page 3, line 35, leave out clause 3.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful that so many Members have chosen to be present this morning hopefully to complete the House of Commons stages of the Bill—I emphasise the word "hopefully".

The new clause and amendment No. 4 would replace clause 3 as it emerged from Committee. If the House will bear with me, I shall explain the effect of the new clause, and then set out the reasons for tabling it. New clause 1 narrows the power to amend industrial and provident society law by statutory instrument to assimilate it into company law to circumstances in which changes have already been made to company law. However, it broadens the range of sections that can be changed in that way while, as in the version presented on Second Reading, protecting those provisions that are central to the nature and identity of an industrial and provident society and which distinguish such societies from companies.

Subsection (1) of new clause 1 makes only one change to the text of the current clause 3(1). It limits the circumstances in which the Treasury would be empowered to use the statutory instrument procedure to amend industrial and provident society law to assimilate it into company law to times when there has been modification of company law. It does that by removing the words

"at any time, whether or not",

which appear in clause 3 before the reference to modifications of company law. The equivalent line in new clause 1 gives power only on any modification of company law.

That change makes the original version of clause 3(2) as it came out of Committee unnecessary, as it promoted the possibility of any historical modifications of company law being read across into industrial and provident society law almost immediately if the Government were so minded.

Subsection (2) of the new clause performs the role of the current clause 3(3), as amended in Committee, in that it deals with the provisions that can be amended by statutory instrument under subsection (1) of new clause 1. In that subsection, what can be modified by statutory instrument is described as "the relevant statutory provisions". Subsection (2) of the new clause defines those relevant statutory provisions by referring to the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 1978, and excluding those sections that define the nature of an

[Mr. Thomas]

industrial and provident society or that are essential to the nature of such societies. It differs from the version approved in Committee, which provided a list of those sections that could be amended rather than allowing amendment to any section other than the ones listed.

I would not want the House to run away with the idea that whole new areas of change are possible as a result of this slight change in approach. That would be a misplaced concern, as I shall show later.

A choice of sections to be excluded from the power by subsection (2) of the new clause was made on the following basis. Section 1 of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 defines the essential nature of industrial and provident societies as either co-operatives or community benefit organisations—bencoms as they are commonly known. They are excluded from change by subsection (2)(a).

Subsection 10(1), sections 16 to 18 and section 56 of the 1965 Act provide powers needed by the Financial Services Authority, as the regulator with which societies are registered, to vet rule amendments, to refuse, cancel or suspend registration of a society or its rules, to deal with petitions for winding up, and to ensure that the requirement that the society must be a co-operative or a bencom is adhered to. As a result, they are excluded from this power by subsection (2)(b), (c) and (g).

The other excluded sections provide specific and well-tried procedures for mutuals, building societies and friendly societies, and now for industrial and provident societies. Sections 23 to 27 of the 1965 Act deal with people nominating others to receive on their death property up to a limited value that they hold in a society, such as shares or loan stock. Sections 50 to 54, subsection 55(b) and sections 58 and 59 deal with reorganisations or dissolutions of societies by transfer of engagements, amalgamation or conversion to a company using procedures that are cheaper and easier than those otherwise available. They are excluded by subsection (2)(d), (e), (f), (h) and (i).

Subsections (3) to (6) are much the same as subsections (4) to (7) of the version of clause 3 that emerged from Committee. The limits of the power conferred to new statutory instruments are set out in subsections (3) and (4). Subsection (5) provides for the use of the affirmative procedure for any statutory instruments made under that power. Subsection (6) defines the key terms "modification" and "statutory provisions". Some minor alterations to the wording of subsections (1) and (2) have been made to accommodate the changes made to the previous version of the clause.

I have introduced the new clause, because, as I acknowledged in my response on Second Reading and in Committee, concerns were raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the breadth of the previous two versions of the clause, despite the provision for the use of the affirmative procedure and my willingness to include a defined list of sections that might be amended. Since Committee, I have also benefited from further advice and assistance on the technical issues and on some drafting problems that emerged.

Several points were highlighted. I was advised that the interpretation of the word "modification" in the earlier version of clause 3 was open to dispute. It was suggested that, when linked to a list of sections that might be modified, it might be possible to achieve only minor changes; for example, if the Treasury were minded to use statutory instruments in future, they would not deal with capacity issues for societies, or with problems in the ability of their committee or officers to contract for them or to apply rescue regimes for insolvent societies. Such avenues are available to companies and would represent a sensible modernisation of the industrial and provident society legal form.

In essence, the list agreed in Committee was too narrow. The latest advice is that it would not allow us to introduce additional concepts in industrial and provident society law, such as the possibility of using statutory instruments to deal with capacity problems. It would allow us only to modify existing concepts in the law. Members will recall that that gives rise to particular problems, as industrial and provident society law has not been substantially amended for an extremely long time—unlike the law for companies, with which many hon. Members will be familiar, and for friendly and building societies.

That situation is inadequate, as several of the sensible amendments that could be made to assimilate industrial and provident society law with company law would involve the introduction of additional concepts to I and P law, which have been incorporated in company law during the past 20 to 30 years. For example, company law was changed in 1989 so that third parties lending money have sensible protection if the company acts ultra vires.

In Committee, I used a rugby club as an example. A rugby club that is a company and uses company legal form borrows money to modernise its social facilities—perhaps for that glorious time when Wales again beat England in the Six Nations, which will happen fairly soon—*[Laughter.]* I cannot understand why that remark provokes such mirth. The provision of such social facilities may not be covered by the club's constitution, but if it is a company, the bank's investment is protected. On the other hand, if the club used the industrial and provident society legal form, the bank's investment might not be protected. The bank could lose its investment even though it had done nothing wrong.

I am advised that, technically, the reform in respect of capacity introduces an additional concept in industrial and provident society law. The current clause 3 would prevent that sensible reform, which is already standard for most other legal forms—certainly for companies and for friendly and building societies. The new provision could be implemented by statutory instrument, if the House and the Government are so minded, should an opportunity arise at a later stage when company law is amended.

9.45 am

Phil Hope (Corby): My hon. Friend is over-optimistic in his remarks about the Welsh rugby team.

Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the amendments that have been tabled, and can he explain what he expects from the House as regards the point that he is making?

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am advised that these relatively minor amendments will help us to achieve a sensible modernisation of the industrial and provident society legal form. Some aspects of the I and P legal form differ from the company model. None of the changes is

especially radical; they have been included in company law and friendly society and building society law for a long time. Sensible reform has not been possible in a number of areas thus far, so the sum of those parts means that when people have to decide which legal form is most appropriate for their community business they are put off using the industrial and provident society legal form. The new clause offers the possibility of achieving modernisation further down the line through those sensible changes, if the House is so minded.

New clause 1 overcomes the problems that I outlined because it gives a wider definition of the relevant statutory provisions. In the light of that, I hope that the House will support the change. By way of reassurance, I remind the House that during the debate on clause 3 in Committee, we discussed what could not be changed under industrial and provident society law. I highlighted aspects that could not be changed under clause 3 and, rightly, they cannot be changed by new clause 1 either. Hon. Members will see that certain key provisions of industrial and provident society law cannot be changed under new clause 1 without primary legislation. To the ultra-critical eye, those provisions might seem relatively narrow; they are listed in subsection (2)(a) to (i) and represent the fundamental differences between companies and industrial and provident societies.

It is worth reminding the House that under new clause 1 the power to amend those parts of industrial and provident society law that can be amended arises only as and when company law is amended in the future. In practice, therefore, only those parts of I and P law that are also covered by company law would be capable of amendment. In Committee, I referred to several sections of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 that could not be changed. For those Members who want to follow that discussion, it can be found at column 14 of the report of Standing Committee G on 13 February.

I referred to sections 11, 21, 14 and 44 of the Act. None of those sections could have been amended by clause 3 as it emerged from Committee, and it will not be possible for any of them to be amended if the House is minded to accept new clause 1. It remains the case that under new clause 1, the aspects of those sections that have no parallel in company law would be incapable of change.

In the same part of the debate in Committee, we also touched on the Treasury consultation document that was published back in May 1998, which consulted the industrial and provident society sector about a series of possible changes to industrial and provident society law. It heralded the possibility of change to registration procedures. That would require primary legislation. It could not be changed by the previous version of clause 3; it cannot be changed by new clause 1. As I said in Committee, that Treasury consultation document also talked about the possibility of changing the statutory definition of eligible societies that was contained in the 1965 Act. That would have required primary legislation, so it would not have been covered by clause 3 as it emerged from Committee. It still requires primary legislation, so new clause 1 cannot change that situation either.

In short, I recognise that the new clause, by reverting to a wider definition of the relevant statutory provisions that can be amended by statutory instrument, appears to widen the powers of the Executive. I know that there is widespread concern in the House when the possibilities of such powers are touted. As a widening of powers in the definition of relevant statutory provisions seems sensible to achieve what we set out to do, I consider it appropriate to narrow the circumstances so that those powers can be used only after company law has been amended. I believe that that is a balanced approach, and it is used in friendly society and building society law. Section 104 of the Building Societies Act 1986 and section 102 of the Friendly Societies Act 1992 have similar provisions. As those two forms of mutual have that facility in place already, I hope that the House will be minded to recognise that a similar provision is appropriate for the industrial and provident society sector too.

I understand that change to company law is on the agenda, so further progress to modernise the industrial and provident society legal form is possible soon. The Enterprise Bill proposes modifications to corporate insolvency law and director disqualification provisions, which could sensibly be read across into industrial and provident society rules.

More important, perhaps, I understand that the company law review is complete and that legislation to put into effect some of its recommendations could come before the House during this Parliament. In those circumstances, I hope that the House will feel that the new version of clause 3—new clause 1—provides an acceptable compromise between the need for assimilation of industrial and provident society and company law in many areas, such as insolvency, capacity, audit exemptions—which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) flagged up in Committee—and other aspects of corporate governance and, of course, legitimate concern in the House not to give excessive powers to the Executive.

I therefore commend the new clause to the House.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I shall briefly express the Government's support for new clause 1 and amendment No. 4. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on his excellent, detailed explanation of the provisions. The Government are keen that industrial and provident societies should benefit from a measure that would make it possible to update their legislation in line with company law. The Building Societies Act 1986 and the Friendly Societies Act 1992 contained similar powers and we welcome the opportunity to create the means of levelling the playing field among these different types of mutual organisation in this regard.

My hon. Friend was very careful, particularly in his last few sentences, in delicately explaining to the House that the scope of the proposed power, as originally drafted, for industrial and provident societies would have been much broader than that for friendly and building societies. In particular, it would have allowed the Treasury to amend industrial and provident society legislation at any time, independently of any modification of company law provisions. The version of clause 3 that was substituted in Committee is broader still.

Some hon. Members might be surprised to hear a Treasury Minister explaining to the House that such a power is considerably wider than would normally be conferred on any Minister or Department. Obviously, the movement realised that it could perhaps benefit more

[Dawn Primarolo]

speedily from modifications to legislation under such an enabling clause. Although we support that sentiment in principle, we need to ensure that subsequent secondary legislation is enacted with the appropriate checks and balances that Parliament would normally expect for such delegated powers.

My hon. Friend's amendments will bring the powers to update industrial and provident society law into line with those applicable to other mutual societies. I believe that they are appropriate amendments, which will level the playing field for industrial and provident societies and create a mechanism whereby we can ensure that the societies do not fall behind any important developments in the framework of company law that are also relevant to the societies.

I thank my hon. Friend for being ever vigilant on the power of the Executive and congratulate him on his presentation thus far of this important Bill. I have no hesitation in supporting the amendments on the Government's behalf.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for those comments. As I said in Committee, I can see no logical reason to oppose giving the Treasury additional powers, given the quality of its performance since May 1997. However, I have been advised that such an ambitious provision might offend against the constitution—

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): A trifle.

Mr. Thomas: In reality, it is not such a trifle. It is important that we seek to achieve modernisation of industrial and provident society law in the appropriate constitutional way. As I said, there is the possibility of company law reform. Fairly soon, the prospect of change to company law through the Enterprise Bill holds out genuine prospects for further change to industrial and provident society law. I am delighted that the Government feel able to support new clause 1 and I again commend it formally to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

Channel Islands

'(1) Her Majesty may by Order in Council direct that any of the provisions of this Act or any instrument made under it shall extend, with such modifications (if any) as may be specified in the Order, to any of the Channel Islands.

(2) An Order in Council under this section may make such transitional, incidental or supplementary provisions as appears to Her Majesty to be necessary or expedient.'.—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

10 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Compared with new clause 1, new clause 2 constitutes a minor and less fundamental change. It refers solely to the Channel Islands, where a slightly different legal jurisdiction applies that the Bill does not currently recognise, and which, I am advised, we should mention. The new clause will confer the power to make orders, and follows closely section 75 of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. It will ensure that industrial and provident societies in the Channel Islands can enjoy the advantages of the Bill, while acknowledging that the islands' unique constitutional position must be respected in the usual way by allowing for application of the legislation with appropriate adaptations by order. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Given that we have just had a debate about whether powers should be wider than is necessary, could my hon. Friend clarify the meaning of the word "supplementary" in the context of subsection (2)?

Mr. Thomas *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman will presumably deal with that point when he sums up, rather than in an intervention.

Dawn Primarolo: The Government support the new clause, which will allow the provisions in the Bill, or any order made under it, to be extended to the Channel Islands. In practice, no such extension would be made unless the relevant authorities wished it to occur. Existing industrial and provident societies legislation either applies to the Channel Islands with modification, or can be applied by Order in Council. It is therefore right that the Bill should enable the provisions to be extended to the Channel Islands, and I can confirm to the House that we have consulted the relevant Channel Islands authorities, which are content for this provision to be included in the Bill. I therefore urge the House to support it.

Mr. Thomas: I am once again grateful to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General for her remarks. Given the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) in the new clause, perhaps I should set out what it will achieve in a tad more detail than I had intended.

The new clause is necessary because the Channel Islands constitute separate legal jurisdictions, and, as the Paymaster General stressed, in applying the Bill their authorities need to be consulted. It is therefore crucial that the new clause be included in the Bill. For example, under the new clause the Channel Islands co-operative society—a member of the co-operative union with which I consulted before Second Reading—can benefit from the protection afforded by the Bill's provisions, and, if the House is so minded, from modernisation of the industrial and provident society legal form further down the line, as statutory instruments are, hopefully, introduced.

In subsection (2), the word "supplementary" simply refers to necessary provisions in Channel Islands legislation that are additional to, rather than a replacement for, current rules. I hope that I have answered my hon. Friend's query in a sufficiently effective manner, and that the House will support new clause 2.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second Time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

ANNUAL FEES

'Annual fees

The annual fee payable by a club, society or any other organisation for registration under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 2002 shall be an identical sum to the current annual return fee payable by limited companies.'.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 4—*Financial Services Authority: fees to be charged in respect of industrial and provident societies*—

'Paragraph 17 of Schedule 1 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 is amended by inserting after sub-paragraph (2)—

"(2A) Any fee charged in respect of functions carried out by the Authority under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 1978 shall be fixed in a manner which has regard to the financial circumstances of the society or proposed society which is to pay it including their turnover, profitability and scale of operation and in no circumstances will the fee charged where an existing society's turnover was less than £1,000,000 in its last year of account or where a new society is applying for registration exceed the fee chargeable in respect of the equivalent function by the Registrar of Companies.'.

Mr. Knight: As the Order Paper reveals, I have registered an interest, although I should tell the House that I am erring on the side of caution as I may not actually have an interest to declare. I have no idea whether Bridlington Conservative club, of which I am a paid-up member, is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. From time to time, I also give advice—usually on entertainment matters—to various working men's clubs, some of which may well be registered under the Acts. Moreover, I am joint chairman of the all-party group on non-profit making members' clubs. Those facts may or may not amount to an "interest" in the parliamentary meaning of the word, but I feel it proper that I place them on the record at the outset.

In the history of civilised trading, the concept of limited liability is long established and well known. Those organisations that trade for profit—there is nothing wrong with that—usually form themselves into limited companies, thus enabling their liability to be limited to the value of the shares held, or to the extent of the guarantee given. The annual cost of maintaining such a company on the register, whatever the turnover, is £15, which has to be paid when the company files its annual return.

Other organisations, many of which are non-profit-making members' clubs, may decide to register under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. As their name suggests, such clubs are run not for profit but for the benefit of their members. In many areas, they are the heart of their local community. They often encourage, and sometimes sponsor, the participation of members and their children in sporting events, or the development of their musical skills. They are often the backbone of many underprivileged and deprived areas.

For many years, those organisations paid no annual fee to remain registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, but approximately six years ago an annual fee of £25 was introduced. Hon. Members may find it odd that a fee greater than the filing fee for a fat cat-led limited company was introduced, but it was. Now, however, an outrageous situation is developing. Moves are afoot to charge those organisations approximately £200 a year for the privilege of remaining registered under the Acts. That is unjustified and unfair, coming as it does at a time when the very existence of many clubs is in doubt.

I do not know how many right hon. and hon. Members have read an article in this week's edition of *The Stage*—the headline of which is "Epidemic of CIU club closures"—which states:

"Working men's clubs—one of the largest sources of work for British light entertainers—are closing at the rate of 85 a year, it has been revealed.

Kevin Smyth, general secretary of the powerful Club & Institute Union, told *The Stage* that a total of 425 member venues have shut during the last five years. And since its high point in 1974, the CIU has seen its total number of affiliates"—

affiliated clubs—

"drop by nearly one third—from 4,000 to 2,700.

The scale of the problem could be even larger because CIU sites account for fewer than half those listed by the 5,500-strong Committee of Registered Clubs Association—whose members also include political or Service clubs such as the Royal British Legion."

So the situation is dire among non-profit-making clubs. Under my new clause, I seek only to give clubs and other organisations registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts parity with profit-making trading companies, and I hope that I will have the support of the whole House.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I very much support what my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) has said in moving new clause 3. Indeed, I also supported it by putting my name to it on the amendment paper. New clause 3 very much supports points that I made on Second Reading. To save me from restating all the interests that I declared then, I formally put on record the fact that I still have those same interests.

On Second Reading, a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed concern about the fees. I think that the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) was the first person to raise the issue in that debate, when he said that there was no provision relating to fees in the Bill. Well, thanks to my right hon. Friend, there will now be scope to include the fees, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support the new clause, as he suggested on Second Reading that he would support such a provision.

Similarly, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), who is not in his place, spoke eloquently on Second Reading about the burden of fees on small clubs. I hope that what he said, which was widely supported at the time, will also be reflected in support for the new clause among those on the Government Benches because it must surely accord with common sense.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I should say at the outset that I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's arguments, but those at the Financial Services Authority

[Mr. Andrew Love]

say that the charges simply reflect the costs that arise from that section of their organisation. How do we respond to that?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but I submit that we should ask ourselves why the costs to the FSA of regulating clubs should be 10 times as high as the costs to Companies House of regulating companies. There must be something very odd about the FSA's fee structure or about the way in which those at the FSA allocate their costs across their organisation if they can come up with the conclusion that it costs 10 times as much to obtain an annual renewal for a club compared with the annual renewal for a company. That is the point.

Like several other regulatory authorities, the FSA is self-financing; it sets fees to cover its costs. It has enormous scope to limit costs in areas where there is no need for great regulation. Given the very large number of clubs, I am amazed that it should be reasonable to charge each of them up to £200 for the privilege of renewing their membership every year. It would be different if they wanted to change their rules, as that would incur a lot of costs, administration and so on.

If the clubs just want to obtain annual renewals in the same way as companies obtain annual renewals from the Registrar of Companies, the point that my right hon. Friend makes in his new clause is absolutely in accordance with common sense. Unless the House uses such opportunities to take control over those self-financing regulatory authorities, we will cede to them the power to impose burdensome charges on clubs, which they cannot afford to bear.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that figure was probably plucked out of thin air?

Mr. Chope: I am sorry, but I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's reference to a figure plucked out of thin air.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): My hon. Friend is referring to the increased fees.

Mr. Chope: It is a fact that there is a threat of increased fees of £200. There is no doubt that that is the reality of the FSA's proposal. If the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) is suggesting that the FSA perhaps reached that conclusion on the back of an envelope and produced a nice round figure, I am unable dispute the point.

10.15 am

Mr. Greg Knight: I did not understand the hon. Gentleman's intervention either. I am not sure whether he was seeking to be supportive and helpful to my case in suggesting that the FSA had plucked the figure out of thin air, or whether he was accusing me of having plucked it out of thin air.

Mr. Hendrick *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Knight: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head and I am delighted that he corrects that last point. On Tuesday this week, I spoke to an FSA employee, who confirmed that the fee is likely to be about £200 a year. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that that fee will not be charged for changing the rules, but simply for the annual renewal of registration.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that clear. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) has arranged a meeting with the FSA on Monday next, but my fear is that if we do not take the opportunity presented to us today to control the fees that the FSA can charge, it will deploy the same arguments as those that it has used in correspondence—it will say that it needs to impose those costs to meet its own internal charges.

Rob Marris: I am sure that many of my hon. Friends are sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but I wonder whether he can clarify a technical point. Off the top of my head, I can think of four types of limited companies: public limited companies, companies limited by guarantee, private limited companies and a different type of private limited company, such as C&A was, that does not have to disclose as much information. However, the new clause seems not to differentiate in that way. Perhaps he can explain how it would operate if it were included in the Bill.

Mr. Chope: I understand that the fee to register a small company is £15 a year and that the fee to register a new company is £20. My right hon. Friend's new clause would limit the annual renewal fee to £15 for small clubs and industrial and provident societies in the same way as it is limited to £15 for small companies. Obviously, if the fee for the renewal of company registrations were to rise from £15 to £20, the fee that the FSA charges for the renewal of industrial and provident societies' registration could also rise.

On Second Reading, I referred to a letter that I received from the Village Retail Services Association—ViRSA—which is the organisation that deals with small rural communities that wish to revive or resurrect their retail facilities. As is stated in column 1149 of the *Hansard* report of that debate, I said that Mr. Peter Jones, the director of ViRSA, gave some examples of the cost of the fee structure for those very small organisations.

A couple of hundred pounds is probably more affordable for a club with a large turnover than for a small village shop co-operative, where every penny counts. So the new FSA fee structure will affect not only clubs, but a lot of smaller industrial and provident societies with very small turnovers. The FSA has expensive premises in one of the most expensive capitals in the world and has extremely well paid staff.

Mr. Love: The hon. Gentleman refers to the FSA, but surely it will argue that, because industrial and provident societies are more complex than companies and because there are not as many such societies as companies, we cannot make a direct comparison between the fees charged for the two groups. How do we respond to that criticism?

Mr. Chope: I am not sure that the FSA has made that criticism. There are large numbers of industrial and provident societies, but that does not mean that they

should face their current cost structure. For example, there is no reason why the FSA should not set up a subsidiary in a part of the country where the costs of staff and premises are much lower. It could have a regulatory regime that is funded at a level of expenditure that is more consistent with those whom it seeks to regulate.

Mr. Purchase: Will the hon. Gentleman extend his thesis a little further and recognise that, although London is a relatively high-cost area, the FSA is also profligate? That forms most of the problem. If the FSA were to set itself up in the west midlands—in Birmingham or Wolverhampton—it would find that people work efficiently, effectively and economically. It would not be as profligate as it is in London. He may agree that there is a total disconnection between what happens in London where the high rollers pay whatever they want for whatever they want and other areas of the country where reality has to break out from time to time.

Mr. Chope: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I would not limit the areas to the ones that he specified. I would certainly include Christchurch, Ferndown and Verwood and other parts of Dorset. Ministers have referred to costs elsewhere, but the costs of employing people in Dorset are significantly lower than the costs of employing people in London. The wages and salaries that secretaries command in Christchurch, which is just under 100 miles from London, are significantly lower than the salaries that can be commanded in London. However, there is no reason to suppose that the efficiency of secretaries in Christchurch is any less than that of those in the City of London. In fact, I suspect that it is much higher, partly because they enjoy a much better quality of life.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that, just as there is great variety in the type of societies that are the subject of the Bill, there is much greater variety in the type of company? Small companies that perform local community functions can be set up as limited companies and the range extends through to medium-sized companies and huge corporations. Complexity is not an issue. There is much greater variation between types of company than there can possibly be between the societies that are the subject of the Bill.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We are talking about the simple process of registration. It costs the same to register a child irrespective of the complications of the parentage, and it should cost the same to register a company or an industrial and provident society. It is a straightforward issue of equity and getting control over the costs of the regulatory authorities.

The FSA has deployed the argument that, under the previous regime, the Registrar of Friendly Societies received a cross-subsidy from the Treasury. If that is so, one of the consequences of the new clause is that it would allow the FSA to put a good case to the Treasury if it had one. However, I am sceptical about the need for the FSA to be subsidised beyond the income that it would receive if it charged a fee for registration in line with the fee for the renewal of company registration. That is why I am an enthusiastic supporter of the new clause moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). Although the gap may be tenfold at the moment, if things carry on as they are, the annual registration fee for friendly societies may be £500 or £1,000 in two or three years' time when people are trying to expand that sector. That would be a crippling burden on this important part of the community.

I hope that the Paymaster General and, more importantly, the House will accept the new clause. It would provide reassurance to all the small clubs and societies that feel insecure because of the threat of increased burdens and costs of regulation.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I wish to speak to new clause 4, which is in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase). However, consistent with the declaration that I made on Second Reading, I must make it clear that I have a long association with the co-operative movement. It employed me for many years before I came into the House. I am also proud to declare that I am a member of the Labour and Co-operative group.

New clause 4 is a probing amendment that is designed to consider the arguments and raise the issue with my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, so that we can clarify ministerial thinking. I shall not press the new clause to a vote.

We have much sympathy with the comments made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). The issues that they raised are seriously regarded in the co-operative movement and are a source of great concern to those who wish to set up new co-operative or community-based organisations. The difference between a company and a co-operative in the fees charged by the FSA for registration is undoubtedly a serious disincentive. The issue needs to be considered and the hon. Gentlemen were right to raise it in their discussion of new clause 3. However, I do not think that they have considered the full implications of their new clause.

The FSA's argument has been well rehearsed. It is a self-financing organisation and, if the fees charged to industrial and provident societies were reduced, it would have to compensate for the loss of that financial stream by increasing levies on other forms of companies. It is also maintained that, because of the complexity and the need to monitor continually the rules for industrial, co-operative and provident societies, the individual societies that have registered require a higher level of scrutiny and supervision from the FSA than is required of individual companies. That, of course, results in greater expense.

However, if new clause 3 were accepted, there would be an enormous and unintended windfall for some of the larger co-operative and mutual organisations. For example, the Co-operative Group, which controls the Co-operative Insurance Society and the Co-operative Bank, would receive an enormous windfall if its registration fees were reduced. The FSA would have to make up that enormous financial deficit from other sources.

If we looked at the range of other major co-operative retailing organisations and housing co-operatives, much the same would be true. That is basically the reason for this new clause. It is designed, first, to provide a mechanism by which organisations considering setting up

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

a business along co-operative lines would not be deterred by the initial level of registration fees. It is also designed to ensure, however, that there is a level playing field between those larger co-operative organisations and companies and, to provide fairness to the FSA, to ensure that financial difficulties would not be incurred as a result of potential changes in income stream. I stress that I shall not press this new clause to a vote.

10.30 am

Mr. Butterfill: Although I do not have a direct interest to declare, I am a vice-chairman of the all-party group on building societies and financial mutuals, and I have a long history of supporting mutual activity in this country. Unless we include measures such as the new clause, we are in danger of putting obstacles in the way of mutuality, which the Government would not intend and which would compound the already difficult position in which mutuality finds itself in the United Kingdom.

In many ways, it is curious that, although this country was the cradle from which mutuality sprang, it has been less successful here than it has, for example, across the Atlantic in Canada and in the United States. It may be that Governments there have created a more benign environment in which mutuality can flourish. That is what this Government—perhaps of all Governments—should be doing in relation to this new clause and this Bill. It seems absolutely extraordinary that we should suggest that mutual societies of this nature should pay fees that are substantially higher than those paid by companies that are largely set up to make profits.

One of the things that we need to do in this country is to encourage people to work together in their communities for their mutual benefit. That is precisely what these societies do. Similarly, in relation to savings organisations, it is important that we encourage mutual savings organisations to flourish. Building societies used to perform that function as the principal providers of mutual savings. I regret, however, that the activities of the carpetbaggers and other very greedy people have meant that the building societies movement in this country has been significantly diminished. The friendly societies have not taken off as we would like, and mutual savings organisations of all types have found it difficult to set themselves up. The Government should be assisting them and providing financial support for this type of activity. If the Government are serious about dealing with the problems of financial exclusion, which I believe that they are—at least, they have that intention—it is essential that they should do that.

First, I do not believe that it is necessary for the FSA to provide for the level of charges that has been mooted simply to have an annual renewal of registration. We return to the argument that, if the Department of Trade and Industry can do it for £15, why cannot the FSA? It may be that the DTI is subsidising the costs of companies, in which case we must ask why that should be the case, and whether it is right that companies should be subsidised by the DTI. If the DTI is not subsidising those companies, however, we must ask what is the difference with the FSA. It is up to the FSA to make a case and to say, "We need this level of charge." If they genuinely need such a level of charge, it must be right for the Government to consider a Treasury subvention to support it. Given that the Government must believe that this is a correct thing to do, it must equally be right for the Government to consider the possibility of subvention to support this type of activity. I very much support the new clause.

Mr. Purchase: I have always been associated with the co-operative cause, but, for the avoidance of doubt, may I once again declare an interest in that the co-operative movement supports my constituency party financially each year.

Having said that, it is once again a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), whose measured tones bring a much-needed insight to these debates. I fear that I cannot be as calm, as collected and as incisive. I believe that we are dealing with an unintended consequence—the people who have drafted the regulations for the FSA and industrial and provident societies have been unaware of the effect that their drafting would have on an important part of the social economy as a whole.

My father and I, for more than 70 years, have been members of working men's clubs. In my opinion, working men's clubs have always been pleased to pay their way, and have always met the costs of their organisation in an honourable fashion. A burden is being imposed on clubs and on small societies and community groups. I am proud to be associated with several community groups that have registered their organisations in a proper and legal way—companies limited by guarantee and so on—and they will find themselves burdened with an excessive cost of filing each year for re-registration.

This is not necessarily the appropriate Bill in which to introduce this new clause. However, this is an opportunity to say to the Minister, loudly and clearly, that something has to be done to right this wrong—for that is what it is. Whether it is an unintended consequence or not, those who drafted the legislation are disconnected from the everyday experience of ordinary people helping our society and our communities at the micro-level. Those people help to build up the feeling of solidarity in society, and they must not be treated in this way.

I accept that this new clause will not find favour with the Minister at this time, but she must ensure that the protestations that we have heard today are taken forward and dealt with appropriately and effectively. We must receive an undertaking today that that will be done.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I have considerable sympathy for the comments made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) and by my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) and for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase), and for the broad thrust of the comments made by the hon. Members for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope).

As has been indicated, this issue was raised on Second Reading, and my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Phil Hope) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) also highlighted their concern. The hon. Member for Christchurch was good enough to give me the opportunity during his speech on Second Reading to place on record my concern about these fees. During the consultation that I have undertaken in preparation for this Bill, and during discussions prior to this stage of deliberations on it, a number of sponsoring

bodies of industrial and provident societies made representations to me about the level of fees. The WI Country Markets, the Village Retail Services Association, to which the hon. Member for Christchurch referred, the committee of registered clubs, which a number of my hon. Friends flagged up, and the Rugby Football Union are worried about the high cost of the registrations charges. I share the general view that the Financial Services Authority needs to act speedily to reduce the fees that it intends to charge from 1 July. As the hon. Member for Christchurch said, I have organised to see the FSA on Monday, partly as a result of discussions with him and the sponsoring bodies. I invite all hon. Members who are concerned to speak to me later. They are more than welcome to attend the meeting.

Although the reference to companies in the new clauses is illuminating in that it allows us to highlight the substantial difference between the charges for the registration of companies and of industrial and provident societies, it is slightly confusing. There is no monitoring regime for companies like that traditionally carried out for industrial and provident societies by the registrar of friendly societies. One reason for the monitoring is that industrial and provident societies hold community or even possibly public assets. The comparison with companies is inappropriate because the regulator has a more active role in approving changes and in monitoring the work and operation of the industrial and provident societies.

It is worth explaining to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West and the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire that prior to the FSA taking over responsibility for regulation, fees for the registration of new rules or amendments to the constitution of industrial and provident societies were higher than the comparable charges for companies.

Mr. Greg Knight: The hon. Gentleman is right that the fees were higher, but those organisations paid an annual fee of £25. Most right hon. and hon. Members would regard that as a reasonable amount. To go from £25 to £200 in one leap is surely most unreasonable.

Mr. Thomas: I strongly share the right hon. Gentleman's view. He is right to make that point and I have profound sympathy with it. I think that we both want the same outcome. Unlike him, however, I do not think that the Bill is the appropriate vehicle for that change, which is why I have set up the meeting with the FSA to press the case.

Mr. Knight: The hon. Gentleman says that the Bill is not the right mechanism to resolve the problem. May I draw his attention to the long title of the Bill of which he is the promoter? It refers to

"the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to be amended so as to bring it into conformity with certain aspects of the law relating to companies".

That is precisely what my new clause would do.

Mr. Thomas: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. The fact that the Speaker has allowed the new clause to be discussed suggests that it is relevant. However, a system of financing is in place for the FSA, and it is in that context that it is appropriate to consider the sums that are charged for the registration of industrial and provident societies.

10.45 am

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the FSA is circumscribed by the legislation that established it? The worry is that unless we use the Bill to change the way in which the charges are made and give the Government a basis on which they can vary the charges, they may find that although they are sympathetic to the case, they have no mechanism to make that change short of introducing primary legislation.

Mr. Thomas: I do not accept that legislation constrains the FSA from changing its fees. That is why it is appropriate for us to address the problem by holding direct discussions with it.

There is another reason why the new clause is inappropriate other than the need to introduce a stronger regime for monitoring industrial and provident societies than we have for companies. We need to recognise what my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West said about how industrial and provident societies vary enormously in size, turnover and assets. It is appropriate for some industrial and provident societies, such as the larger co-operative retail organisations, to pay higher charges because it often requires more work to monitor them than it does to monitor the smaller organisations, such as social clubs.

Mr. Chope: Surely the annual return that is sent to the FSA to continue an existing registration does not require monitoring. All that is needed is a tick in the box and continuation of the registration.

Mr. Thomas: I have considerable sympathy for the concern about the huge hike in the cost of the annual return. Nevertheless, the direct comparison with companies is unfortunate. Perhaps a more flexible wording of the new clause would have been more appropriate, and I accept that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West attempted to introduce that greater flexibility in new clause 4. We need to remember that because industrial and provident societies hold assets for the community, the regulator has to take a greater interest in them, so a more appropriate regulatory structure needs to be in place. That inevitably costs more than the regulatory regime for companies.

I accept that there is no justification for the huge hike in the charge, but I encourage hon. Members who are tempted to accept the new clauses to understand that the best way forward is to deal with the FSA face to face in order to make it clear that hon. Members on both sides of the House have huge concerns about the issue.

Dawn Primarolo: I congratulate all hon. Members who have participated in this important debate on putting before the House some of the clear issues that relate to the fees charged. Although I will explain why the Government do not think that the Bill is the appropriate way to address the problem, we do not want to undermine the important points made about some sections of industrial and provident society legislation.

The Government are well aware of the concern that has been expressed by some in the movement about the fee structure that is being developed by the FSA in relation to its duties under the relevant industrial and provident societies Acts. This debate takes forward many of those issues.

[Dawn Primarolo]

I stress that the final level of the fees that will apply over the coming year has not been finalised, and the FSA's consultation with the movement has only just d[illegible] a close. I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Har[illegible]st (Mr. Thomas) said about his meeting with the FSA o[illegible]y. The figures proposed in the FSA's consultation document are illustrative, as is often the case with such documents, and we have heard other figures quoted publicly in connection with the matter.

The FSA ensures that registrations conform to the legislation and that any changes to societies' rules, registered offices and so on are appropriate. In discharging its obligations as the regulator, the FSA has to take account of the tremendous variations across the movement. Hon. Members have demonstrated the range of societies and clubs that can fall within this category. In the event of mergers or windings up, the FSA must ensure that the relevant legislation has been respected. It also ensures that societies submit regular accounting returns.

The transfer of functions from the Registry of Friendly Societies to the FSA occurred in December 2001. It worked to the benefit of societies in that it permitted access both to a pool of experienced former registry staff already working in the FSA on building society and friendly society regulations and to a broader range of expertise. It is important to balance the mix between obligations on regulators, access to expertise and costs to societies.

I do not believe that it is appropriate to make a straight comparison between the fees payable by societies and those due from companies. Although I accept that valuable points were made in the submission, it is not comparing like with like. Registration obligations on the Companies House registrar are less onerous than the equivalent obligations on the FSA. It is inappropriate to link fee levels for societies with those of companies, as the new clause proposes.

Mr. Butterfill: Of course it is right that mutual societies dealing with the funds of their members should be properly regulated, but does the Paymaster General agree that it is equally right that companies that can hide behind the benefits of limited liability, leaving behind creditors littered all over the place, require an even greater degree of regulation?

Dawn Primarolo: It is somewhat unusual to hear a Conservative Member, even one as knowledgeable as the hon. Gentleman, pressing the Government on the need for greater regulation of companies, but I shall take his point in good faith and resist any further jibes. I promise never to quote his suggestion. *[Interruption.]* No, perhaps I will not make that promise.

The hon. Gentleman is concerned about appropriate regulation and safeguards. The basis of the current debate about the mutuals—how to devise appropriate legislation to deal with protection—applies equally to companies.

Mr. Love: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dawn Primarolo: In a moment, when I have finished this point.

There has been a great deal of discussion about reviewing company law and how to modernise it, and I understand that a report is due soon. We have to strike a balance between appropriate safeguards and allowing these organisations, which have different structures and fulfil different obligations, to develop and expand. The Bill is about mutuality, the industrial and provident societies and how to assist their growth and development.

Mr. Love: Although my hon. Friend says that a direct comparison cannot be drawn, does she accept that there is considerable evidence, especially from the worker co-operative sector, that some small organisations are choosing to register as companies rather than industrial societies because of the differential, and will she bear that in mind when considering the matter in the future?

Dawn Primarolo: That is indeed an issue of which we must be aware, as we must be aware of the differences between companies that choose to be incorporated and unincorporated and of the different structures that are available to companies, societies and clubs in providing safeguards for their members or shareholders while allowing the development of their organisations.

New clause 3 raises the broader question of what type of registration procedures are appropriate for industrial and provident societies. Through changing the relevant Acts, the FSA could be required to undertake fewer checks and verifications during the registration process. However, that may not be in the best long-term interests of the movement, especially as recognition of and confidence in the society organisational form needs to be enhanced, not reduced.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) for the way in which he presented his arguments. I hope that the House will be seen to have paid proper attention to the issues, although we may not necessarily agree that the Bill is the appropriate way to advance them.

New clause 4 would link the level of fees charged for carrying out regulatory functions to the size or profitability of the society's operations. New clauses 3 and 4 demonstrate the complexity of the sector, in that it was necessary to try to find an approach that would not cause problems elsewhere. I appreciate and am sympathetic to their underlying rationale, but we must take other factors into account.

The FSA has been developing the fee structure, following consultation with interested parties, including all sponsoring bodies, trade associations and principal legal advisers to the sector. Three separate consultation papers have been issued and workshops have been held to hear the movement's views. The FSA has considered various options. One was to base the fee structure on size. However, the size profile of societies is heavily biased, as many hon. Members have pointed out, towards smaller societies, so the burden on the larger societies would be unreasonable. For example, the FSA estimated that if a larger society were to pay an annual fee of £10,000, the fee payable by other societies would reduce by about £1. That is unacceptable.

11 am

In addition, there is no consistent relationship between the size of a society's operations and the amount of work

that it generates for the FSA. That is linked to the points made by hon. Members about complexity, accountability and the desirability of structures in industrial and provident societies. If the FSA charged on the basis of transactions, that would lead to exceptionally high costs for individual transactions such as rule changes. That would discourage good governance and we should not inadvertently, for motivations that I quite understand, include something in the Bill that would do that.

A link between size and fee levels for societies could also create unintended effects. For example, it could lead to charitable housing associations and registered social landlords, which are among the largest societies, effectively subsidising the cost of smaller societies such as private members-only clubs or societies set up to benefit members. That would clearly cause problems in the different structures. It would be perverse and go against the idea of a more equitable distribution of costs.

Mr. Chope: Does the hon. Lady accept that under the proposed fee structure, small organisations that do not change their rules each year will be subsidising and cross-subsidising those that choose to change them because they did not get them right in the first place? How can that be equitable?

Dawn Primarolo: I am trying to explain to the House the complexities of the issues involved, the diversity of the sector, and the importance of striking the right balance and considering the necessary scope of work. The number of industrial and provident societies has been broadly stable between 1996 and 2000, but the amount of their assets has increased, from approximately £41 billion in 1996, to £61 billion in 2000.

I have been doing my best to show the House that the sector is very broad and that there is not just one simple answer. As hon. Members have said, there is a difficult balance to strike. Therefore, the FSA needs to assess all the issues; all hon. Members who have spoken this morning believe that fees need to be part of that assessment and the eventual balance reached.

I understand that the FSA, along with many in the movement, prefers an approach based on a flat-rate fee, as the hon. Member for Christchurch said. That will inevitably affect some societies unfavourably, but equally it must be appreciated that some societies will gain from such a move. We need to find out which is the most equitable solution and ensure that it is delivered.

We also have to consider those societies that are active in updating and developing their governance structure. That is precisely what the Bill is about. For example, I understand that the proposed periodic fee would cover all registration transactions undertaken by a society in a year. A society could, for example, adopt a completely new set of rules and have them registered for free by the FSA. The former registry would have charged £800.

As I have continually tried to stress, it is necessary to strike a balance here. The FSA has worked hard and will have to continue to work hard to build a consensus around its proposals. I believe that at this stage it is not appropriate to legislate in the rigid fashion suggested by the new clause.

As I have said, I am sympathetic and I understand clearly the points made by my hon. Friends. I have tried to show the complexity of the area. I am sure that there will be ongoing discussions between the clubs and the FSA. Those discussions, I sincerely hope, will reach a solution.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I welcome the Minister's remarks. She understands the dilemma that clubs are facing. The immense frustration felt has been echoed around the Chamber. My hon. Friend has met the FSA, and is meeting it again on Monday. Would she be prepared, if it is felt necessary, to meet the Working Mens Club and Institute Union to discuss some of the anomalies that we talked about this morning, in the hope of getting justice for the clubs of this country?

Dawn Primarolo: Normally this subject area would fall within the remit of the Economic Secretary. However, both the Economic Secretary and I are always pleased to receive representations and see delegations. I am sure that, if my hon. Friend thought it appropriate, either one of us would do our best, as we try to do for all Members, to accommodate those representations.

I hope that I have given the House an explanation of why the Government do not support the new clauses. I hope that they will not be added to the Bill, but also that the House is sufficiently reassured that the Government have taken note not only of the representations, but of this debate.

Mr. Greg Knight: We have had a very interesting debate, and I am grateful for the support expressed for my new clause by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am particularly grateful for the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who made a very powerful case for the new clause.

This really comes down to the fact that, once a year and for a fee of £15, Companies House, in respect of each limited company registered with it, examines the company accounts and the annual return form that a director or secretary of the company has to submit. The FSA says that, in future, it will charge £200 to examine similar forms and accounts submitted by clubs and other organisations that, under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, come within its remit. Clearly, there is something wrong with the FSA's system, because in each case accounts are prepared. The FSA does not have to put together those accounts; organisations submit them in a recognised form. I do not, therefore, feel that the size of the proposed fees can be justified.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) made, if I may say so, a rather strange speech, appearing to speak against his new clause. Either the Whips did a little arm-twisting earlier today, or his heart was not in the arguments in the first place.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) reminded us that this issue was raised on Second Reading. He said that swift action is needed, but pinned his hopes on a meeting he has pending with the FSA. If what the FSA is telling the Working Men's Club and Institute Union—the CIU—is anything to go by, I would advise the hon. Gentleman not to raise his hopes too high. A member of the FSA has advised the union that if clubs do not like the fee, they can deregister—an outrageous piece of advice, given that deregistering means that clubs would lose their limited liability. If a club that had deregistered

[Mr. Greg Knight]

got into trouble, the working people running it would find that their homes, cars and other assets could be seized. Deregistering is not an option for clubs.

When the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North–East (Mr. Purchase) rose, my optimism increased. He is an important Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, so when he said that he supported the measure I thought that meant that the Government were on side—there spoke the PPS to the Leader of the House. Then along came the Paymaster General to pour cold water on everything that her hon. Friend had said.

Mr. Purchase: I do have some independence of mind, which does not always accord with Government policy.

Mr. Knight: I applaud the hon. Gentleman's independence on this matter: may we see much more of it.

I strongly advise the Paymaster General not to enter any working men's club in Bristol in the near future, because if its members have read her speech I doubt that she will receive a warm welcome. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East says that something has to be done, and he is right. I am extremely disappointed that, although she expresses sympathy, the Paymaster General has declined to give a commitment to consider the issue. To be fair, she said that she would be happy to meet a delegation from the CIU or some other source, but she gave no commitment to the House that she would examine the matter with a view to righting the clear wrong.

Something has to be done, and my new clause is a vehicle to do it. I hope that the House will approve it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 10, Noes 74.

Division No. 212] **[11.13 am**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brazier, Julian
Cable, Dr Vincent
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Hayes, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. John Butterfill.

NOES

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Berry, Roger
Borrow, David
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Follett, Barbara
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hill, Keith
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Mole, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oiner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Salter, Martin
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Phil Hope and
Rob Marris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

REQUIREMENTS FOR CONVERSION OF A REGISTERED SOCIETY INTO A COMPANY

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 7, leave out "subsections (2) and" and insert "subsection".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 1, line 8, leave out subsection (2).

No. 1, in page 2, line 27, leave out Clause 2.

No. 6, in clause 2, page 2, line 40, after "cannot", insert—

'save with the written consent of the Financial Services Authority'.

No. 7, in page 3, line 34, at end insert—

'(6) In exercising its discretion as to whether to give its consent under paragraph (c) of subsection (1), the Financial Services Authority shall have regard to the following matters:

(a) the purpose or intention of the society's members evidenced by the rules of the society and, in particular, by the inclusion of the provisions referred to in subsection (1);

(b) the interests of the community for whose benefit the society was registered and its successors;

(c) whether the whole or any part of the value represented by the assets of the society should be dedicated to the continued benefit of the community; and

(d) whether the transfer of engagements, amalgamation or conversion referred to in paragraph (c) of subsection (1) is necessary in the interests of the viability of the industry business or trade carried on by the society.'.

No. 5, in title, line 5, leave out from "company;" to "and" in line 7.

Mr. Thomas: I introduce the amendments in my name with some reluctance. I believe that the debates on clause 2 on Second Reading and in Committee have established the importance of ensuring that assets originally dedicated to a community, not to a society's members, should

remain dedicated to that purpose. Following the discussions I have had, I believe that there is now strong sympathy for that position.

Our debates on the clause have also highlighted the importance and value of the community benefit form of industrial and provident society as a vehicle for the pursuit of public interest aims. I have already referred to the benefit of having a regulator, in the form of the Financial Services Authority, to ensure that any society registered under the legislation remains either a co-operative or a community benefit organisation.

Without that safeguard in industrial and provident society law, there would be little to stop the conversion of a co-op from a non-profit vehicle to a company operating for the benefit of its members, shareholders or whatever. Generally, the Registrar of Companies does not police such matters; rightly, he has no duty to do so where a company structure is used. The courts exist as a possible forum for enforcing provisions in company constitutions to protect assets, but unfortunately that would be an expensive and cumbersome process, and only complex structures involving trust arrangements, and a number of other corporate vehicles, can achieve such aims if the industrial and provident society structure is not used.

In comparison, industrial and provident society legislation provides a relatively cheap and effective means of establishing and maintaining social enterprises that operate in the interests of people other than their owners. Clause 2 would have bolstered and improved that system, but even without it, the House should recognise that the industrial and provident system still has great advantages.

Clause 2 and the debates that surrounded it have played their part in the wider process. I understand that the performance and innovation unit in the Cabinet Office has been working on such issues as part of an examination of social enterprise for the Government. I welcome the fact that that work is taking place.

In that spirit, I also commend the judgment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in giving a Minister specific responsibility for this sector when she took up her post. The performance and innovation unit report is imminent, and when it appears the whole question of legal structures for social enterprise will be considered across Government Departments, so it seems appropriate that the issue of asset locking should be taken out of the Bill at this stage and examined as part of that wider discussion.

During our deliberations in Committee, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury highlighted a number of technical issues that would have remained if clause 2 had stayed in the Bill. What she said is recorded in column 11 of the *Hansard* report of Standing Committee G for 13 February. Those technical issues need to be sorted out, so it is right to take clause 2 out. I hope that the performance and innovation unit report, and the consideration of it across Departments, will address those issues.

On that basis, I commend the amendments to the House. As I said, I do so with some reluctance—but I feel reassured that the issues will not drop off the agenda, and I am delighted by the work being done within Government. It is sensible that the issues raised by clause 2 should be considered as part of that general discussion rather than remaining in the Bill.

11.30 am

Mr. Love: I should like to speak to amendments Nos. 6 and 7, which are probing amendments designed to increase the flexibility of clause 2. I shall try to set out their context.

There are two classes of industrial and provident societies: bona fide co-operatives, and societies for the benefit of the community, which have a much wider role in society and operate not just for the benefit of their members. Indeed, their prime consideration is the community interest. When registering, all industrial and provident societies must give reasons for registration as an industrial and provident society; that touches on the previous debate about why there are different charges and why there is an onus on the Financial Services Authority to provide proper regulation of industrial and provident societies.

The FSA gives societies guidance on the registration criteria, which range from a desire to operate mutually under a one member, one vote constitution to business reasons. The important point, however, is that societies must be able to demonstrate their reasons to the registrar. Although there is a safeguard for industrial and provident societies, community benefit societies are vulnerable to asset stripping, and that is particularly true of those that have unclear rules on such circumstances. Someone could therefore exploit a loophole to achieve conversion to a limited liability company, with the assets falling into the hands of a restricted group of members.

The Royal Automobile Club operated under slightly different rules, but everyone was amazed to discover what happened to all the so-called members who signed up with the RAC and built it up over a long period. When its assets were distributed, the members of the best swimming club in London were the net beneficiaries, receiving £35,000 each, which was unfair then and is unfair now. Against that background, we need to protect industrial and provident societies.

Housing associations are safeguarded by the Housing Corporation, because public assets are involved, but if a housing association dispensed of its public assets it could convert for the benefit of a limited membership.

In my probing amendments, I wanted to test the Government's attitude to entrenching assets in an industrial and provident society. Governments of all persuasions, as has been said on numerous occasions in the past 10 to 15 years, have always resisted attempts to entrench assets, as is reflected in clause 2. However, in France, for example, AXA, a well-known brand name in this country and Europe, can be characterised as an industrial and provident society. There are other major examples of what we would consider industrial and provident societies throughout Europe, although that does not apply to every type of organisation. In this country, charities are perhaps the most prominent example of organisations that simply cannot change their charitable status. Everyone accepts that that is appropriate in the circumstances.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Does my hon. Friend agree that people who set up a community benefit organisation often do not think about what might happen subsequently? The danger is that they might not be clear about how the rules will apply if the organisation changes in a particular way? As he graphically illustrated with the

[Ms Meg Munn]

RAC, unintended consequences might result. There is a genuine need to provide protection for organisations that seek to benefit the community and are not established to provide benefits, profits or surpluses for individual members.

Mr. Love: That is exactly the case that I am trying to make. Societies are often established with proper constitutions, but without thought about what will happen. I know that it is not possible, but if we interviewed people who originally set up many mutual organisations that have since been demutualised, we would discover that that eventuality was the last thing on their minds. Assets that have been built up over generations for mutual benefit should not be given to a limited number of shareholders who benefit from demutualisation. My amendments therefore seek to provide long-term protection.

Credit unions are another form of organisation with entrenched constitutions, perhaps because the Credit Unions Act 1979 was very much based on the Irish experience and did not sufficiently take into account the norms of British jurisprudence. However, it was decided that credit unions cannot convert in the same way as building societies or other mutual organisations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West said, some discussions with the Government on public interest companies have covered the possibility of introducing legislation to entrench other forms of organisation. In principle, if the arguments are strong enough, there is no reason why entrenchment should not take place, which is why amendments Nos. 6 and 7 provide a flexible response to asset locking while allowing the FSA to use its experience and expertise to make the final decision. If, under clause 2, a society entrenches its assets, and if there is a move in future to convert the society, it will be for the FSA to sanction the decision.

Mr. Greg Knight: How does the hon. Gentleman envisage the FSA assessing the interests of the community under amendment No. 7? For example, does he envisage the FSA conducting a poll or seeking to take evidence from all members of the organisation to see whether a certain view is held by the whole membership? Or does he see the FSA going beyond the members of the organisation to ascertain the answer?

Mr. Love: I was going to come on to the issues that the FSA will need to take into account but, of course, the community interest is an extremely important consideration for community benefit societies. The FSA will have to have a way of taking the temperature of a community that may be badly affected. If the FSA had taken the temperature of RAC members when the RAC was demutualised, I strongly suspect that there would not have been support for the cause espoused by the limited number of members who benefited from demutualisation. However, it will be for the FSA to make the final decision to sanction demutualisation. We accept that there will be problematic cases, such as those involving declining memberships.

Concern has been expressed about the inability of certain credit unions to turn themselves into commercially viable organisations; the same is undoubtedly true of a number of industrial and provident societies. Their original purpose may have ended, or the community that they represented no longer exists in the same form; or they may simply need a business rescue and restructuring. There will therefore be circumstances in which it will be appropriate for the FSA to sanction change.

Mr. Butterfill: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I agree with everything that he has been saying. Does he agree that where assets have been built up over many years, there is an intergenerational responsibility, and that in principle it is wrong that, for financial gain, one group of people, at one snapshot in time, should enrich themselves at the expense of the continuation of activities? Only where there are circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has been describing, when such activities can no longer reasonably be continued, should the FSA agree.

Mr. Love: That point is included in my amendments. The FSA will need to take into account what will happen to the assets of the society in such circumstances. Intergenerational issues will indeed be important; also important will be whether assets are distributed on the widest possible basis to the community or are restricted to only a few people. We know that although the community benefits from the activities of community benefit societies, their membership is normally restricted. There may be only a few people. All these issues need to be taken into account.

There are various important considerations, including the original purpose of the society as written into its constitution by its members on its formation. Another important consideration is the interests of the community. In addition, there are the assets. There may also be business reasons. We understand that sometimes the safeguarding of jobs and the continuation of the organisation may necessitate change. In those circumstances, that should be allowed.

The purpose behind the amendments is to ensure flexibility when problems arise. We cannot foresee all circumstances. One of the major concerns of government has been that to entrench for ever does not allow for unforeseen circumstances. The amendments will provide the flexibility that will safeguard the community benefit that the societies offer, and demutualisation where that is appropriate.

Many people will ask, "Why are we giving this power to the FSA?" We have discussed the duties that the authority has to undertake and whether costs will be increased. The authority already has considerable experience in this area. For example, it has a statutory duty to ensure that all industrial and provident societies are either bona fide co-operatives or community benefit societies. I say to those who think that that may be a theoretical issue that the largest retail co-operative society in the 1980s—it had a turnover of hundreds of millions of pounds and more than 50,000 employees—was deemed by the registrar not to be a bona fide co-operative. It needed to decouple itself from its wholesale organisation so that it would continue to be registered as a society.

If the registrar can take important decisions of that nature—it was supported by all genuine co-operators as being in the best interests of the industrial and provident society movement—that experience can be used to ensure that societies are maintained for community benefit but

that demutualisation can be allowed in appropriate circumstances. There is inflexibility in having entrenchment without safeguards.

Mr. Greg Knight: The discretion that is provided in amendment No. 7, which is given to the FSA, is not absolute. The authority will have to take into account certain factors, which the hon. Gentleman has explained. As there is not absolute discretion, is there not a risk that we might see a plethora of court cases, with aggrieved parties challenging whether the FSA had acted properly and whether it had given due weight to certain matters? Would not absolute discretion have been a better way forward?

11.45 am

Mr. Love: There is considerable discussion about public interest companies that will be formed under Companies Acts procedures. The only means of challenge will be through the courts, with all the delay and expense that that involves. One of the great advantages of the process that I am advocating is that it will, in most instances, preclude recourse to the courts. There will be streamlining and it will be possible to use procedures with ease. In extremis, however, the courts may have to be used—for example, where it is felt that the FSA has not reflected properly the legislation that is on the statute book. We cannot have it all ways.

We have not gone for an absolute power. We want to increase flexibility, so the FSA should be able to make a decision within the broad parameters set out in the amendments.

We want to strengthen the protection of industrial and provident societies. We recognise that that will be achieved only by providing flexibility to the FSA, which is both independent and, we hope, objective when dealing with these matters. If it can adjudicate in circumstances where there is difficulty, that should provide the protection that the Government require, so that we do not entrench for all time where the circumstances are not supportive.

Dawn Primarolo: The Government support amendments Nos. 2, 3, 1 and 5. My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) said that amendments Nos. 6 and 7 are probing amendments. I shall explain why the Government want to resist his amendments. I hope that, on that basis, he will feel able to withdraw them. If not, he must know that the Government do not support them.

On Second Reading and in Committee, the Government indicated that while we can see potential benefits in enabling community benefit societies to dedicate their assets to the benefit of the community, we were concerned about how that might work in practice. The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) touched on one of many possibilities in this fraught area. That being so, I shall not speak at length.

Legislation that irrevocably commits assets to the benefit of the community must not have unintended effects. Asset lock-in would be a crucial decision for an individual society, and we must also take a view of the effect on the sector as a whole. For example, it must not reduce the flexibility of the sector to allow it to consolidate and grow.

One way to ensure continued flexibility within the sector and make provisions to deal with exceptional circumstances for individual societies would be through powers to reverse or amend asset lock-in in special situations. However, we think that this would raise further questions about defining any circumstances where the asset lock-in might be reversed—for example, who might exercise these powers and how they might be enforced.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) asked in Committee about the rights of members. The adoption of an irreversible asset lock-in rule by an existing society, without unanimous vote, could unwillingly deprive some of those members of rights in a way that might be incompatible with article 1 of the first protocol to the European convention on human rights. The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire might not have referred specifically to that, but he mentioned the possible range of involvement of the courts where somebody disagreed with a decision.

The performance and innovation unit is currently considering the organisational forms of social enterprise, and we look forward to considering its further analysis of the provisions that might help the sector to grow and thrive.

Provisions such as asset lock-in need detailed consideration. That is why I agree with the four amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) to remove the clause and references to it elsewhere in the Bill. In principle, clause 2 has some attractions, but, in its present form, it does not fully resolve the issues of which we are aware, nor have we consulted widely to make sure that there are no other implications that would need to be considered.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 were tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Edmonton and for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith). The possibility of allowing the Financial Services Authority to arbitrate on whether a society that had adopted an asset lock-in rule should still be allowed to convert to or merge with a company without such a rule is an interesting proposal. I see that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton pointed out, that might provide useful flexibility where a society was encountering financial difficulties. For example, the FSA could permit a society to merge with a local company or restructure in some way under company status and thereby avoid having to cease its activities.

Government officials examined such possibilities during their work with advisers assisting my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West in an attempt to address the Government's concerns about the clause. However, I do not consider that the two amendments would be sufficient to resolve the issues that have been discussed during the passage of the Bill.

In addition to the points that I have already raised, there are other issues that we would need to consider—for example, whether the FSA should be able to prevent a society from adopting an unalterable asset lock-in in the first instance; whether there should be circumstances in which a society could reverse such a rule once adopted; and whether all societies or bencoms should be able to adopt this irrevocable rule in their constitutions.

[Dawn Primarolo]

If it were necessary to wind up a society that had such a rule, would the FSA be the best authority to authorise the conversion or transfer, or should some other authority or even the courts take a role? Bearing in mind the discussion that we had in a previous debate about the cost of fees to the FSA, it is odd that the amendment would put greater obligations on the FSA.

I say to my hon. Friends the Members for Edmonton and for Bristol, North–West, as gently as possible and with the best of intentions, that although we appreciate their intentions, the Government believe that their amendments would not be sufficient or a substitute for a more detailed consultation and consideration of such powers. I sincerely hope that having had the benefit of putting—

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: No, I am about to conclude my remarks.

I support amendments Nos. 2, 3, 1 and 5, and hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton will be satisfied with having his comments on the record, in the knowledge that the matter needs and will receive further consideration and consultation. He can look forward to returning to the matter at some future date.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for her comments in support of my amendments. I commend the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) and the amendment tabled by him and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith). It is an ingenious device that would provide additional flexibility and improve clause 2 as it emerged from the Standing Committee. Nevertheless, as the Minister says, there are still issues that need to be resolved, and it is appropriate that that should be done in the context of the performance and innovation unit report and considered across Government. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton will withdraw his two amendments and instead support mine.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 1

REQUIREMENTS FOR CONVERSION OF A REGISTERED SOCIETY INTO A COMPANY

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 1, line 8, leave out subsection (2).—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Clause 2

COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETIES

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 2, line 27, leave out Clause 2.—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Clause 3

POWER TO [illegible]IFY, ETC, TO ASSIMILATE TO COMPANY LAW

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 3, line 35, leave out Clause 3.—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Title

Amendment made: No. 5, in line 5, leave out from "company;" to "and" in line 7.—*[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

11.56 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill emerges from Report significantly improved and achieves two things: first, it places co-operatives registered under the industrial and provident societies legislation in the same position as building societies by ensuring that on that most crucial decision whether or not to convert to a company, there is substantial democratic participation. Members can still change the structure of their organisation, but only on a 50 per cent. turnout and the 75 per cent. vote in favour which was already provided for in law, mirroring the existing provision in building society law.

Secondly, the Bill permits the use of statutory instruments when company law is changed in future to assimilate industrial and provident society law with company law, to deal with the discrepancies on, for example, insolvency procedures, capacity rules, accounts and audit and other aspects of corporate governance which meant that industrial and provident society legal form lagged considerably behind that of the company model and the friendly society and the building society model.

Although that can happen only when changes to company law are enacted, following our deliberations in Committee and in the Chamber today, it is possible for any part of the industrial and provident societies legislation from 1965 to 1978 to be changed, except those parts that are central to the nature of industrial and provident societies or to facilitating the processes that they carry out.

It is important that the co-operative and social enterprise sector is allowed to develop freely and that artificial obstacles such as the lack of a modern legal form are not put in its way. The uneven playing field with companies in the areas that I mentioned and the difference from building societies and other mutuals on demutualisation were serious problems, which have exercised members of the co-operative movement for a considerable time.

The Bill, although modest, allows both issues to be resolved, and should play a small but important role in encouraging the use of industrial and provident societies, so facilitating the development of co-operatives and of businesses with community benefit aims. That can only benefit our economy and the development of communities that are both enterprising and caring.

I pay particular tribute to the sponsoring bodies that I consulted and with which I worked to bring the Bill to its present stage: WI Country Markets, the Committee of Registered Clubs, the Village Retail Services Association, the Rugby Football Union, the Welsh Rugby Union, the United Kingdom Co-operative Council and the

Co-operative Union. They have all been extremely helpful and positive about the Bill and I welcome that.

During the Bill's passage, a number of issues have been raised that still need to be resolved, of which asset lock-in, which we were discussing only a short time ago, is a key one, as is the issue of fees for registration, which I hope will be sorted out shortly.

On the eve of the private Member's ballot in July last year, a former Minister said to me in passing that hon. Members who were lucky enough to secure a private Member's Bill opportunity tended to become obsessive about the process. Hon. Members will recognise that I am the exception to that rule, but nevertheless I have at times come close to being obsessed and I am grateful for the considerable support that I have had in avoiding falling into that trap from parliamentary colleagues, particularly members of the co-op group.

I am grateful for the support that the Bill has had at all stages from Treasury Ministers, and the helpful advice that we have received from their officials. When I heard that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) was to lead for the Opposition, being aware of his two-hour speech on the High Hedges Bill, I did not immediately feel delight, but I am grateful to him for the way in which he has engaged with me and with the issues, and we have a better Bill as a result of those cross-party discussions. I am also grateful for the contributions of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) who leads for the Liberal Democrats for approaching the Bill in the same spirit.

I am grateful, too, for the support from the co-operative movement. The Bill puts in place a number of provisions for which that movement has long campaigned to have included in legislation. In particular, I am lucky enough to chair the Co-op party and I pay tribute to its members who have been assiduous in lobbying Members of Parliament on the Bill. I also pay tribute to its staff who have been extremely helpful during the Bill's passage.

I pay tribute to three people in particular who have worked closely with me on the Bill. Mr. Ian Snaith, the guru of co-operative law, passed me a great tome on industrial and provident society legislation to read on the beach during the summer. I am extremely grateful to him for his support and advice, but he will understand when I say that I will be delighted never to have to look at that particular tome again.

I also pay tribute to Mr. Cliff Mills from Cobbetts, the lawyer who has worked closely with me on the Bill. He has almost convinced me of the worth of the lawyers as a profession, but not quite. He has been extremely kind, generous and supportive and without his advice the Bill would not have reached this stage.

Finally, I pay tribute to my friend the general secretary of the Co-op party, Peter Hunt, who has been an extremely loyal supporter during the Bill's passage. However, in saying those words, just in case lightning should strike twice when the private Member's Bill ballot is drawn next year, I warn him that I will not be in a position to meet him.

I am grateful for the support of hon. Members in making the time to be here on Friday. I know how difficult that can be on occasion. I hope that the House agrees that the Bill has been significantly improved and is worthy of a Third Reading so that it can be passed to the other place for consideration.

12.4 pm

Mr. Greg Knight: I am disappointed that what could have been a great Bill is only a fair Bill following the defeat of new clause 3. The Paymaster General needs to appreciate the great debt of gratitude that she owes to her Whips Office, because during discussions inside and outside the Chamber on the Bill several Labour Members have told me that they supported new clause 3 but had been advised not to vote for it. Therefore, I warn her that if the issue is not satisfactorily resolved, it will return.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on steering the Bill this far. A private Member's Bill is a fragile vessel indeed and he has done well to reach Third Reading. I wish him the best of luck in his forthcoming meeting with the FSA. I hope that he will relate the growing concern in all parts of the House on the issue of fees and that his meeting will ultimately help to resolve that outstanding matter.

Mr. Thomas: I invite the right hon. Gentleman to speak to me after today's proceedings and to take part in that meeting.

Mr. Knight: I respond in the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman made the offer. I shall speak to him when our proceedings have concluded. I wish the Bill well.

12.6 pm

Mr. Love: I warmly welcome the Bill and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), not least on maintaining a sense of humour throughout the proceedings up to Third Reading.

It is well to remind the House that the industrial and provident society sector consists of something approaching 9,000 different societies with total assets of around £61 billion. It is a substantial sector of the economy. Perhaps even more important than that are the sector's unique structures, which can be summed up as an attempt, through constitutional means, to combine the efficiency necessary to survive in a competitive environment with the need for community involvement and, in many cases, democratic accountability. That is no mean feat.

We have an enormous diversity of organisation. We all know the tremendous work done by the housing associations, not only in building houses, which is their primary function, but, if one considers how they have evolved during the past five years, in becoming increasingly involved in community issues with regard to poverty and deprivation. That is a step that I welcome. We also have the old retail shops, agricultural co-operatives and, as many hon. Members have said, there are the different clubs, ranging from Conservative clubs through to trades and labour clubs. That is perhaps the only way in which the two sides come together, which attests to the diversity and warm fellowship within the movement.

I want to comment briefly on two important issues.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Does my hon. Friend agree that, having listed the existing mutual models that will be grateful for the Bill, new generations of social entrepreneurs will also be grateful as they develop new and lasting models based on the Bill?

[Mr. Love]

Mr. Love: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, not least because, in the mutual movement, we tend to look back, and it is most important that we look forward. I hope that the Bill is a contribution to that. This is the first legislation on industrial and provident societies for 30-odd years. There have been numerous Companies Acts during that period, so a Bill that provides for updating industrial and provident society legislation without the need for primary legislation, is a welcome measure. Industrial and provident societies face hurdles. They do not have a level playing field with their company competitors, but the Bill will help to create one.

In the past 15 years, demutualisation of societies has been seen as the honest and correct thing to do, as there have been windfall benefits for everyone and no down side. The Bill recognises that that is not the case. More importantly, it exposes what has happened as a result of demutualisation. The original clause 1—it may be clause 2 under the revised numbering—recognises that we must create a level playing field for industrial and provident societies, otherwise they, like other mutuals in the financial services sector such as building societies and mutual insurers, will be overtaken by events, as has happened in years past. The debate about whether organisations should demutualise was overtaken by the question of how much money individual members would receive, regardless or whether such a move was to the benefit of the society.

Almost all the arguments used by the managements of the organisations that demutualised are now either bankrupt or do not apply. There is concern that some of those organisations, having demutualised, will now be gobbled up by other financial services companies or banks, and will no longer be able to offer the services that they provided when they were mutuals.

We must try to create a more level playing field for industrial and provident societies. The court case involving the Co-operative Wholesale Society shows the need to do that. Two of its most senior executives have been found guilty and will be sentenced in the near future. That is an object lesson for us all, and shows what can happen inside large organisations with significant assets that many people would like to get their hands on.

I strongly welcome the Bill, because it moves towards a level playing field for industrial and provident societies. We need to take further steps, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West listed some of them. This is a most welcome measure, and I commend it to the House.

12.13 pm

Mr. Butterfill: I endorse the warm welcome that the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) has just given to this excellent Bill. I share the regret of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) that we have not adequately tackled the issue of charging by the Financial Services Authority. I hope that the proposed meetings will bear fruit, because the will of both sides of the House has been clearly expressed.

I also understand why the Paymaster General felt unable to accept amendment No. 7, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Edmonton. That was a little disappointing, but there is clearly a need to consult further. I hope that that consultation will lead to a successful conclusion on the important issues that were raised in that amendment.

Having said that, I think that this is a worthwhile Bill. It has been clear from the debate that much of the important fabric of our society is represented by industrial and provident societies. Without their activities, our communities would be deeply impoverished. The strengthening of those societies through this legislation was long overdue. I join in the congratulations given to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on bringing this measure before the House.

12.15 pm

Mr. Edward Davey: I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who has been forced to leave me in charge of the Third Reading speech for the Liberal Democrats. He has given me some speaking notes, and I am delighted to echo his support and that of my party for this welcome measure. I pass on his congratulations to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on bringing it forward and on steering it through the House so well. I had a visit from his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) and, given the number of other Bills on the Order Paper, I assure the House that I shall keep my remarks brief.

I also believe that mutuals play a strong and important role for many of our constituents. They play an active role in making our communities that much richer, so it is important to bring the legislation that applies to them up to date.

Many people in the House and outside believe that this sector can play a much larger role in future. The many social entrepreneurs that are around and many people working in the public service and the private sector want this model adopted by their organisations—either existing or new ones. The Bill is welcome because it brings the law up to date and provides a mechanism for the legislation to be updated more frequently and more easily.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham believes that the limitation that the Bill puts on carpetbaggers by ensuring that a democratic process applies to industrial and provident societies is an important step forward. I agree with him and with the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) that more work needs to be done on entrenching the assets in these organisations. I was pleased to hear from the Paymaster General that the performance and innovation unit is actively considering that issue, and that consultation will take place in due course.

I am pleased that the fairly new social enterprise unit in the Department of Trade and Industry is contributing to that work, and is examining not only new ways of reforming industrial and provident society legislation, but new artificial identities that could be developed in the framework of industrial and provident society or company law.

We could go back to that creative stage in the Victorian era when new artificial identities were established to ensure that the economic and social objectives of society could be met by legal entities. We commend the Government on that work, and encourage them to go further.

I end by again congratulating the hon. Member for Harrow, West on his Bill.

12.18 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner: My remarks will be brief as time is limited. Our thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) have already been put on record, but it would be remiss of us not to mention that his conduct and approach to the Bill since its inception have been admirable. On behalf of Co-operative MPs—I declare an interest as a member of that group—I express our appreciation of the way that my hon. Friend has approached the Bill. He thanked legions of people in his contribution, so it is appropriate for us to thank him for giving his private Member's slot to this extremely important Bill.

For several years, the co-operative movement wanted to introduce such a measure, but we always found that parliamentary and Government time were taken up with so many pressing issues for our country that there was no opportunity to initiate modernising legislation for our co-operative enterprises and societies. An opportunity has been presented through the good offices of my hon. Friend in giving us this private Member's Bill. The measure is moving towards the statute book and hon. Members have told us of the benefits that it will bring.

I want to comment briefly on the remarks of the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) and the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) about the difficulties for clubs in respect of fees. The comments of the Paymaster General show that there is an anomaly that must be addressed and resolved, but it would have been unfair for that to impact on the Bill. We know that there must be serious discussion of the problem of the FSA and fees, and I am grateful to the Paymaster General for telling us that she is prepared to listen further to our arguments and to resolve the problem.

The matter must be resolved. The present situation is unjust for co-operative societies, as well as for working men's clubs, Labour clubs, Liberal clubs and Conservative clubs—thousands of clubs throughout the country with thousands and thousands of members. They feel disadvantaged and badly treated by a decision that was not originally theirs. They did not choose to move away from the Registrar of Friendly Societies; it was the result of legislation passed in this place. As a consequence, the societies were harshly treated as regards the fees that they have to pay. The FSA has said that it will do its best to reduce the fees, but the anomaly will remain. I urge colleagues vigorously to pursue the matter with Ministers so that we can find a solution.

I remind the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) that I described the Second Reading as a happy parliamentary occasion; there was unanimity as to the desirability of the benefits that would flow to many thousands of people. We have also seen that today.

Before the introduction of the Bill, we shared the views of that wonderful philosopher Omar Khayyam. He said:

"Ah love! could thou and I with Fate conspire

To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,

Would not we shatter it to bits . . . and then

Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

That is what we have done today. We have remoulded the Bill nearer to our heart's desire and that of many thousands of people. We should give thanks for having been able to do that.

12.23 pm

Mr. Chope: The final part of the contribution of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) must have been the result of his drinking from one of those bottles of special real ale with which he was presented by the Campaign for Real Ale—

Mr. Turner: Not this morning.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that the promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), had dealt with it admirably. I would like to add that the hon. Gentleman has done so in an exemplary fashion. Indeed, if other Members who introduce private Member's Bills use his experience and follow his example, they will do extremely well. He realised that in order to get a private Member's Bill on to the statute book, one must be clear about one's objectives; one must be prepared to listen to points of view from both sides of the House; and one must conduct oneself with good humour and keep in touch with people who have expressed an interest in the subject. He has done all those things. From the moment at Second Reading when I first expressed misgivings about clauses 2 and 3, he went out of his way to try to accommodate my concerns.

I am only sorry that now, at Third Reading, the Bill completely lacks the content of the original clause 2, because although I had reservations about it—as did the Government—the clause could probably have been amended to make it acceptable if work had been done on it earlier. I share the frustration that the hon. Gentleman must feel that although, having managed to secure his place in the ballot, he chose and identified his piece of legislation very early, Treasury officials did not get to grips with the detail of the Bill until the eleventh hour. If more thought had been put into it earlier, we might have been able to progress clause 2. The hon. Gentleman also understood the concerns that were expressed about clause 3; as a result, the latest version is a great improvement on the original.

I hope that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East and others will not rue the day that they chose not to support my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) in his new clause 3, which would have produced a better Bill. Their decision is understandable if—as might be the case—they were threatened that if the Bill was amended in that way it would not receive Government support at Third Reading, but let us hope that Labour Back Benchers' faith in their Government will be fulfilled and that there will be a significant reduction in the fees that clubs and industrial and provident societies are charged. I have my doubts about that, but time will tell whether I and my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire are right or whether Labour Members were right to put their trust in the Government.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West on the Bill. I and my party support its Third Reading and hope that it passes through the other place without significant—or perhaps any—amendment, because if it is amended, it may encounter difficulties in terms of time in the House and fail to reach the statute book.

12.27 pm

Dawn Primarolo: I echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on the excellent and dedicated way in which he has guided the Bill through the House.

The quality of debate on Second Reading, in Committee and in the Chamber today has been high. That shows that at last, after a very long time—stretching back beyond even the stewardship of the Labour Government—we are on the verge of fulfilling the desire of the industrial and provident societies to reform themselves and update their legislation. The House has recognised the significant part that industrial and provident societies play in the wider mutual sector and how much positive will there is among Members of Parliament to ensure that we maximise the benefits that those societies can offer to their members.

There are currently just under 10,000 industrial and provident societies in the United Kingdom, with assets totalling over £60 billion. They, with other classes of mutuals in the United Kingdom—building societies, friendly societies and credit unions—form a distinct and important part of the economy, and the Government believe that mutuals of all kinds should have an opportunity to develop and play an important role in offering consumers choice and innovative services. The mutual advantage—not having external shareholders to satisfy, so that organisations can concentrate on providing goods and services for their members and for the wider community—makes mutuality a distinct and potentially very useful alternative model for business, as hon. Members have said. We believe that mutuality has a great deal to contribute, now and in the future, offering particular benefits to individual members and to the communities in which they are based. It is because we recognise the value and potential of mutual societies that we have recently been involved in several initiatives to help them maximise the benefits that they can offer to their members.

I realise that some people are disappointed that changes made during the Bill's passage through the House make it less ambitious than they would have preferred, but it is important that there should be time to consult and to consider its detail. Despite that disappointment, and in addition to recognising the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, those who supported and advised him, and the Treasury officials who have stood ready at all times to give the advice that they are required and able to give—private Member's Bills are dealt with in a different way from other Bills—we should not underestimate what the Bill will achieve in its current form.

A more robust demutualisation procedure should bring more confidence in, and strength to, the society form. The ability to update industrial and provident society legislation through secondary legislation will ensure that the legal framework for societies need never fall further behind the framework applying to companies. Over time, the Bill's provisions will have a much more profound effect. They will allow industrial and provident legislation to catch up in areas deemed appropriate, thereby helping to create a genuinely level playing field with companies and across the mutual sector.

During the Bill's passage, we considered several other provisions that are not current features of it. Although, for differing reasons, it has not been possible to accept them, the debates and the analysis undertaken have served a useful purpose. For example, we have been able to explore areas in which the movement might benefit from an updating of its legislation. We have also examined the issues surrounding asset "lock-in" and why it may be advantageous to certain parts of the movement, and what issues need further consideration. We have discussed at length fees, the relationship of all societies to the Financial Services Authority, and particular problems with fee levels that have been identified in certain areas.

The performance and innovation unit has undertaken its own analysis of the legal framework of the social enterprise sector, and it hopes to report later this year. Whatever its conclusions, I believe that the discussions and the work that we have undertaken during consideration of the Bill have given us a much better idea of how to help the movement grow, and of how we might take forward any recommendations that the performance and innovation unit makes. The Government believe that, where appropriate, it is essential to help industrial and provident societies to operate on a level playing field with companies and other mutuals. The Bill provides an important stepping stone towards achieving that aim.

Once again, on behalf of the House I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West on introducing this very useful Bill. I am delighted to hear that his reading matter will now move on from the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts. Perhaps he will read the Red Book and the Budget papers, before finally alighting on something a little lighter. I recommend the Harry Potter novels, for example, which provide amazing relaxation. My congratulations are sincere. In terms of the procedures of the House, the difficulties associated with private Member's Bills are enormous. He has done an excellent job and this is an excellent Bill. The Government certainly want to see it on the statute book.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

COMPENSATION TO AFFECTED PARTIES

(1) If, pursuant to this Act an ancient monument is declared which results in any third party suffering financial loss directly as a result of such declaration (including a loss as a result of such third party being unable to exercise fishing rights) then compensation shall be paid to the third party as a result of such declaration.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision relating to the compensation to be paid under subsection (1).'.— *[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.35 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Earlier this week, when I tabled new clause 1, I think that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) an attack of hypertension because she was very concerned that my aim might be to talk out the Bill. No such anxiety arose with my dear hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), who is very laid back about such matters. May I tell both of them that I am not here to wreck today's proceedings?

I introduce this primarily probing new clause because the Bill is strangely silent on what happens if someone suffers a financial loss as a direct result of the declaration of an ancient monument. If the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England makes a decision as the result of the Bill and that decision results in others being out of pocket or losing out in some way, surely compensation should be considered. If no compensation scheme covers the scope of the Bill, surely one needs to be introduced. That is the aim of new clause 1.

I am quite happy for the details of such a scheme to be decided by the Government and I do not seek to prescribe in the new clause how it should be set up. I am confident that the Government would ensure that fair provisions were introduced if such a measure were needed, but we need to examine the principle of awarding compensation to those who lose out through no fault of their own, and we need to debate and clarify that issue before proceeding to Third Reading.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I rise briefly to support my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). Before being elected to the House, I practised as a chartered surveyor and know that the principle of injurious affection has been long established in British legislation. Under that principle, if someone's property is expropriated or diminished in value in some way for community purposes—for example, if a propriety's value is affected by a new road—that member of the public can be compensated for his or her loss.

It cannot be right that we as a society can take away the value of someone's property for a community purpose without offering fair compensation. I therefore believe that my right hon. Friend has done a great service to the consideration of the Bill by proposing the new clause, without which severe injustice could occur.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) for introducing the new clause, although I invite the House to resist it if he feels that he cannot withdraw the motion. So far as I can understand his objectives, I think that they are two separate things. Before I consider those, I should say that I think that the new clause is technically outside the scope of the Bill, and I shall briefly try to explain why.

I shall put aside the fact that ancient monuments are scheduled, not declared—I do not rest on that argument. In fact, I believe that an ancient monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. There are no provisions in my Bill—if I may so call it, for ease of reference—relating to such scheduling. My Bill only amends the definition of an ancient monument in the 1979 Act to include a vehicle, vessel, aircraft or the remains thereof.

In fact, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) inferred, there are existing procedures for the payment of compensation in connection with scheduled ancient monuments. However, the compensation is not paid when the monument is scheduled as, at that point, it is claimed there is no loss. Compensation can be paid, however, under section 7 of the 1979 Act when scheduled monument consent is refused by the Secretary of State. A process of redress therefore exists.

The reference in my right hon. Friend's new clause to fishing rights is, I presume, in connection with the scheduling of ancient monuments on the sea bed—wrecks or prehistoric built structures—and the danger of nets snagging on and being damaged by those monuments or a fishing boat having to move to new sites. If his argument is that an ancient monument is scheduled, and that that bars a fishing boat from fishing on that area, which would automatically result in compensation, that is a very wide issue. It is not an issue for me; perhaps it is one for the Government. I think that a lot of fishing boats would suddenly turn up to claim compensation. I would also say, however, that fishing boats with fishing rights have those rights in different parts of our seas and not necessarily on just one narrow, restricted part.

There is already considerable consultation before wrecks are designated. If someone drags a trawl net across the sea bed within the restricted area surrounding a designated wreck site—incidentally, such sites are marked on navigation charts—they can be fined for doing so, as it is illegal. I do not want to provoke my right hon. Friend unnecessarily, but a stronger case might be made not for compensation being made to such vessels but for fines being imposed on them if they act without the law.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It may be for the convenience of the House if the Minister winds up the debate. I call the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh).

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I simply want to put

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

the mind of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) at rest that I am very relaxed about his new clause. I congratulate him on his drafting ability in that respect, but, for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) so eloquently explained, although I welcome this opportunity to discuss the issues raised, I have great difficulty in envisaging circumstances in which these conditions would arise. I am firmly of the view that the new clause falls without the scope of the Bill, and, regrettably, we shall not therefore support it.

Dr. Howells: I also congratulate the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) on his ingenuity. After all, if we consider the wording of the new clause, ancient monuments are scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, and there are no provisions in the Bill relating to such scheduling.

I spoke to the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire some time ago, and this is a fascinating subject. I understand that considerable consultation with all relevant parties, including the fishermen, is undertaken before a wreck is designated, to ensure, among other things, that their livelihoods are not put at risk. I also understand that there are more than 40 designated wrecks in British waters. I have sought advice on this matter, and have been informed that there has not been a case of any great controversy involving the effects on fishing of the designation of any of these wrecks. These debates are fascinating, because I have just discovered the name of the relevant body that conducts the consultation. The Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites is made up of experts who advise English Heritage and the Government.

12.45 pm

I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has raised the issue, but the Government will resist the new clause. We believe that adequate safeguards are in place and we support the explanation that was given by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman).

Mr. Greg Knight: I welcome the Minister's remarks. I am reassured to hear that consultation takes place with all those who may be affected, including representatives of fishermen. The fishing industry has suffered a lot over the past decade and it could do well without a further attack on it. I am pleased to hear that the industry is properly consulted, so I am reassured by the Minister's remarks.

I was rather concerned by the attack of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) on the fishing community. He suggested that some fishermen might fish above a wreck if they thought that they would receive compensation. He made that point in a jovial manner, so I take it that he was not seeking to impugn the honour of the fishermen of Bridlington.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I certainly did not mean to suggest what my right hon. Friend has imputed. If I made a slight mistake in my choice of words, he must make allowances for the fact that I come from landlocked Chipping Barnet. We very much appreciate the probity of the fishermen who supply us with a basic need.

Mr. Knight: In the light of the tone of my hon. Friend's intervention, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

NEW FUNCTIONS RELATING TO UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 1, line 11, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 10, in page 1, line 14, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 11, in clause 2, page 2, line 10, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 12, in page 2, line 19, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 13, in clause 3, page 2, line 38, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 14, in clause 4, page 4, line 2, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 15, in page 4, line 14, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 16, in clause 5, page 5, line 7, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

No. 17, in clause 6, page 5, line 42, after "waters", insert "and continental shelf".

Mr. Dismore: I reassure my hon. Friend the Minister that it is not my intention to talk out the Bill, and I have had to pass on that message a few times. I also give that reassurance to my neighbour, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman). He is an old hand at these matters and understands how the House works on a Friday. Indeed, he is such an old hand that I cannot resist the ungentlemanly comment of saying that he lays claim to being a scheduled monument in his own right.

Martin Linton (Battersea): But not a wreck.

Mr. Dismore: No, not a wreck.

This group of amendments would apply the Bill to the continental shelf, and several issues need to be raised in this context. For example, oil rigs and gas platforms may not be the most beautiful objects in the seas around our coast, but they are vital to the national economy. When we extended our territorial waters over the continental shelf, we did so for economic reasons and to allow us to exploit the natural mineral resources that lie off our coast—for example, in the North sea.

People may wonder why I want to preserve oil rigs and gas platforms. They may think that they are not worthy of preservation. However, future generations may see the rigs and platforms as part of our national heritage and culture because of their importance to our economy over the past decade. Those generations might want them to be preserved. However, as the Bill is framed, they would have no protection at all.

The brief provided by the House of Commons Library offers another reason for extending the provisions of the Bill to cover the continental shelf. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the number of designated sites that already exist. In fact, according to the most up-to-date figures, there were 49 at the end of 2000. All of them were within the 12-mile limit, and most were within the three-mile limit. I asked the Library to provide me with an estimate of how many wrecks there might be beyond those limits, and it said:

"Estimates suggest there could be anything up to a million wreck sites in international waters around the British Isles. Most of these would be wooden vessels, difficult to detect with current technology."

It occurs to me that although we might not have the technology to examine the wrecks now, there is no doubt that diving technology is advancing rapidly. Before long people will be able to visit the wrecks and perhaps exploit them. We know that that can be done in deep sea by the work carried out by marine archaeologists on the Titanic and the German battleship, the Bismarck, which recently featured on television documentaries. I suspect that it will not be long before some of the wrecks on the continental shelf suffer similar exploitation.

I cannot understand why there should be a legal objection to my proposal. We recently debated the protection of marine wildlife and are thinking of extending conservation areas beyond territorial waters into the continental shelf area. Lord Whitty said in another place on 4 February this year that the Government are thinking of extending the implementation of the European Community birds and habitats directives beyond the 12 nautical mile limit of the territorial waters to areas over which we claim sovereignty. If we can do that for areas of natural importance, we should also do it for areas of historic importance to ensure that wrecked ships are protected.

Miss McIntosh: Has the hon. Gentleman estimated the size of the continental shelf around the British isles, especially the coast of England?

Mr. Dismore: The usual assumption is a limit of 200 miles for economic activity purposes except when we neighbour another country and the continental shelf is shared. I recall that from my days of studying international law at university.

Some sites that are not covered by the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 should be categorised as war graves at sea. They include: merchant and passenger vessels that are sunk, whether by enemy action or not; wrecked naval ships as opposed to those sunk or run aground by enemy action; aircraft, although they might be protected by existing legislation; and ships that are more than 200 years old. If we were to extend the legislation, we could provide valuable protection to those sites that are beyond territorial waters.

I know that the definition of ancient monument in the legislation is to be redefined to cover some of those categories. We could use that mechanism to provide additional protection for war graves that are not covered. Although such sites do not comprise naval ships, many people would think of them as war graves. For example, ships that were torpedoed in the battle of the Atlantic or as part of a world war one convoy are not protected unless they are naval vessels. I think that it is important to protect the graves of people who tragically died in those important years that preserved our national life.

More ancient wrecks may also need protection as the work of divers gets more sophisticated. That includes ships of the Spanish armada and the Napoleonic or French revolutionary wars. It could also include East Indiaman ships. At the moment, those ships are well protected because of the depth at which they lie, but they could soon become vulnerable.

It might be worth considering whether we can extend the Bill's provisions beyond territorial waters to include ships on the continental shelf. I am not suggesting that we should protect every one of the million wrecks at the bottom of the sea, but we might need the powers of protection in appropriate cases as and when they become detected.

Mr. Greg Knight: Affording protection will work only if the sites are policed. How would that process be carried out?

Mr. Dismore: I was going to deal with that when we discuss the next group of amendments. There is a provision in the 1986 Act which has yet to come into force. Protection is afforded at the moment through a voluntary code of practice that the diving communities operate among themselves. To an extent, they form an underwater neighbourhood watch that looks after such sites. My concern is that those wrecks would not be covered even under the existing legislation designed to protect them. I do not suggest for one moment that in the next few days people might go diving on wrecks that are further out, but the reserve powers that the amendment would provide should be available so that an important wreck found, say, 13 miles out could be protected.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful for the contribution made by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), whom I know well and who is a near neighbour. I am aware of his great knowledge of matters archaeological and of the fact that he is a lawyer, so I am hesitant about quarrelling with him about his amendment.

My understanding of the scope of my Bill is that adding the words "and continental shelf" would extend its application to areas that are outside UK territorial waters. Moreover, the Bill covers only powers in relation to the waters of England; properly, there is separate legislation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That may cause problems—I do not know, as I am not a lawyer.

The provisions on underwater archaeology are intended to enable English Heritage to incur expenditure on the archaeological investigation and preservation of wrecks designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. Clause 1 covers wrecks

"in, on or under the seabed within the United Kingdom territorial waters adjacent to England."

As the jurisdiction of the 1973 Act does not go beyond the boundary of 12 miles, I do not think that it would be permissible to add to my Bill the words proposed by the hon. Member for Hendon.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend raises a serious point. Will he enlighten us about what would happen if the amendment were accepted and the Bill was

[Mr. Greg Knight]

subsequently employed to try to affect areas that are beyond the jurisdiction of our courts? Would that make the whole Bill void or liable to a challenge before the European Court? If the amendment could have either of those consequences, those of us who initially had some sympathy with the hon. Member for Hendon might conclude that he should be prevailed upon to withdraw it.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I have done a considerable amount of research on the provisions of the Bill, but I am not a lawyer—still less an expert international lawyer—nor would I pretend to be. I could go so far as to say that when I was deciding what profession to take up, I was advised to start at the top of the alphabetical list and work down. I knew that I did not want to be an accountant or an actuary, and I was in danger of not being able to spell the word "archaeology", so I moved on to the next one down, which was architecture. That is why I am an architect.

In all seriousness, my understanding—I would welcome the Minister's clarification later, if not now—is that it would be necessary to make changes to the 1973 Act, which would require separate legislation. Moreover, the fact that the continental shelf is a pretty large area could give rise to practical problems, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) suggested.

I suspect that the amendment may not be appropriate in the context of my more modest measure, but I await the Minister's clarification of whether that is so.

1 pm

Miss McIntosh: The scope of the Bill, as I understand it, is restricted to allowing English Heritage to become involved in underwater archaeology in territorial waters adjacent to England. I would say, in the friendliest spirit, to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that the amendments are unnecessary. There is very little continental shelf within England's territorial waters, and continental shelf beyond that is not part of English Heritage's remit.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I am an international lawyer, having graduated from the Edinburgh university. The international law lecturer there when I was a student was a rapporteur on the North sea conference. I commend to the hon. Gentleman the latest conference report, of which there are three copies in the Library. In that spirit, I urge him to withdraw this group of amendments.

Dr. Howells: Extending English Heritage's powers to allow it to operate on the continental shelf outside the 12-mile territorial limit would require careful consideration and could affect interests beyond those of English Heritage—perhaps even international interests. It is a big issue for us to consider at this late stage of the Bill's consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) made some interesting and far-sighted suggestions. I remind him that, within the limited context of the Bill, the amendments may not be as appropriate as he thinks. It was never our intention to allow English Heritage to operate beyond the 12-mile limit of UK territorial waters adjacent to England. Putting England on a 12-mile limit makes the position the same as in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, so we are removing an anomaly and the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) should be congratulated on that.

The situation has been anomalous and, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the underwater archaeology provisions are intended to enable English Heritage to incur expenditure on wrecks designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 in or under the sea bed in UK territorial waters adjacent to England. The jurisdiction of the 1973 Act does not go beyond the 12-mile limit, so we have to resist the amendments.

Mr. Dismore: The amendments were designed to draw attention to a risk that is not immediate, but may emerge in the future. Economic activity such as oil platforms may pose a threat to wrecks that are not currently accessible, but may be in the future. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Dismore: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 1, line 19, at end insert—

'(4) For the avoidance of doubt, nothing in this Act shall permit any activity on or near any wreck prohibited by the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.'.

This is a probing amendment designed to ensure that I receive, on behalf of the House, assurances from the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman).

Clause 6 amends the National Heritage Act 1983 by inserting a new section 33C, providing the commission with powers to meet the cost of, for example, surveying, excavating or other investigations undertaken in respect of a protected wreck, the removal of such a wreck or any part of it, the arrangements for its preservation and so forth.

I want to ensure that nothing in the Bill would in any way enable people, with the assistance of English Heritage, to do something forbidden by the Protection of Military Remains Act. That Act creates two different types of protection. First, it is possible to designate a site, such as an area containing naval vessels that were sunk or stranded as a result of military action by another country, or vessels of another country's armed forces, provided that they are within UK waters.

Only those vessels are protected by the legislation and perhaps we should consider whether to extend that protection to aircraft in the same way that the Bill extends the provisions of the National Heritage Act 1983 to aircraft. I have already gone through the other categories that are not included.

The effect of designation is to prohibit a series of activities on such sites—activities that mirror fairly exactly those that are to be permitted, indeed encouraged, by the amendments the Bill would make to the legislation.

The alternative form of protection under the Protection of Military Remains Act is for a protected place, whereby a specific vessel that appears to have been sunk or stranded while on military service is designated, whether or not its last resting place is known. Our earlier discussions are relevant to the fact that that protection applies anywhere in the world, not only in our territorial waters, to vessels that sank after the start of the first world war.

No sites have yet been designated under the Act as either controlled or protected sites. Currently, they are protected through the voluntary code that was introduced by those who engage in diving for recreational purposes. I want to do nothing that will detract from their activities. I think that they have behaved extremely responsibly in drawing up their seven-point plan to respect wrecks and helping to police the sites. However, I am concerned that technological advances may result in people attempting to interfere with sites that are, in effect, war graves.

Mr. Greg Knight: The hon. Gentleman is probably aware of the recent media programme that speculated about the cause of death of Glenn Miller, the wartime band leader, in which it was argued that his plane might well have been hit by unused bombs dropped by RAF planes on their return from raids on Germany. At the time of his death, Glenn Miller was serving in the armed forces, but my understanding is that the plane on which he was travelling was a civilian flight. Are the remains of Major Glenn Miller covered by the 1986 Act?

Mr. Dismore: My understanding is that they are not, first, because if the hon. Gentleman is correct the aircraft was a civilian aircraft and, secondly, because aircraft are not covered by the Act, which covers only vessels. In connection with previous amendments and just now, I made the point that aircraft are not protected. Perhaps we should at some stage—not today—consider extending the legislation in that respect.

We have, regrettably, had news of the plundering—presumably by treasure hunters and not by divers from the United Kingdom—of the wrecks of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse, two battleships that were torpedoed off Malaya in 1941. As technology advances, some sites will become increasingly vulnerable to misguided and ghoulish individuals who want to crawl all over the wrecks. I am grateful that the diving fraternity utterly condemns such activities and helps to police them to some extent.

Although no sites have yet been designated under the 1986 Act, the purpose of my amendment is to ask the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet to make it absolutely clear that nothing in the Bill would detract from the protections afforded by existing legislation to war graves beneath the seas.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am sure that, like me, the House is extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) for raising this important issue. I hope to be able to reassure him beyond any doubt.

I have concluded that his amendment is not necessary for one specific reason. The Protection of Military Remains Act covers maritime military graves and other military wrecks from conflicts dating from the start of the great war—world war one. Those remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.

As the hon. Gentleman would expect, I have made inquiry of the Ministry—and as he pointed out, no sites have been designated. That is a fair point, which adds power to what he has said. However, I understand from the Ministry that it is now drawing up a statutory instrument to designate 16 vessels as controlled sites within UK jurisdiction, plus five vessels in international waters that meet the criteria in the consultation document; those will be representative of the others that have been lost. Diving on those vessels will be prohibited without a licence.

I am satisfied that the Ministry of Defence is moving now, however lax it may appear to have been to date. The material point is that once a vessel has been designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act it will be protected by that legislation and English Heritage will have no remit in respect of it.

The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that most of the 16 vessels intended to be designated as controlled sites within UK jurisdiction are not located in UK territorial waters adjacent to England, so they would be outside the scope of the Bill. Six are in Scottish waters, one is off Anglesey and four are in waters off the Falkland Islands. There are also five other vessels under consideration, all of which are in international waters.

I do not think that amendment No. 19 is necessary to achieve what the hon. Gentleman and the rest of us want to achieve.

Mr. Dismore: In his discussions with the Ministry of Defence, did the hon. Gentleman get the impression that we are trying to close the gate after the horse has bolted in thinking about protecting the Repulse and the Prince of Wales through designation?

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Gentleman may be in a better position to do that than I am, as he sits on the Government side of the Chamber. All I can do is to pass the message on to the Ministry of Defence. Perhaps he and I could question the appropriate Minister.

Dr. Howells: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on having tabled some far-sighted amendments. However, it is important that we try to see the matter in a broad perspective. The sites that he has referred to are important, but we believe that his amendments to this Bill are not necessary.

As the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said, once a vessel has been designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 it will be protected by that legislation and English Heritage will have no remit in respect of it. As the hon. Gentleman also informed us, the amendment is unnecessary, as most of the 16 vessels in UK jurisdiction due to be designated as controlled sites under the 1986 Act are located outside the UK territorial waters adjacent to England, and the 1986 Act applies only to vessels that sank after 4 August 1914.

I hope that after those reassurances, my hon. Friend will see fit to withdraw what he described as a probing amendment.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful for the explanations by my hon. Friend the Minister and by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman). The purpose of tabling the amendments was to air the issue, and I accept that it would not be appropriate for them to be pressed now—but I hope that the Ministry of

[Mr. Dismore]

Defence will at least take note of the debate and think what amendments should be made to other legislation. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

1.15 pm

Clause 4

NEW TRADING FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

Mr. Dismore: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 3, line 36, at end insert—

'(1A) The Commission shall, before exercising its powers under subsections (1)(d) and (e) above, consult and thereafter take account of any representations made by the Government, or any equivalent body to the Commission, of the country concerned.'.

We are somewhat changing the subject now, and moving from international waters to international monuments. The Bill makes provision for the commission to produce books, films and souvenirs relating to monuments, buildings and so on overseas. I want to ensure that if we stray beyond our territorial waters to other countries, we do so in a way that will not offend anybody.

When the Bill was discussed in another place, Baroness Anelay said:

"I assure the House that English Heritage should not and will not operate in competition with existing commercial concerns. It will complement and not conflict with the services already offered by commercial concerns for operations outwith the UK. By developing relations with overseas bodies English Heritage will look to stimulate the market for UK commercial companies. Overseas agencies look to English Heritage for training and advice."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 2001; Vol. 627, c. 1493.]

I very much hope that that is the case, but I know from my own trips to countries like Greece, where I frequently visit ancient monuments and museums, that museum replicas are becoming big business; they are produced to a high standard, are often expensive and are an important part of the income of many overseas museum services. If we start to produce such material, we should do so in co-operation with the authorities of those countries and not, as Baroness Anelay said, in competition with them. I therefore seek an assurance that, in light of the co-operation that was discussed in another place, we are not going to compete with overseas museum services.

We should also have regard for the sensitivities of overseas countries. The Parthenon sculptures, for example, are a matter of great debate between Greece and ourselves. The sculptures are in the British museum, which produces an awful lot of material about them in the bookshop. There are two very different stories about how the Parthenon sculptures came to be in the United Kingdom. I shall not explore them now, although it is tempting. However, I share the Greeks' view, rather than the British Government's. If we produced plastic parthenons for sale in the British museum, the Greek Government might have something to say. They might also have something to say about the context and content of any books or literature produced.

We must bear in mind the fact that a lot of souvenirs represent things that are culturally sensitive, such as the Parthenon, which is highly symbolic for the people of Greece. If we go down that route, we should recognise the importance of selling high-quality products; we should not stoop to the tourist tat that is seen on the streets of some countries. We should produce items in co-operation with overseas countries so as not to offend them. We must make sure that we work in co-operation with them and are not in competition with them.

Mr. Greg Knight: The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) is a powerful advocate. He has moved a number of amendments today, and has taken me with him on some of his arguments. However, he has needed all his powers of advocacy for amendment No. 22 because his case is weak. I am against what he is trying to achieve; he has not explained why we should put the commission under that duty.

The main issue is whether the commission should be able to trade. I have serious misgivings about allowing it to start trading and selling trinkets and would much prefer the Bill not to include such a provision. However, having accepted that that power is in the Bill, the commission must be allowed the discretion to produce items as it sees fit. For example, if it believes that there is a market at certain British sites for tacky replicas of the Empire State building, why should we have to consult the Americans about whether to go ahead with the proposal? The process would be cumbersome and unwieldy, and it would not work. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) for introducing the amendment. It gives us a chance to discuss a serious issue. We are discussing it in the context of the Bill being able to allow English Heritage to

"produce and publish, or sell, books, films or other informative material relating to foreign ancient monuments or foreign historic buildings",

and to

"produce or sell souvenirs relating to such monuments or buildings".

The amendment would require English Heritage to consult. That would impose a huge burden upon it, and an unnecessary one. I tend to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). English Heritage has a reputation for not producing tacky materials and souvenirs. First, I think that it has a sense of taste, but I recognise that that is subjective. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, English Heritage always takes great care to understand and respect cultural sensitivities. I am sure that it would always act with propriety if it were to produce an item relating to a foreign ancient monument or building.

Mr. Knight: Is there not another consideration? If the amendment were accepted, the process would prove so cumbersome for the commission that it would wipe out any profit that it made from selling items.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I would not claim to be an expert in commercial processes, but I tend to agree with my right hon. Friend.

I rest my case, subject to what the Minister says, on the amendment being unnecessary. English Heritage justifies its reputation, given the way it has gone about things. It would consult where it was obviously necessary to do so.

It would be unnecessarily cumbersome, to use the word of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire, and bureaucratic to require it to consult in every instance. I invite the hon. Member for Hendon to withdraw the amendment.

Miss McIntosh: I do not wish to disagree with anything that my right hon. and hon. Friends have said.

I hope that the Minister will assure the House that the Government will not support the amendments. Amendment No. 22 would pose quite an obstacle and raise an unnecessary hurdle. Foreign Governments have to be approached for picture copyright, for example, but there are other circumstances where it would not be appropriate for them to be approached.

In congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) on taking the Bill through its consideration, we should be mindful that it emanated from another place. It has been on the table, so to speak, since 21 July 2001. The amendment comes late in the day, and we should be mindful of the reassurance of my noble Friend Baroness Anelay of St. Johns, to which the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) referred. It would be entirely inappropriate to use any opportunity today to revisit the issue of who owns the Parthenon sculptures, which are rightfully the property of the British museum.

Dr. Howells: As the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) made clear, English Heritage always takes great care to understand and respect the cultural sensitivities that apply to any ancient monument, historic building or artefact. I have every confidence in asserting that it will continue to do so. We shall have something to say if it does not. It will not be in competition with the heritage authorities in any other country. I am confident that English Heritage would automatically extend the care that it already shows to any foreign monument or historic building on which it was working. However, it would be an unacceptable burden to expect English Heritage to consult, for example, with the Egyptian Government before publishing a book in England about the pyramids.

The amendment is unnecessary and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) will show some faith in English Heritage as a fine organisation that displays a great sense of taste. I am sure that it will continue to do so, not only within the bounds of England and 12-mile territorial waters, but wherever in the world it operates.

Mr. Dismore: I have two short points to make. First, in response to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), this is the first opportunity that I have had to table amendments, as I did not have the good fortune to serve on the Standing Committee, so I cannot be criticised for that.

Secondly, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) asked why the amendment was necessary. I answer by referring once more, with trepidation, to the Parthenon. I recently visited the Parthenon and met the director of the site, Professor Pantermalis, with whom I had a long discussion. He gave me a copy of a catalogue from an exhibition at the Berlin museum which the Greeks are mounting jointly with the German museum authorities. The Greeks have lent a large number of sculptures to the German museum. It is a wonderful catalogue, showing hundreds of items that we will never see in this country because of the dispute between our Government and the Greek Government over the Parthenon sculptures.

Through the amendment, I am trying to avoid offending other Governments so that, wittingly or unwittingly, we do not end up in dispute with them. The cultural world is international, with exhibitions travelling from country to country. Because of that, we run the risk of causing offence. The net result would be that we cut off our nose to spite our face. That is my answer to the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire: the amendment was intended to ensure that we work in co-operation with other countries, rather than in competition with them.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Although I served on the Standing Committee, I had not intended to speak in the debate, as I hoped that the Bill would go through without hindrance. When the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) was fortunate enough to see the Parthenon, was he subjected to the admission charges? I gather that they have just been raised by 50 per cent., making a visit to the Parthenon a rather more expensive exercise than going to see the Elgin marbles in the British museum for free.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. On more than one occasion I have stressed to the Greek Government and all those involved with the Parthenon that when the Parthenon sculptures return to Athens, people must have access to them free, so that they can see them on the same basis as they can see them in their temporary home in the British museum.

I shall not prolong the proceedings. I see that the House is not with me on the amendment. However, I have made the point about the need to work with foreign Governments, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

1.28 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is with pride that I introduce the Third Reading of the Bill, which I know commands support from all parts of the House, as it did in the other place. Of course, it derived from the other place, where it was introduced by the noble Baroness Anelay of St. Johns. If the House is minded to give the Bill a Third Reading, the credit goes principally to her and all the endeavours that she put into this important measure.

I claim that the Bill has all-party support, simply because it derives from a 1996 White Paper entitled "Protecting our Heritage", which was introduced by a previous Conservative Government. Many of the provisions in the Bill were to be found in the Culture and Recreation Bill which was introduced in the last Session of the last Parliament but did not proceed because the general election was called.

The Bill transfers responsibility for underwater archaeology from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to English Heritage. As hon. Members will know, English Heritage presently has responsibility only for archaeology on land sites.

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

As far as I am aware, all the relevant organisations and institutions support that principal provision of the Bill: not only English Heritage, but the Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites, the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee and even the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Two other provisions in the Bill give English Heritage the right to produce souvenirs, about which we have just spoken, not only in England but in relation to monuments or buildings in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and rightly so.

The Bill also deals with an anomaly whereby English Heritage may offer its services and expertise in England, but not outwith the United Kingdom. There is certainly a demand for English Heritage's expertise, goods and services outside the UK and the Bill gives English Heritage the powers to meet that demand. English Heritage will be able to charge for such services and so generate additional income.

It is worth pointing out that the Bill gives English Heritage the power to delegate its functions to another person if the finance is available to do the work that is within its remit but it simply does not have available the personnel or the time. That is a purely practical solution to a problem that can arise.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to thank all those hon. Members who have been involved with the Bill, not only those in the House of Lords, but those who served on the Committee, which was fruitful. I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) and the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) for introducing the amendments that have been withdrawn but which brought important matters to the attention of the House.

I also thank the Minister who showed me great courtesy and consideration as I attempted to pilot the measure through the House. His advice has been totally co-operative and I should like that to be put on the record, as also the great help that I was given on Second Reading by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and, more recently, not only on Report but in Committee, by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). I am most grateful to them and I commend the Bill to the House.

1.33 pm

Miss McIntosh: I congratulate my noble friend Baroness Anelay of St. Johns on introducing the Bill as long ago as 18 July 2001, and my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), whom I regularly describe as our national treasure, on so successfully bringing the Bill through all its stages in the House.

We welcome the Bill and the fact that it has all-party support. I welcome the transfer of responsibility for underwater archaeology from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to English Heritage. That is a particular priority of the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee, which made it a cornerstone of its 1989 document "Heritage at Sea" and, more recently, in "Still at Sea".

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) made similar recommendations in 1996 in the Green Paper "Protecting our Heritage" and the English Heritage report "Power of Place" recommended that English Heritage should assume responsibility for maritime matters.

The Bill proposes that English Heritage should assume responsibility for ancient monuments in the sea or on the sea bed within UK waters adjacent to England, and we support that. The importance of the large number of wrecks that have been identified throughout the Bill's consideration, particularly today, and prehistoric submerged landscapes are particularly valuable to us as an island nation and a naval and mercantile power.

The seas around us offer a plethora of significant sites and remains, which form an important part of our national heritage. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the lead agency for managing the physical remains of the historic environment already has responsibility for marine archaeology. By contrast, English Heritage is unable to survey underwater sites, fund work on them, give advice relating to them or assist the Secretary of State in the discharge of functions conferred on her by the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

Under the National Heritage Act 1983, English Heritage is not allowed to offer services outside the United Kingdom. I am delighted that the Bill will change that, recognising the fact that there is great demand outside the United Kingdom for the expertise, goods and services of English Heritage. That will enable English Heritage to generate extra income. It should not and will not compete with existing commercial concerns, but we recognise that overseas agencies look to English Heritage for training and advice, and would welcome its assistance. We support that.

We support the Bill, and congratulate all those associated with it, especially my noble Friend Baroness Anelay of St. Johns and my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet. I have great pleasure in commending it to the House.

1.36 pm

Mr. Dismore: I congratulate the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) on the Bill. I know that it is a difficult job to pilot a private Member's Bill through the House, having had his support for the Bill that I brought forward last week. Despite my comments and criticisms of his Bill, I think that it is worth while. I was grateful for the opportunity that he has given me to research in the highways and byways of obscure legislation, and perhaps get some ideas for future law reform of my own in the next Session.

The hon. Gentleman has done a great service to the world of archaeology and the protection of our cultural heritage by bringing the Bill to the House. I believe that today will be the final stage, apart from Royal Assent, and he is to be congratulated on that achievement.

1.37 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Like the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), I rise briefly to put on record Liberal Democrat support for this measure, and to congratulate the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman). He has piloted the Bill through the House with his usual professional skill and eloquence. Many people will welcome this legislation.

On a personal note, in anticipation of English Heritage's positive response to a grant application for All Saints church in Kingston, I welcome the extension of that organisation's powers.

Dr. Howells: I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) on the way in which he has navigated this excellent Bill through the House—I am fed up hearing references to "piloting". It was my privilege to serve with him right the way through it, including in Committee. His Bill gives valuable new powers to English Heritage. Its passage through the House shows that there is widespread support for it on both sides. I reiterate the fact that the Government fully support it.

The Bill will broaden the powers of English Heritage, allowing it to trade in overseas countries and become involved in underwater archaeology in territorial waters adjacent to England. The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) made the important point that that will further enhance English Heritage's status as a leading body in this sector. It has a well-deserved, worldwide reputation.

I should also like to repeat a number of reassurances to the House. I can confirm that the overseas trading provisions in the Bill do not give English Heritage powers to undertake these activities in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, as they have their own heritage bodies. The devolved Administrations are content with all the provisions in the Bill. My Department has been in contact with Ministers and officials in the devolved Administrations, who have said that they are content with the Bill. I know that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet will be pleased to hear that.

I can also assure the House that the Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights.

Once again, I should like to say how pleased I am to offer the Government's support and to commend the Third Reading of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.40 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

My Bill is straightforward and simple, but it deals with a problem that seriously affects a number of people. It amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to ensure that the owners of working dogs are not refused the use of minicabs by drivers when they want to travel with their dogs.

I do not think that there is disagreement in the House about the need to deal with discrimination against people who suffer from disabilities. I served on the Standing Committee for the Disability Discrimination Act, which came into force under the last Conservative Government and was piloted through the House by the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the former leader of the Conservative party.

We all agree about the need for such legislation. Members from four parties are among the sponsors of the Bill. An early-day motion that I tabled on the same subject attracted almost 90 signatures from hon. Members on both sides of the House. There is no great controversy about the need for the measure.

Last year, section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act came into force; it implemented a requirement on licensed taxi drivers to carry guide dogs. There was no great problem in bringing that into force; it introduced a welcome change. However, it left a gap: many guide dog owners continue to suffer discrimination. The problem is that section 37 of the Act does not cover private hire vehicles—minicabs.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I very much welcome my hon. Friend's measure. In my outer-London constituency—my hon. Friend's constituency is similar—the number of black cabs is somewhat disproportionate to the number of private hire vehicles. People are much more reliant on private hire vehicles. Correspondence from my constituents shows that there is a problem in my constituency and for that reason I offer my hon. Friend my best wishes for his Bill.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank my hon. Friend. He is right: those of us who represent outer-London constituencies know that although black cabs exist, they are relatively few and far between. Throughout much of the country, licensed private hire vehicles are the main form of such transport.

The problem was first drawn to my attention by my constituent, Mr. Alan Powell, the chair of the Waltham Forest talking newspaper association. He got in touch with me after he had experienced problems in getting cabs. I then came across several other cases. The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has drawn the attention of several hon. Members to one example. I shall read briefly from the account of what happened to that individual. She said:

"I needed to collect my three children from school and started phoning for a car at 3 pm. None of the cabs called would take me because of my guide dog. In the end I called nine companies and

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they all said they didn't have a driver who would take a guide dog. In the end I had to call the school and ask them to look after the children. Eventually I got a bus and got to school one hour late."

I recently spoke to someone who had been shopping at Tesco. They filled up their trolley and then rang a car firm that they had used several times, but the firm said that it had no drivers who could take them so they had great difficulty getting home. In another recent example, a person travelled from the area in which he lived—where the local authority required minicabs to carry guide dogs—to an area that he did not know. When he arrived at the station, the car that he had booked refused to take his dog. He was stuck at the station in a strange place where he knew nobody, and was unable to get to his destination.

Guide dog owners rely more than most of us on that form of transport. In a survey conducted last year, one in seven people who owned guide dogs said that private hire vehicles—minicabs—were their most commonly used form of transport. One in five said that they used a taxi or private hire vehicle at least once a week. Two thirds said that that type of transport was easier for them to use than other forms of transport, and it is fairly easy to understand why. It is door-to-door transport, it makes it possible to take a companion if necessary, and of course, those who have an assistance dog rely on it and need to have it with them.

In the current system, the licensing of private hire vehicles is the responsibility of local authorities—in England and Wales, at least. In Northern Ireland the Department of the Environment is responsible. In London, of course, no one is currently responsible. Private hire vehicles in London are not licensed at all, but they will be, shortly, through the Public Carriage Office, and Transport for London, which has been undertaking a consultation and is inclined to include carriage of guide dogs in the licensing conditions.

The fact that it is a local authority responsibility creates problems, because what I hope most people would agree should be a universal condition, is not universal but depends on the local authority. To be fair, a great many local authorities have decided to include in their licensing conditions a requirement to carry a guide dog, but some will not, and some are not interested or say that there is no problem in their area because no one has complained. I do not think that that is a terribly accurate reflection of the existence or absence of a problem.

More than 250 of 374 local authorities have now introduced a requirement for a private hire vehicle to carry a guide dog. Things are moving; two-thirds of local authorities have taken that step. The problem is the remaining one third. The difficulty is that there is a patchwork. When the local authority in whose area a person lives has the licensing requirement but a neighbouring authority does not, that person may travel a short distance and find themselves unable to return by private hire vehicle. Moreover, how is anyone supposed to know when they are travelling whether the local authority in whose area they happen to be has introduced the licensing requirement? Some of the incidents that I mentioned earlier arose from precisely that problem. They had travelled to an area with which they were not familiar and then found that they had a problem and were facing very serious difficulties. That problem would be dealt with quite simply by making the requirement mandatory and national.

All sorts of objections are raised. Some people say that dogs create problems in cars. I suspect that some of those people probably never have much contact with a guide dog to see how they behave. Some local authorities say that they have a lot of Muslim cab drivers in their area, who would not be prepared to travel with dogs. Suggestions are made that Muslims do not like dogs, are afraid of them or have problems with cleanliness. Many of those problems are more perceived than real.

The matter is relevant to my local authority, which has the biggest Pakistani community in London and where a lot of cab drivers are Muslim. However, after the incidents that I mentioned, which caused the local press to take up the issue, representatives from the mosque made it very clear that religion was not the barrier, and should not be used as a reason for refusing to introduce the licensing condition. During last year's discussions in Blackburn about bringing in the licensing condition, Mohammed Narwan, chairman of the Blackburn and Darwen's Private Hire Drivers Association—he is a Muslim—said:

"People should be able to travel in private hire vehicles with their . . . dogs free of charge."

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, which has discussed the issue with major UK Muslim organisations, is satisfied that no real problem exists.

The issue needs to be approached with some sensitivity. When licensing conditions are introduced, discussions should take place with drivers, so that they are aware of the factors involved. In fact, the problem affects a fairly small number of people. There are only about 5,000 guide dog owners in the country, so the impact on cab drivers would be relatively small, but for those owners this is a major issue that affects their daily lives. To ensure that the Bill works and that we get it right, it is clear that we need to look at certain parts of it in some detail. The system needs to work properly, and we may need to consider not only drivers but operators. When someone telephones, they speak not to the driver but to the operator, so both driver and operator need to be aware that they must follow licensing regulations.

The Bill enjoys a lot of support from the major associations involved—the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Hearing Dogs for Deaf People—and I hope that it will find further support.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman mentions hearing dogs and he is absolutely right to do so. That issue needs to be highlighted, because when we think of guide dogs, we inevitably think of visual impairment. We need also to bring hearing impairment into the network that he describes.

Mr. Gerrard: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but if he looks at the definition of assistance dogs in section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which applies to taxis, he will find that it covers not only guide dogs for the blind but hearing dogs and other working dogs.

This simple measure will make a lot of difference to people who rely on dogs for their daily lives, and I hope that the House will support it.

1.52 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): This private Member's Bill, which would oblige drivers of private hire vehicles to carry the guide dogs of disabled people without imposing an extra charge, closes a loophole in previous legislation. The omission of private hire vehicles from the 2001 legislation, which obliged taxis but not minicabs to accept guide dogs, created an anomaly and a confusing and patchy service for visually impaired people—a point made strongly at the time by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), whose social conscience is legendary.

That confusion can only be heightened by the fact that 312 of the 374 local licensing authorities outside London and Northern Ireland that are empowered to impose such an obligation have not done so. It therefore seems clear that national legislation is needed to contend with that inconsistency, so that we can bring the majority up to the standard of the minority.

For those in the United Kingdom who are blind or visually impaired, the assistance of a guide dog can make a remarkable difference to their independence and mobility—a point made strongly by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. I am conscious of the shortage of time, so I shall not recount a heart-rending case, described in the *Western Mail*, of a blind man in Cardiff who spent half an evening—first on the street, and then on the telephone—trying to find a taxi home. Significantly, it was an Islamic taxi driver who finally came to collect him.

The Opposition therefore support in principle this private Member's measure to improve independence and mobility for blind and visually impaired people, but several practical hurdles may have to be overcome in Committee. The obligation on drivers would be difficult to police effectively, as it would rely on the willingness of local police to bring criminal charges against minicab drivers who flout their obligations. Moreover, how strictly will the term "private hire vehicle" be defined in the new legislation? How much will the situation in London be affected by Transport for London's recent consultation on minicab regulation?

As I have said, despite those obstacles to effective implementation, the Conservative party strongly supports this measure to increase the independence and quality of life of disabled people, including those who are deaf as well as those who are blind or visually impaired, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said. The Opposition support the Bill and seek to give it a Second Reading.

1.56 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): When the current anomaly was first mentioned to me by one of my constituents—Mr. Robin Hutchinson, who happens to be the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association's head of communications—I was absolutely staggered that it existed. I was also staggered that cab companies and cab drivers were discriminating in this way; it is shocking and surprising that people should take such action.

The Bill is particularly welcome because it will remove a form of discrimination that many hon. Members perhaps never thought existed. That is a lesson to us all about how such discrimination can come about and how damaging it can be to people's ability to lead independent lives. I know that about the problem not only because of the examples that have been cited already, but because of the problems that my constituents have brought to my attention.

When we consider regulation, we often ask, "Okay, there may be a problem, but is this the right way to go about it?" The Bill is clearly the right way. Its provisions can be implemented and have been shown to work in local authorities throughout the country, and they will produce no practical problems for the industry. I hope that both sides of the House will support it and that it will make rapid progress.

1.57 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who spoke from the Front Bench, was kind enough to make some complimentary remarks about me, which in itself is rare in the Chamber, so I treasure every one.

There is a tiny track record on such issues. I participated and took an interest in the legislation on minicabs, which I forced into Committee, where it was amended some 50 times because it was so bad. I tabled an amendment—it failed—in an attempt to give disabled people rights of access to minicabs. The Government resisted that amendment at the time, so, to my disappointment, it did not find its way into the legislation.

Mr. Hayes: I should like my right hon. Friend to clarify what he has said—I cannot believe that I heard him correctly. Is he suggesting that the Government resisted a similar measure to that now proposed, with all-party support, to give disabled people such access and the freedom that results from it?

Mr. Forth: Well, the proposal was different at the time. I proposed that minicabs should provide access for disabled people. This measure is different, although it is related. I am only too happy to blame the Government when blame is deserved, but we are dealing with a slightly different thing on this occasion.

The Bill strikes me as being essential, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on introducing it. It is a model private Member's Bill—it is brief, succinct, focused and, I hope, uncontroversial. Therefore, I hope that it is something to which the House can give its support. I welcome the opportunity to discuss it briefly, and I am happy to take part in the debate.

All I want to do is flag up a point that has already been made a couple of times: the Bill will need to be considered in some detail in Committee. Although we all want a measure of this kind, and therefore give it our broad support, I hope that the Standing Committee will take a little time to consider it in detail and satisfy itself that the duties that are being imposed are reasonable and achievable. For example, the reference to the licensing authority giving exemptions, if appropriate, on medical grounds, gives me slight pause for thought. If the medical grounds are relevant for, I presume, the driver of the vehicle, may they not also, in some circumstances, be relevant to those who might use the vehicle subsequently or to other persons in the vehicle? I mention that as one possibility that we would have to consider. I do not want to dwell on it, and I am happy to give my broad support

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to the Bill at this stage. I hope, however, as has been indicated, that it will be given proper and detailed consideration in Standing Committee.

2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): First, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) for introducing this Bill, which seeks to end a profound injustice experienced by many disabled people who want to use minicabs. I was aware, of course of his commitment to disability rights, and he was a member of the Committee that considered the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. He also has the rare distinction of already having got a private Member's Bill on to the statute book; this will be his second.

The Government are committed to establishing comprehensive and enforceable rights for disabled people. Access to transport services is a key element in delivering on that commitment, and there is no doubt that, for many disabled people, private hire vehicles—or minicabs as they are more usually known—are a vital part of the transport mix. It is therefore deplorable that disabled people should be denied access to those services because of a reluctance on the part of drivers to accept guide dogs or other dogs trained to assist them—hearing dogs and other types of dog—particularly when those dogs are essential to their independent mobility.

Hon. Members have already set out much of the legislative background to this Bill and to the problems that we have encountered. As there are still many matters that hon. Members want to discuss, I shall not go back over those issues, and I shall come directly to the Bill.

The Government support the Bill because we fully agree with its basic aim: people with guide dogs and other assistance dogs should not be barred from using minicabs because of their animals. This is an issue on which my Department receives a significant number of representations both from groups and individuals.

It may be of interest to the House if I read out a few extracts from some of the correspondence, which gives an idea of the kind of discrimination that disabled people experience, and, also, of how they feel about it. One person wrote:

"Four times now I have been refused getting into private hire cars with my guide dog Brandy. It makes me so mad and angry being treated like a freak because of my use of a guide dog. My dog has given me a lot of independence and freedom to go out and about, without the help of family and friends to rely on."

People are not just refused access to minicabs; in some instances, they have been charged for the use of a minicab for their dog as well as for themselves. We received a letter from a group that represents disabled people in Leicestershire:

"Recently we have received complaints of the growing charges made to carry guide and other service dogs. Some want to charge ten pence while this week we had a complaint that a firm charged a guide dog owner £2 to carry her dog, to see her husband in hospital who had just had a heart attack. This is more than they charge to carry extra people and luggage, this problem is growing now and they know they are not covered by the DDA."

Another blind person who was asked for £2 to carry a guide dog realistically pointed out:

"Other people are not charged a penalty for carrying shopping or luggage, nor are mums with buggies, so why discriminate against a blind person with a guide dog?"

The Government support the Bill. As everyone on both sides of the House has said, its principles are absolutely right. However, there are difficulties with it as it stands. I shall outline them so that hon. Members understand what they are, but I do not think that they will present an insurmountable obstacle.

The Bill is based on the existing provisions in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and it assumes that the licensing regimes for the two transport services are one and the same. That is not the case. The licensing regimes for taxis and private hire vehicles are substantially different.

In the case of taxis, the driver himself accepts a hiring. Section 37 of the 1995 Act recognises the fact that a licensed taxi driver plying for hire is compelled to accept a hiring normally within the area of the licensing authority. Therefore, if a blind person accompanied by a dog wanted to go beyond the local licensing area, the driver could refuse. The legislation simply means that the presence of a guide dog is not reasonable grounds for refusing a compellable hiring.

The problem with using the same approach for minicabs is that the method of hiring in the private hire vehicle legislation is completely different. Minicab operators, not the drivers, decide whether to accept any given hire on a commercial basis. For example, they might decide to refuse all airport jobs on a particular day, because they have made the commercial decision to deploy all available minicabs on short journeys on that day. An operator with a fleet of up-market limousines might decide not to do high street shopping jobs. The operator would not offend against private hire vehicle legislation in making such a decision.

Unfortunately, the wording of the new proposed section 37A(1) under the Bill suggests that the driver's duty to carry dogs applies only once the vehicle has been hired. As an operator is under no obligation to accept a hiring, it might never come to the attention of a driver, in which case the Bill will not achieve its aim.

The Bill therefore requires amendment if it is to achieve its aim. It will have to consider the role of the operator as well as that of the driver. We will be happy to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow to ensure that such issues are covered in the Bill. With [illegible] provisos—which I believe my hon. Friend is happy to accept—the Government are happy to support the Bill. We look forward to seeing it on the statute book and to it giving fuller rights to disabled people.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.7 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I believe that almost any Member of the House would wish to introduce or support such a Bill. In the 22 years that I have had the honour to represent Birkenhead, the nature of my postbag and of the people who come to my surgery has changed out of all recognition. Twenty-two years ago, the overwhelming majority of people came to see me with complaints about social security, the housing department, unfairness in the allocation of homes, industrial disputes or about similar issues. Now, by far and away my constituents' outstanding grievance is about the behaviour of a very small minority of people in the town who make their lives a misery.

I do not claim that my Bill would be a panacea or that merely passing this measure would deal with all the problems of antisocial behaviour in constituencies around the country. Nor do I pretend that the Bill need not be modified in Committee. Indeed, I seek the House's permission to move the Bill to that stage. However, giving the Bill a Second Reading would send a clear message to our constituents that, slowly and surely, the balance of power in our society is moving away from protecting those who cause the most disorder, discomfort and unpleasantness and towards using the law to support those who are the backbone of our country—the decent citizens.

The Bill has two major clauses. Housing benefit would be denied to a household if a court has found its members guilty of antisocial behaviour twice in the past three years. Similarly, it addresses the issue as it relates to landlords. I am pleased to say that most landlords are decent people. There is, however, a minority who buy up houses merely to rake in housing benefit. They are not concerned about who their tenants are or how they behave.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My right hon. Friend does the House and my constituents a service by introducing the Bill. However, I should like one thing clarified. The Bill refers to antisocial behaviour. Is that antisocial behaviour in general terms within the definition as set out in clause 1(2), or is it linked specifically to an antisocial behaviour order made under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998?

Mr. Field: I would not dream of linking it to the latter. We tried to get antisocial behaviour orders granted in Birkenhead from the very minute that that power came into effect and we are still waiting for the first one to be implemented. The definition is set out in clause 1(2). I hope that with those brief comments we have a short and productive debate on the Bill.

2.11 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It will have to be a short debate; let us hope that it will also be productive. The main point of having a debate in the House is to give hon. Members the opportunity to raise different views. We may just about have time to do that and I shall keep my remarks as brief as I reasonably can for that reason.

It is interesting that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who has many years of experience in the House, highlighted antisocial behaviour as one of the things that now dominates his postbag. Without wishing to be insulting, that might be expected given some of the problems in his constituency. However, it might surprise the House to know that that problem occurs all too often in the leafy suburbs of Bromley and Chislehurst. My postbag and telephone conversations with constituents reflect the same concerns. So on that sample of two hon. Members, we can probably assume that the problem is nationwide. For that reason, the right hon. Gentleman should be congratulated on introducing the Bill. Given his experience in, expertise of and commitment to such matters, we can reasonably defer to his judgment on the subject.

In general, I welcome the Bill. Although it would take only a small step in the right direction, as the right hon. Gentleman conceded, it would at least provide another weapon in the armoury that we need to deal with such difficulties now. Funnily enough, my reservations are that it does not go far enough or is not tough enough. I wonder whether a three-year period is the right time span. I hope that the House gives the Bill its Second Reading so that we can discuss that in Committee. We all have examples of grotesque behaviour that has taken place over a relatively short time. It may not be right to expect someone to put up with antisocial behaviour for three years.

To hang the measure on the peg of convictions made in a magistrates court may create difficulties. As the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) implied, the antisocial behaviour orders have not been as successful as we had all hoped. Perhaps we should consider alternatives to the requirement that convictions trigger the mechanism. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman can think of times when behaviour has caused extreme distress but has not been subject to a conviction in a magistrates court or taken place over a three years.

I acknowledge that the matter is delicate. Problems between neighbours are notoriously difficult to address. I am sure all hon. Members have experienced the problems that arise from such circumstances, but there must be a way to deal with them. When it is patently obvious that a tiny minority in a community is causing a disproportionate amount of distress to decent citizens, it is frustrating that we, as Members of Parliament, all too rarely offer them relief or succour.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Given that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) implied that he may be prepared to consider widening the Bill should it progress further, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is too restrictive because it relates only to court orders before magistrates courts, yet many unruly and bad tenants are taken to the county court? When defining what should trigger the mechanism in the Bill, we should also consider court orders made by the civil courts.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that useful point. The promoter of the Bill is nodding, so I suspect that he would be prepared positively to consider the matter in Committee. The point of my few

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remarks is to try to strengthen the Bill and to make it more effective. That was also the thrust of my right hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Dismore: On the same theme, I hope that the promoter of the Bill will also consider conviction on indictment in the Crown court, because it would be nonsense if people with lesser offences were subject to the Bill, but those with more serious offences were not.

Mr. Forth: Indeed. We are receiving some high-quality free legal advice today, which is always appreciated. Moreover, it is balanced advice from both sides of the House.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead will have gathered that there will be widespread support for his Bill. Equally, he will accept that it covers such an important subject that it will have to be considered properly, if perhaps expeditiously, in Committee.

I wish the Bill well. Despite the brief time available, I hope that the House will give the Bill its Second Reading, and that it can then be strengthened and sharpened in Standing Committee.

2.16 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Like the right hon. Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I can attest from my constituency casework that this is a growing and serious problem, and our law-abiding constituents are looking to this place to take action.

We therefore have to decide what action we should take. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead suggests benefit sanctions, especially housing benefit sanctions, and he may have a point, but we need to debate some of the wider social issues behind the problem to ensure that we are taking the right action. As the right hon. Gentleman said, there have been problems in using the law introduced by the Government. Antisocial behaviour orders—at least in their earliest years—are not proving to be up to the job, so perhaps that legislation should be refined as well.

Some of my Liberal Democrat colleagues in local government in Islington and Kingston are considering so-called antisocial behaviour contracts, which do not require law. They are a grass-roots, locally based solution by which the council takes action, working in partnership with tenants and others to try to explain to people that their behaviour is causing problems for their neighbours. What strikes me in some of my dealings is the fact that people who are behaving in what we would consider to be atrocious ways do not appear to realise the damage that they are doing to other people or that their behaviour is wrong and immoral.

Mr. Greg Knight: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how those contracts will not need law? As I understand it, if a contract is broken one needs to go to law to get a remedy.

Mr. Davey: The contracts are between a local authority or housing association and a tenant. I am told that they are legally binding; the legal departments of local authorities in Kingston and elsewhere are using them. I have not seen all the legal advice, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that they are in use.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead has made a welcome proposal that takes its place in a wider debate. I look forward to assisting, if I may, on the Committee that will give it proper scrutiny. However, I say to him and to other potential members of the Standing Committee that, in passing the Bill, we want to ensure that tenants' freedoms are not unnecessarily and wrongly overridden.

Some of the difficulties caused by antisocial tenants in my constituency stem from their mental health or addiction problems, which may require a solution through the health service or the police and the legal system rather than the imposition of benefit sanctions. We want to make sure that the Bill is targeted at exactly the right problem, and I submit to the House that it will require full, and not necessarily expeditious, scrutiny to ensure that it tackles the offence.

2.20 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Sometimes there are pleasant surprises in politics. When I came into the House at 9 o'clock this morning, I looked at the Order Paper and was disappointed to see that the Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was listed as No. 4. I concluded that we would not reach it and would therefore be unable to debate it and express our support for this excellent measure. As luck would have it, we have reached the right hon. Gentleman's Bill, and I congratulate him on his speech proposing it to the House.

I found that I agreed with everything that the right hon. Gentleman said. It was not the first time, and I am sure that it will not be the last, that he spoke sound common sense. I am sure, from what he said, that antisocial behaviour is a growing problem in Birkenhead, but it is also a growing problem in towns such as Bridlington because many unemployed troublemakers go to seaside resorts during the summer months to enjoy the sea and the sand. I know that this measure will be warmly welcomed by many good landlords in my constituency whose lives, and those of their tenants, have been made a misery by one or two bad tenants. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say bad tenants are in a minority—it is the bad few who make life a misery for the many.

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's indication that he is prepared to be flexible, which was confirmed by the nod of his head in response to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). As well as his Bill is drafted, it could be broadened to include orders made by the civil courts, to which I referred in an intervention, and convictions on indictment. It would be bizarre if a tenant who had been convicted of murder could not be dealt with under the Bill, but a tenant who had committed a minor offence that was dealt with before the magistrates could. I am therefore pleased that the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to keep an open mind about suggestions that Opposition Members may make to improve and strengthen the Bill. With those words, I wish the Bill well in its progress.

2.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is to be

commended for introducing this Bill, which seeks to withhold the housing benefit of those whose antisocial behaviour can have a devastating effect on the local community.

In this brief debate, my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members have mentioned their constituency experience. I shall briefly wear my constituency hat and say that, sadly, what they have said rings all too true of my constituency of Croydon, North, which is not far from Bromley. As I came here this morning, I reminded myself of the experiences faced by some of my law-abiding constituents. Those include intolerably loud music, sometimes with neighbours deliberately placing speakers so as to harm the well-being of my constituents, rubbish thrown in gardens, continual shouting, threats of violence and actual violence against neighbours, cars that have been deliberately scratched, graffiti and unruly children. The children of honest citizens are often afraid to go in the gardens because things are constantly thrown over the fence. When tabloids talk about neighbours from hell, for once they speak some truth.

The Government see no reason why the activities of unscrupulous landlords and antisocial tenants should undermine the work of local authorities that are trying to stabilise and regenerate neighbourhoods in decline and to tackle crime. The Government have just published a consultation paper, "Tackling Anti-Social Tenants" in the social sector of housing. We have also proposed new discretionary powers for local authorities to license all private landlords in all or part of their area. Those powers will be available alongside licensing of houses in multiple occupation. Another consultation paper, on the selective licensing of landlords, focusing on areas of low housing demand, was issued last October.

In the few minutes remaining, I shall emphasise the issues that I believe are important. The Government remain sympathetic to the Bill's objectives, but it deals with a complex subject and, as has already been acknowledged, careful drafting is required. The Government are concerned that, as the Bill stands, considerations relating to the European convention on human rights remain to be addressed, necessitating substantial amendment in Committee.

Consideration has to be given to dependants, especially children. We should not seek deliberately to make children homeless—and therefore, in extremis, taken into care—just to punish their parents. We must ensure that all dependants are fully protected.

The Bill accords with ideas that we have been considering in relation to the licensing of landlords and houses in multiple occupations, but, although it is not right to pay housing benefit to landlords who operate illegally, nor would it be right to expect landlords to house people rent-free. How we deal with antisocial tenants depends on the responsible management of the properties in which they reside. Under our proposals, if a landlord ceases to be licensed, a local authority may seek alternative management, with any housing benefit being paid to the new managing agent instead. Fundamentally, we look to landlords to take a measure of responsibility for their tenants and to take action against those who act antisocially. Many landlords already do so, and they deserve the support of their local authority.

There is much to be considered in the wording of the Bill, which will require amendment if it is to achieve its aims. Above all, human rights issues must be addressed. We will be happy to work with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead to ensure that his Bill adequately caters for such issues.

All hon. Members are concerned to ensure that rights in society and the welfare state are matched by proper responsibilities and duties. It is important to safeguard the right to decent housing: many of our poorer constituents depend on the provision of council and social sector housing. The housing benefit system means that people have the right in practice to be able to afford their rents. We must protect and cherish those rights.

Rights demand responsibilities. The responsibility demanded in the context of the Bill is to be a good neighbour. Many of us, and most of our constituents, take for granted the good fortune of living with good neighbours, but when responsibilities are ignored, decent citizens should be able to seek the state's protection. All of us feel strongly that in the past we have not struck the right balance between people's rights and people's responsibilities.

I know from my constituents that too many of our decent citizens are plagued by neighbours from hell. They feel that in the past the state and the courts have not had the powers needed to deal with unruly neighbours. Now, we are taking measures to get the right balance between rights and duties. I hope that the Bill can be amended in Committee to contain the proper safeguards, so that it can become law. I wish it well.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

COMPANIES ACT 1989 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Not moved.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS TRANSMITTERS (RESTRICTIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

2.29 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Although I shall not have much time, I should say that I introduced the Bill because another issue has arisen—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 21 June.

Remaining Private Member's Bill

CHRISTMAS DAY TRADING BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 10 May.

Policing (Bedfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

2.30 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to hold my third Adjournment debate since being elected to the House nine and a half months ago. Both my previous Adjournment debates were on subjects of vital interest to my constituents in South-West Bedfordshire, and this debate on policing is no exception.

Earlier this year, Bedfordshire police responded magnificently to the fire at Yarl's Wood detention centre, and I pay tribute to Bedfordshire's chief constable and all the officers who came to Yarl's Wood's assistance. I also put on record my thanks to Chief Superintendent Ivor Twydell, Inspector Tony Kimble, Inspector Steve Barrett and Inspector Melvin Hartley, with whom I frequently correspond on behalf of my constituents and with whom I have had many meetings.

I have asked the Home Secretary on the Floor of the House to ensure that he does all in his power to resist attempts by various insurers to reclaim from Bedfordshire police and local authorities the costs of repairs to the detention centre. That is a source of enormous concern to my constituents, and I seek reassurance from the Minister on the subject today.

In my opinion, the costs of repair to national facilities such as Yarl's Wood should be borne by the country as a whole, not by the communities in which they happen to be situated. The extra policing requirements in the aftermath of such incidents should also be borne by the country as a whole. At present, Bedfordshire supplies 39 police officers and 13 civilian staff in the follow-up operations. Bedfordshire is a small force, and that is a considerable drain on our reserves of police officers.

In the past 15 months, Bedfordshire has also been dealing with the work associated with 12 murders and four manslaughters; I understand that they are tying up 94 police officers and 14 civilian staff. Together with Warwickshire, Bedfordshire has had the largest rise in unlawful killings in the past 15 months, which is a considerable strain on Bedfordshire police resources.

The most serious issue affecting Bedfordshire police is retention. Recruitment has improved recently, and I applaud the police authority's decision to budget for an extra 56 police officers in the year to March 2003. I understand that the constabulary needs to recruit 192 officers to reach that target, but that it believes that it will be doing well if it manages to recruit 140 to 150.

It has been brought to my attention that the current batch due to start the training course for Bedfordshire police officers should consist of 14 officers, but the course cannot go ahead at present because there are only 12 potential recruits. That is a source of concern.

In the year to 31 March 2000, five officers transferred out of Bedfordshire police; in the year ending 31 March 2001, 21 officers transferred out; in the year to the end of March this year, 45 officers wanted to go. Today there are 22 officers awaiting transfer out, and we are only three weeks into the current financial year.

Those trained officers are all experienced and have an average of 10 years' service. The result of their transferring out is that roughly 20 per cent. of Bedfordshire police officers are probationers. There are 200 probationer officers in Bedfordshire constabulary, 63 in Bedford, 75 in Luton and 62 in Dunstable D division, which includes Leighton Buzzard. Probationers are available for duty for 77 working days in a year or only 56 working days if they are on a driving course, which means that they can provide only a third of the manpower of a police officer who has completed his training. The Bedfordshire force is short of a further 136 officers because of the 200 probationary officers in its profile.

Many officers want to transfer out of the Bedfordshire constabulary principally because of the extremely generous allowances offered by the Metropolitan police and the City of London police. For example, a probationer with 18 weeks' service would be £7,220 better off in the Met or City of London police; a police constable with 10 years' experience would be over £5,000 better off; and an inspector with two years' experience would be £6,300 better off in the Metropolitan police. The difference in income is the result of a combination of London weighting, London allowance, central allowance housing and transitional rent allowances. In addition, there is free travel within 70 miles of Charing Cross and, for Bedfordshire officers, a guarantee, more or less, of a posting to a north London station. The problem is not unique to Bedfordshire; the chief constables of the Essex, Hertfordshire, Thames valley, Surrey and Kent forces face the same difficulty.

Much as I sympathise with the recruitment demands of the Metropolitan police, I urge the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), to bring about the end of the continual poaching of Bedfordshire officers by other forces. The Met can offer unfair additional allowances to police constables from neighbouring forces, including housing allowances for officers living in Bedfordshire. It is anomalous for Bedfordshire officers living in the county to be offered the London housing allowance plus free travel. I do not seek retrospective changes, but I urge the Minister to consider the issue very seriously indeed. The allowances for Metropolitan police officers and those for neighbouring forces must be evened out.

I turn to the issue of travellers which, I know, is of concern to many hon. Members. Bedfordshire, like many counties, suffers from the behaviour of elements of the traveller community. Of course, some travellers are thoroughly law abiding and respect the communities through which they pass. However, south Bedfordshire is on established traveller routes, which makes the problem all the more urgent for my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) has introduced a ten-minute Bill, the Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction) Bill, which I very much hope the Government will support. It addresses the issue of evicting travellers on highways, which was omitted from earlier legislation, and would assist with evictions from a traveller encampment at Stanbridgeford in my constituency.

There is area in which the law is deficient, to which I ask the Minister to pay attention. In my constituency, land currently classed as agricultural has been bought by travellers and has been turned into a virtually permanent encampment, with hard standings, tarmac roads, kerbed

pavements and sometimes street lighting, which is of huge concern to the surrounding settled communities, especially the village of Billington. I understand that Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are starting to look at that important and urgent problem. I hope that the Minister will understand my raising this issue, although it relates to the DTLR, in this debate. I have done so in the interests of joined-up government and in doing something about the problem to which I have referred.

All Governments have spent more on police forces over the years. Much of that expenditure has gone into technology, equipment and call centres, for example. However, the public want officers on the beat, and especially the same officers on the same beats so that they can get to know the communities that they serve. They can then get to know the law-abiding people in their communities and come to know extremely well those people who are causing trouble. It is a subject on which my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary has spoken. I hope that we can see progress towards the situation that I have described.

The manning of police stations is extremely important for members of the public. It is important also that they are fully functioning. Houghton Regis police station, which is in my constituency, is now open for only limited hours. Dunstable police station, the headquarters of D division, has recently decided to close its doors between 11 pm and 7 am. Leighton Buzzard police station is also a shadow of its former self.

I shall read from the lead letter that appeared on 22 January in the *Leighton Buzzard Observer*. It states:

"Back in 1988"—

the police station—

"had a chief inspector in charge, two inspectors—one for patrol and one for CID, an admin office with two clerks and a supervisor . . . an enquiry office staff of five and an office manager, five local beat officers with their own sergeant, (two of them for the town centre alone), four shifts with seven police constables and a sergeant each, four detective constables with a detective sergeant, two traffic wardens, one transport/handyman and two cleaners. And the phone was answered within seconds. The 'current' police office has one inspector, two enquiry office staff, (one part-time), two qualified sergeants, two unqualified acting constables, four shifts of just five officers each, (half trainees), a cleaner and a civilian transport officer. Having to go via the call handling centre, now a phone call can take more than 25 minutes to be answered."

Our constituents are entitled to ask why things have gone backwards to such a degree since 1988, despite more money being spent by all Governments since that time.

It is a sad reflection that that is the case. Are we best serving the communities that we are charged to protect when police stations offer so much less of a service to the public than they did a few years ago?

I shall refer briefly to the work of the Family Matters Institute, which is situated in Bedfordshire, at Mogerhanger. The institute has worked tirelessly over the years to strengthen family life and to run parenting courses. Indeed, it has worked in association with Bedfordshire county council and with significant elements of the Islamic community. It is of great concern to me that the Home Office has recently refused to pay grants for the institute's work, and has called into question the excellent work that it has done over the years. I place on record my concerns as a Bedfordshire Member. I ask whether the Minister could take back my concern to her Department, and ask that the matter be reconsidered.

2.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): As I am the Minister with responsibility for active communities, I undertake to check what is going on with the organisation that was mentioned by the hon. Member for South–West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and write to him.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate on policing in Bedfordshire. It is a useful opportunity to air current concerns about the police in Bedfordshire, including the pressing issue of the outstanding insurance claim made against the police authority following the disturbance at Yarl's Wood. I echo the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the men and women of Bedfordshire police service and to the fire authority. I commend their courage and dedication during the night of the disturbance. They all did a magnificent job under very difficult circumstances.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear the Government's position on the insurance claim on 25 February in his statement about the fire at Yarl's Wood and the insurer's claim against Bedfordshire police. I know that the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire was present in the Chamber at the time and asked a question. We will take whatever advice is necessary and work with the police, who are operationally independent, to protect their interests and those of the people whom they serve in Bedfordshire.

The disturbance is the subject of separate investigations by Bedfordshire police, Bedfordshire fire and rescue service and Group 4 Amey Immigration Ltd., as well as the subject of an overarching inquiry conducted by Stephen Moore. I would not wish to pre-empt those findings. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the Home Office is not directly involved in the claim made by the insurers of Group 4 Amey Immigration Ltd., as it is a matter for the Bedfordshire police authority. However, we are being kept informed of developments. For legal reasons, I cannot comment further, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are vigorously pursuing the contractor's obligations to us under the contract to run Yarl's Wood, and I hope that he will be reassured by that.

I turn to more general issues, including police officer numbers and particularly recruitment and retention. Police numbers are an important part of a comprehensive package of measures to ensure a modern and efficient police service that can fight crime in the most effective way. The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government are well on course to achieve their target of 130,000 police officers in post—the highest number ever. It is equally important, though, that police officer time is used efficiently. There are measures in the Police Reform Bill to assist in the most effective use of officers' time and professional expertise.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is for police authority and the chief constable to determine the precise make-up of the force and its distribution across the force area. That is part of my answer to the hon. Gentleman's comments on Leighton Buzzard police station. Those are operational matters for the chief constable, not for Ministers. Those on the Conservative Front Bench in the Lords removed clause 5 from the Police Reform Bill, which would have helped a Home Secretary deal with failing forces. I am

[Angela Eagle]

sure that the hon. Gentleman will have made all the comments that he has just put on record on the Floor of the House to the chief constable of Bedfordshire police, particularly about staffing in Leighton Buzzard.

Bedfordshire had 1,077 police officers on 31 January. That is 41 more than in March 2001. I understand that the force expects to increase further to 1,117 in 2002–03. Civilian staff numbers have increased by 28, which is a 6 per cent. increase, since March 1997 to 512 on 30 September 2001. I understand that the force has introduced a number of measures to make better use of officers' time, not only to increase police visibility on the streets, which is an important reassurance to the public, but to ensure that officers spend their time more effectively.

I commend the force on those initiatives, which include a prisoner handling unit to help save officers' time. The force is considering the feasibility of extending the scheme throughout the force area. It employs civilians for case preparation, prisoner handling and custody work. For rural policing, there are two mobile police stations to provide visibility and reassurance to those communities.

The force has introduced the Operation Scorpion website, which gives the public access to crime reduction initiatives, and Ringmaster, which is a computerised system to pass on intelligence among local communities. That is particularly useful in rural areas, but it is also effective in areas with a high concentration of retail premises, so that people can be informed about the presence of known troublemakers, their whereabouts and their activities.

In addition to its specials, the force has 60 volunteers who are members of the public who give up their time to assist the force with office duties and open days so that officers can remain on the beat. That is the sort of initiative that I like to see.

The crime fighting fund, which the Government established to boost police numbers, has been central to the recent growth in police strength nationally. The CFF is enabling forces to recruit 9,000 officers over and above their previous plans in the three years to March 2003. In 2000–01, forces took on some 2,800 officers through the fund and a further 3,200 were recruited by the end of 2001–02. We expect a further 3,000 to be recruited this year, and that will make up the target of a 130,000 nationally that I mentioned earlier.

In 2000–01, the first year of the scheme, the Bedfordshire force appointed 80 recruits, including its total allocation of 28 funded by the CFF. The latest information provided by the force shows that it took on 132 new recruits in 2001-02, including all of its allocation from the CFF. Subject to the force meeting the CFF criteria, it will be able to take on a further 26 recruits in 2002–03.

Partnership and crime reduction programmes in Bedfordshire have an extra £3 million of funding. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware of some of the projects in his constituency, including £197,000 for CCTV in Leighton Buzzard; £46,000 for partnership development in 2001–02; £110,000 for the communities against drugs initiative in 2001-02; and £42,000 for the safer communities initiative scheduled for 2002-03. That is a significant investment of extra resources, which will help the police to reduce crime and improve the quality of life for his constituents.

The hon. Gentleman made a good point about officers leaving the force on transfer. Transfers of officers from Bedfordshire to other forces have increased sharply from 21 in 2000-01 to 45 in 2001-02. None the less, recruitment continues to outstrip the number of officers leaving the force. Recruitment has increased from 37 officers in 1999-2000 to 82 in 2000-01 and to 132 in the current financial year.

It is healthy for there to be an interchange of experience between police forces, but I recognise that a net outflow of experienced officers can cause great difficulty. As part of the research presently being undertaken on voluntary resignations, a sample of officers who have transferred between forces will also be interviewed. The information that that provides on the reasons for transfer will help to identify measures that forces can take to reduce the number of transfers.

I understand that in Bedfordshire exit interviews conducted by the force show that some officers left to join London forces for financial reasons, but others went to other forces for affordable housing and quality of life.

Higher than average early retirements may be expected in a service such as the police for understandable reasons, but medical retirements in Bedfordshire have been significantly higher than average in recent years—a huge 58.1 per cent. in 2000–01 compared with the England and Wales average of 31.4 per cent. The Government target is for medical retirements to represent no more than 33 per cent. That is an issue on which the Bedfordshire police will have to focus in order to discover what is happening.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, following a recommendation by the police negotiating board, the previous Home Secretary approved a new allowance for officers in eight forces surrounding London who were appointed on or after 1 September 1994 and are not in receipt of housing allowance. That was awarded in recognition of the recruitment and retention problems associated with the higher cost of living in the south-east. For qualifying officers in Bedfordshire, the allowance is £1,000 a year from 1 April 2001.

Some may contend that the £1,000 allowance for qualifying officers in Bedfordshire is inadequate. The force would have had the opportunity to make that case to the police negotiating board through its representation in the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities. It would be for the police negotiating board in the first instance to consider any case for revisiting the amount awarded to qualifying officers in Bedfordshire. The Home Office is paying 75 per cent. of the cost of the south-east allowance and in 2001–02 we paid the force £200,000.

Through the starter home initiative, which also aims to assist in this area, 21 Bedfordshire police staff are expected to benefit from a £10,000 equity loan to help them buy their first home. I hope that that will give the hon. Gentleman some assurance, but I recognise that complex issues are involved.

The hon. Gentleman raised issues with respect to the travelling community.

Andrew Selous: The Minister is responding most helpfully to the points that I have made. Before she moves

on from the issue of transfers, may I draw her back to the figures that I mentioned. There is a £7,200 difference for a probationer at 18 weeks. That is a huge difference for a young man or young woman starting out in the police force—from £18,000 to £25,000. The difference is £5,000 for a police constable at 10 years and £6,300 for an inspector at two years. Those figures are at the heart of the problem, especially given free travel and a guarantee of a north London station. I stress that further work needs to be done on those points.

Angela Eagle: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, and when I said that these were complex and difficult issues, I hope that he sensed that I was acknowledging the problem. As always, we will keep an eye on trends in this area. I also hope that I gave the hon. Gentleman a hint that the police negotiating board may be a first port of call on extra allowances if a case can be made for the Bedfordshire police.

It is important in the few minutes we have left to get a point in about the travelling community. I have every sympathy with those whose lives are blighted by antisocial behaviour and criminality, whatever its source, which should be taken seriously and dealt with firmly.

The police are slightly baffled by the problems with the travelling community, as no particular cases have been drawn to their attention. I know that there has been an increase in distraction burglary in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. People may attribute such crimes to the travelling community. If that is happening, it is important that people contact the police so that they can note events, investigate what is going on and get more information about who is perpetrating such crimes. At the moment, the police are slightly baffled by the concentration of crime attributed to the travelling community. It may well be going on, but if it is, it should be reported to the police so that they can track trends.

The police and local authorities can use their powers under sections 61 and 77 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, at an early stage if necessary, to direct travellers to leave land when the statutory conditions are met. Although those are discretionary powers, we have always made it clear that antisocial behaviour and criminality should not be tolerated, and that the traveller lifestyle is no justification for behaviour that is not acceptable in the settled community.

Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, we introduced new antisocial behaviour orders. At present, such orders can cover only a single local government area or that area and adjoining areas. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be supportive of changes that we are proposing in the Police Reform Bill to introduce powers to impose an antisocial behaviour order that will be valid over a wider area than the single local authority, and potentially over the whole country. I hope that he will realise that that may be relevant if traveller communities exhibit antisocial behaviour.

Andrew Selous: I am conscious that we have only minutes left, but may I ask the hon. Lady to give me an undertaking that she will liaise with Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about land currently classed as agricultural land that is turned into a settled encampment? We must consider that problem very seriously. It is different from the trespass issue, but it is causing huge concern to large numbers of my constituents and those of many hon. Members.

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman has left me about 20 seconds, so I shall abandon the rest of my speech. I was going to say that I will draw his remarks to the attention of my colleagues in the DTLR, and I am sure that they will be in touch with him shortly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 10 April 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): This is the first time that a so-called Westminster Hall debate has been held anywhere other than Westminster Hall. As we all know, it is because of the arrangements for the lying in state of the late Queen Mother. It is therefore appropriate that the subject of our first debate since Parliament has resumed is non-partisan and concerns the good will of people in prosperous countries towards those in poor countries.

I shall begin the debate on a local note. The Hampshire Scout Expeditions has been engaged in an expedition to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Within the past few days, on their way back, the scouts visited poor villages in Tanzania to engage in developmental projects and put something back into the country in return for their adventure. The spirit behind that generous contribution was similar to the spirit in which the 1945-50 Attlee Labour Government set up the Colonial Development Corporation, which subsequently became the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

The raison d'etre behind the corporation was to boost investment for development in some of the world's poorest countries. When the legislation for the part-privatisation of the CDC was debated in the House in 1999, the wish to make it work enjoyed cross-party support, but there was considerable concern that it might not succeed. When the Bill was first debated in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), the then shadow Secretary of State for International Development, sounded the clearest possible warning when he said that

"the new CDC may be the worst of all worlds: it will attract little interest from the private sector and will therefore be undersold, but will be moved away from its developmental objectives over the next few years by shareholder pressure.—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 19 June 1999; c. 4.]

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I sat in on that debate in 1999. Labour Members were assured that the new arrangements would not alter the CDC's traditional developmental role by one jot or tittle. That is the basis on which we voted for the Bill.

Dr. Lewis: The hon. Lady is absolutely right and that was the basis on which the Opposition did not vote against the Bill. However, fears were expressed that the consequences that I have outlined might follow if the arrangements did not work.

Looking back at the record of the proceedings in Committee, two views were expressed about the Bill. The original idea was to have a body that would fill the gap in poorer colonies that were unlikely to attract private investors. I am trying to be as fair as I can by saying that the Government's intention was to convert that body into a bridge between private investors, who might not usually invest in those countries, and the developing countries themselves. However, Bowen Wells, the distinguished former Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, expressed the view that one purpose of the part-privatisation of the CDC was to reduce competition with the Department for International Development for Treasury funds. The 1999 legislation made it possible to borrow funds from the private sector as well. Unfortunately, the price of doing that seems to be an unacceptable sacrifice of the Department's developmental aid.

The Minister will be aware of the exhaustive examination carried out by *The Times* and published on 2 February 2002. I will rely on a considerable amount of that material in the remainder of my remarks. The article quoted a senior policy advisor at Oxfam, Tricia Feeny, who said:

"A lot of (CDCs) African investments are in things like shopping malls stuffed with imported luxury goods, which cater to the wealthy elite or expatriate community. These have a neutral or even negative impact for the poor."

In other words, she saw a change in the focus and emphasis on the traditional way in which the CDC had invested in development countries.

During the debates in Committee in 1999, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) expressed great concern that the business principles and investment policy of the CDC were not sufficiently strongly bound into the Bill. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) pointed out that the first attempt at a public-private partnership by the new Labour Government involved a 50-year-old organisation with £1.2 billion worth of investments in more than 400 businesses in 54 countries.

Sadly, the numbers involved are beginning to shrink. In answers to written parliamentary questions tabled by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), the Government admitted last month that the CDC investment in sub-Saharan Africa had declined from £73 million, £72 million and £74 million in 1997-99 respectively, to only £56 million in 2000. For example, investment in Malawi and Uganda had ceased entirely and it seemed no coincidence that the CDC offices had shut down in both countries since 1999.

A written answer from DFID on 19 March 2002 also confirmed the closure of other CDC offices in Peru, Trinidad, Jamaica, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Fiji. Although the part-privatisation has not yet been carried through, the strategy of the new administration appears to be preparatory to completion of the process. The CDC, or, to give it its new identity, CDC Capital Partners, has been jettisoning long-term agricultural investments that traditionally yield returns of 6 to 8 per cent. in favour of funding banks, shopping centres and energy firms that offer much higher rates of return.

Such a process was entirely to be anticipated. The Government assured us that the safeguards would be sufficient, but were they effective enough to stop the process once it had started to roll forward? Conservative Members think that the signs are distinctly

[Dr. Lewis]

discouraging. CDC staff numbers have been cut by some 35 per cent., although it must be said that rewards for those who remain have markedly improved at director and chief executive levels. I believe that the chief executive receives a package worth £250,000 for his three-day week.

Before PPP, the CDC was subject to a detailed framework of scrutiny, including quinquennial reviews by relevant Departments' representatives under the chairmanship of a representative of DFID. Now, however, the situation is very different. The Government say that they have put sufficient safeguards in the new Bill to ensure the new organisation's accountability, without the need for the sort of parliamentary scrutiny that the Conservatives urged in 1999, when the Bill was enacted.

Let us examine the supposed safeguards. First, the Government will retain a 25 per cent. share in the CDC. However, a 25 per cent. share will not prevent changes in the investment policy and thus constitute a worthwhile safeguard.

The second safeguard is that DFID will be able to appoint two directors to the CDC board. However, two people do not constitute a majority so, on their own, they will be unable to protect the development focus.

Thirdly, whereas the Conservatives supported the statement of business principles that accompanied the 1999 Bill, there was nothing remarkable in that statement that other multinational companies could not adopt. By itself, the statement is a worthless safeguard for protecting the CDC's developmental role.

Fourthly, the memorandum and articles of association give no general protection to the role of development in the workings of the CDC. They simply state that there should be a focus on investment that benefits poor countries. That is too vague to be a sufficient safeguard. They also state that the CDC must adhere to the statement of investment policy—the sixth safeguard, which I shall discuss in a moment.

The fifth safeguard is the golden share. Article 51 of the memorandum and articles of association states that there shall be no change in the investment policy without the consent of the holder of the golden share. We welcomed that at the time, but as we argued then, the investment policy itself was already flawed.

The sixth supposed safeguard is the statement of investment policy. We argued at the time that that statement was far from sufficient to entrench development. It sets minimum levels of investment in poor countries, but it does not prevent a future CDC that wanted to increase its return on investment from investing only in the top-listed blue chip companies of poor countries. It does not specify how many companies the CDC must invest in or the type of company. Two or three minor provisions prohibit it from investing in certain types of company, but it can invest in any high-performance, high-yield company, regardless of whether it benefits the local economy or creates jobs. The CDC's activities could move in a sufficiently undesirable direction to contradict its original aims, without triggering a situation in which the Government could use their golden share.

In its examination, *The Times* claimed that the CDC's £80 million profit in 1999 had become a £41 million loss the following year. Ernest Mtamboh, a development economist who worked for the CDC for eight years, until he was made redundant recently, was quoted as predicting:

"Over the next 18 months, CDC plans to sell all its agri-business interests in Zambia . . . The long-term investments are going to be dumped in favour of short-term investments with a higher return . . . The employees won't know what's hit them. Jobs will be lost, productivity will fall, and the good labour practices and social responsibility that were the hallmarks of the CDC will go out of the window."

At the end of the Committee stage in 1999, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon moved a new clause that would have strengthened significantly Parliament's ability to scrutinise the strategy and policy of the CDC. It would have sent a strict and stern message to those running the part-privatised CDC that we were looking over their shoulder, as it stated:

"The Corporation shall at the end of each complete financial year after the day appointed under section 3(3) make a report to the Secretary of State on its investments during that twelve month period and on its policy on future investments."

It would have further provided that the Secretary of State should, as soon as practicable, lay such a report before Parliament.

My hon. Friend said at the time:

"The amendment is designed to bring back CDC's investment policy and decisions to the House of Commons once a year so that we may look over the Secretary of State's shoulder five or 10 years down the road. It constitutes another pressure on shareholders and directors in future: they will know that the House of Commons will consider decisions, and may debate them."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 22 June 1999; c. 105.]

The response of the Secretary of State for International Development was that it was sufficient that the Department would produce an annual report every year, which Parliament could debate. However, in general, the annual report has not been debated in Parliament and, in any case, it addresses a range of the Department's activities and does not concentrate on the CDC in detail.

The most recent DFID annual reports allocated very little space to the CDC. The 1999 and 2000 reports each allocated only three paragraphs to the CDC, which discussed the progress made towards the PPP. The paragraphs contained only the most vague information on the investment strategy being pursued by the CDC, despite the changes in its investment policy. They contained no information about the implication of those changes on development in poor countries. The 2001 DFID report contained only a single, solitary paragraph on CDC Capital Partners that repeated almost verbatim what was said the previous year.

Despite the critical tone that I have had to adopt while addressing this worrying situation, we are trying today to give the Government an opportunity to reconsider their undoubtedly sincere initial belief that they had made sufficiently strong arrangements to safeguard the original intention of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The CDC enjoys total support among all parties today, as it has under successive Governments since its establishment in 1948.

I shall conclude with a constructive suggestion, which is perhaps not for me, nor the Minister, to make. As the Chairman of the Select Committee on International

Development is present, let me air the possibility that the way in which the part-privatisation of the CDC is developing is a worrying trend that seems to confirm the worries of hon. Members of all parties that were expressed when the Bill was enacted.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): We are inviting the CDC to talk to us in June.

Dr. Lewis: I am delighted to hear that. In the light of that invitation I hope that my hon. Friend will decide that it would be suitable for the Select Committee to investigate fully and report on how the process is evolving.

I am glad to have secured the debate. I apologise to the Minister if I have sounded like a Jeremiah; I am sure that he will do his best to dispel the gloom. I hope that he will accept the sincerity with which the Opposition are putting their case. We do so not because we should like to say that we told the Government so, but because we wish to ensure that when the CDC is fully and finally privatised we can say that we told the Government so and that they listened, and as a result we gained the best and not the worst of both worlds.

9.50 am

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am pleased that the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) called for this valuable debate. As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, we members of the Select Committee have raised the issue and have arranged to talk to the CDC.

I shall discuss broader concerns as well as the CDC, which raises big issues. As a general policy, it was absolutely right that DFID should have led the attack on poverty and focused on education, health and social services as a way of creating long-term growth. However, that has led us to focus less on the current economic regeneration of countries such those in sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously, that regeneration is primarily the responsibility of the Governments of those countries, but more could be contributed from outside. My concerns centre on the fact that more than 80 per cent. of people in those very poor countries live off the land and are directly dependent upon it. Frequently, in travels with the International Development Committee one is not briefed on agricultural or land policy, or is not conscious that the countries have a policy. Surprisingly little attention is paid to that critical issue.

Let me give a couple of examples. The people of Uganda boast that they grow the best pineapples in the world, but Ugandan pineapples do not reach our supermarkets. I was not conscious that Ugandan agricultural policy is concerned with how to adapt Ugandan pineapples so that they will fit the shelves in Sainsbury's and will be marketable. In Ghana, the same points are made about cocoa as were made 50 years ago. The Ghanaian cocoa farmer gets a very low price and is frequently slaughtered by a fall in the price of cocoa, whereas in the prosperous world, when the market price of cocoa falls, we get value added chocolate production without reducing the price of chocolate. Any manufactured goods would be slaughtered by the tariffs that we impose on them.

Ms Abbott: On agricultural policy, the issue is not just the total number of people employed in agriculture, but the fact that those people work in the countryside. If agriculture collapses, they drift to the cities. Many of the people involved in agriculture cannot easily be deployed to computer inputting, or whatever DFID is promoting.

Tony Worthington: I agree completely. That is a neglected issue; all over the world, there is a drift into mega-cities that do not have the services, facilities or work to provide something better than working on the land. We must consider that inter-relationship. There have been examples of success, such as the amazing growth of flower growing in east Africa. That requires the most sensitive kind of manufacturing. It is sensitive to time and quality; nobody wants to buy a flawed red rose. That has been achieved in a part of the world that does not have a settled political atmosphere, which proves that such things can be done, but why have not enough of them been done in Africa?

I always thought that the CDC was about remedying market failure—going where ordinary financial investors would not go—because it is a myth that the market will always provide a cure. Sometimes people are crushed by the market, and intervention is required to prevent them and their countries from becoming poorer and poorer. Now, the CDC's remit is to bring in private capital—to make itself attractive to private investors. That is a different role.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East quoted some of the relevant figures: in 1996, the CDC invested £87 million in sub-Saharan Africa; in 2000, that had fallen to £56 million. Its chief executive, Alan Gillespie, states:

"CDC is today plugging the equity gap in healthcare, electricity generation, transport, mining and communications: CDC is a lead investor in a mobile phone operator in 13 African countries."

The CDC website refers to recent investments, such as an injection of $18 million into the east African power sector, the investment of $40 million in a pan-African telecom business, and CDC Capital Partners also invests in zinc in Zambia. However, there is no reference to investments in what the great majority of people are occupied in, which is agriculture. I find that difficult to accept.

In the annual report, Mr. Gillespie states:

"It was with considerable reluctance that the board concluded that many of our agribusiness investments, with which CDC has been proudly associated throughout its history, are unlikely to meet our minimum financial return requirements."

Those investments, therefore, are now on a "for sale" rather than a "going concern" basis.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although the shift from a rate of return of 6 to 8 per cent. to 25 to 30 per cent.—which the CDC is now promoting—might not sound like much, it is a seismic shift, and it totally precludes a whole raft of projects that have traditionally been managed by the CDC, and which nobody else would be available to finance? Does he also agree that by being so ambitious—rather than, perhaps, going for 15 per cent.—there is no difference between the CDC and any other commercial provider of capital?

Tony Worthington: I do not want to pronounce on the CDC's policies, because what it is doing now might make abundant sense, with regard to getting investment into new enterprises in such countries, where there might still be a market failure in relation to the private sector. However, although that might be the case, the needs of sub-Saharan Africa are so vast that a job is not being done in what may be seen as the traditional area. I do not wish to comment further on that until we have talked to the CDC about whether it sees real wealth creation resulting from its investments.

I return to agriculture. As the hon. Member for Banbury knows, the International Development Committee recently visited Ghana and Nigeria. We spent many hours driving through lush countryside, where it was difficult to recognise what was a central or local government strategy to create more wealth and food. There was no picture of anything other than growing things: there was no examination of markets, quality or how Ghana or Nigeria linked in to our world. I felt exactly the same last year in Vietnam and Cambodia. The only place that we visited where I felt that the land was farmed to its maximum efficiency was Bangladesh. Good work was being done there, and it was difficult to imagine it being done more intensively or to a better quality.

Agriculture is exceedingly difficult territory in which to cause change because landholding tends to be fragmented, and is becoming more so. In every country, it is intrinsic to inheritance and power. Farmers tend to be conservative, and huge values are attached to animals and goats—sorry, not to goats, to food. Goats are on my mind because I saw them everywhere, but they were not being used in an economically effective fashion. Their protein, milk and hide were not used; they were just around as dogs and cats are in this country.

I am surprised that we never receive briefing on the anthropology of those societies, because it is crucial to the development of communities. One must be careful and considerate about major agribusiness moving in, further stripping people of power and leaving them jobless. For example, there is a current controversy over a planned development project, "Vision 2020", in Andra Pradesh, which has been promised £65 million of British aid. The upside is that it promises to bring millions of poor farmers into the 21st century through the consolidation of farms, the mechanisation of agriculture, irrigation projects, new roads and the introduction of genetically-engineered rice. The state Government promises also to eradicate poverty. However, the big downside is that those dependent on the land will fall from 70 per cent. to 40 per cent. and 20 million people will have to find another source of income. I mention that project neither with approval nor disapproval because I have not studied it, but it illustrates the complexity, the sensitivity and the importance of the issue.

The CDC is clearly no longer seriously considering agriculture as a major area of development and wealth creation because it cannot achieve its targets through its work. However, somebody should be seriously considering the matter, because it is being badly ignored and our international work is underpowered. At both British and international level it is difficult to identify who is considering macro-agricultural policy and its translation into wealth creation at farm level.

At international level, the European Union has been a major enemy of developing countries through its tariffs and its policies of dumping excess food. In our studies of EU development policy, I do not recall any agricultural projects that have attracted praise. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation should be responsible for agriculture, but, in a competitive field, it has about the lowest profile of any UN organisation. That has never been brought to the attention of the Select Committee on International Development. UNFAO claims to be doing such work on its website:

> "The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was founded in 1945 with a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations."

However, I have never heard that quoted in a business sense. Research may be going on, but in my extensive travels I have not come across the FAO as part of a country's agricultural policy.

Today's debate allows us to raise our concerns about agricultural policy in the developing world and the contribution it makes to poverty alleviation and wealth creation. I always thought that the CDC was our major contribution, but it has clearly turned away from such work to help the spread of mobile phones, or some other economic activity. That might be profitable for those who control companies, but it will not increase the incomes of the poor. I should welcome the Minister's views.

I am not saying that what is happening to the CDC is wrong. The House made a decision, and it is early days yet; the CDC deserves time to be tested out against the Government's policies. However, there is a vacuum to be filled in the agricultural policies of developing countries. I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.5 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): As always, I agree with almost everything that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said. I start with a confession of past errors. I think that I made a mistake, when I had the responsibility that the Minister now has, when I, in effect, allowed the Commonwealth Development Corporation to change its name to the CDC. Presentation is sometimes important, and, with the benefit of hindsight, I think that making that change resulted in the organisation losing some of its focus.

The background is simple. In about 1996, the Commonwealth Development Corporation came to Baroness Chalker and me, as we had ministerial responsibility for it at the time, and said, "Look, there are many poor countries not in the Commonwealth and many Commonwealth countries that are not poor. Our present remit prevents us from investing in poor countries not in the Commonwealth. The geographical spread of Commonwealth countries is not even across the world—there are many Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean but few in Latin America. Please may we have the freedom to invest in poorer countries?" That made eminently good sense, so the legislation was amended to enable the Commonwealth Development Corporation to invest in poorer countries, wherever they might be. The logical consequence was that it asked to change its name to the CDC. I think that that has, in part, lost it its development focus.

I shall be slightly more critical than the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie about the CDC's present performance because the concerns need to be put on the table, and that will give the CDC and the Minister the opportunity of rebutting those points if they can. I think that everyone in this House supported the Prime Minister when he said recently to the Nigerian National Assembly that Britain has a special responsibility to Africa and that aid is needed to invest in creating capable states, to encourage economic growth and to invest in public services. However, I am concerned that the direction of the CDC is not to invest in the areas that one would see as consistent with the Prime Minister's comments. It is not investing in education or in agribusiness, in which 85 per cent. of people in poorer countries work and in which they look more likely to succeed in trade.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie about that. We see the CDC investing away from poorer countries, away from sub-Saharan Africa. Investment by the CDC in that region in the last two years for which figures are available, 1998-2000, fell by 13 per cent. Some countries have seen investment collapse completely. Malawi, which received £9 million of CDC investment in 1996, now receives none at all. Swaziland received £19 million from CDC investment in 1996, but by 2000 it was receiving absolutely nothing. Investment by the CDC in sub-Saharan African countries has plummeted in recent years by more than £30 million.

The CDC's annual report claims that the reason for the change is that

"CDC believes that if it is able to achieve its mission of realising attractive returns to shareholders this will have the effect of also assisting social development".

I am at a loss to see how getting attractive returns for UK shareholders per se will necessarily assist social development in poorer countries in Africa. Until it can be demonstrated to the contrary, the suggestion must mean that CDC directors have simply decided to put profit before any poverty focus. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) said a few moments ago, part of the concern is that, if the CDC is no longer looking for shareholder returns on equity investments of between 6 and 8 per cent. but of at least 20 per cent. to attract partners, it is not surprising that it has decided not to invest in agribusiness and agri-economy, which are very important for poorer countries.

The CDC's directors have created some of the problems. Through equity investment, they have created a financial return hurdle that is too high. The CDC now needs to increase its return considerably to attract private investors. Indeed, in the corporation's report in 1997, the chief executive said:

"The returns will need to be enhanced, and this will require us accepting risks in the businesses in which we invest for a commensurate increase in rewards."

Equity in developing countries is elusive. As the Secretary of State for International Development admitted in evidence to the International Development Committee, equity is a scarce resource in many developing countries. In its eighth report to the previous Parliament, the Select Committee concluded:

"Until the downward trend in the Commonwealth Development Corporation's returns is significantly and sustainably improved, it seems unlikely that the Public/Private Partnership will be a commercially viable venture."

Unfortunately, the warnings of the Select Committee have proved to be the case. Equity investments at the CDC have gradually increased since 1998; in contrast, return on capital employed at the CDC has dramatically dropped from 3.6 per cent. to a deficit of 4.7 per cent. during the same period. Even more staggeringly, the operating profit after tax fell from £57 million in 1999 to a deficit of £41 million a year later. Those figures do not make the CDC look like a sustainable business. Obviously, the downward trend considerably affects its ability to attract private partners.

One is concerned about some of the projects that the CDC has invested in. For example, it now appears that the Konkola project in Zambia faces a £20 million loss, unless it can find a new owner to replace Anglo American, which pulled out last month. A little while ago, I received a letter on the issue from the executive vice-president of Anglo American, who gave several reasons why they had withdrawn. One questions why the CDC continued to invest in the scheme, and other examples of similar projects raise questions about the CDC's collective judgment in investing.

Also, questions are raised about the CDC's commitment when one considers where it is closing offices and opening new offices. It is closing offices in countries such as Uganda and the Ivory Coast but opening offices in places such as Egypt and Mexico. *The Economist* noted last year that the CDC was moving from agri-economy to property and banks:

"New regional offices, manned by people who know more about making deals than growing pineapples, have opened in Egypt, China and Mexico."

Why is the CDC opening a new office in China? Admittedly, China contains a large number of poor people, but it does not contain the poorest of the poor. Its gross domestic product rises by about 9 per cent. each year. It is even excluded from the World Bank progress reports on the 2015 targets, to avoid distorting G8 countries' performance. I suspect that the only reason that the CDC has opened an office in China and closed offices in sub-Saharan Africa is that it hopes to make a better return on capital in China.

Recently, I was told by a former employee of the CDC:

"Additionality is off the CDC agenda—almost all technical expertise has been fired—agriculturalists, business managers, engineers. Even the environmental specialists have gone!"

How on earth does the sacking of engineers and environmental specialists enhance the social development that the CDC professes? It does not. The former employee—a perfectly rational person, who I have known for more than 10 years—continued:

"Dedicated development orientated business men have been substituted by a cosy coterie of ex Bankers and naïve expensively educated MBAs. Is this the Goldman Sachs of the developing world?"

[Tony Baldry]

Hon. Members should be concerned by both those statements on the direction in which the CDC is going.

The Secretary of State has a golden share in the CDC which was one of the earlier parts of this country's work in helping poorer countries—the better part of the legacy of the Attlee Government of the post-war years. I hope that the Minister will reassure the House that he and the Secretary of State are taking a close interest in what the CDC is doing, to allow confidence that that is still part of the Department's work in tackling poverty in the poorer countries of the world. Otherwise, the CDC will simply become another venture capital fund—there is a venture capital fund called CBC. One wants to be confident that the CDC will not become just like any other fund in the City of London, running no fewer risks or gaining no more rewards.

We have always been very proud of what the Commonwealth Development Corporation has achieved. Of course, it was right that it could help poorer countries outside of the Commonwealth, but we hope that Ministers are confident that the CDC is determined to help people in poorer countries and is not just concerned with the return on its capital.

10.18 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on securing an important debate. We can all agree that the role and work of the CDC has not been sufficiently scrutinised since the decision was taken in 1999. The hon. Gentleman seemed alarmed when I sat on this side of the Committee Room. Although we are physically in Committee Room 10, philosophically this is a Westminster Hall debate, and such debates are normally conducted on non-partisan lines. I would like to participate in a non-partisan spirit.

I remember the 1999 debate very well. There was little controversy, and the House was united in believing that the matter was technical and would better enable the CDC to fulfil its developmental remit. In that spirit, the measure was passed with questions asked, but no opposition from either side of the House. The evidence is partial and anecdotal, but it seems that under the new dispensation the CDC has moved from its developmental remit. It seems that way because we do not have enough information. The avenues are not open to the House to allow us to scrutinise properly what the CDC is doing. We know that the CDC is withdrawing from agriculture throughout the world because it does not pay enough. The return that the CDC wants cannot be obtained from investment in agriculture.

I want to add my voice to those of hon. Members who have said that the Government should scrutinise their policy on agriculture and development. In addition to employing a large number of people in third world societies, agriculture is often the anchor of social stability. I am chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the British Caribbean and my family comes from there. I visit the Caribbean most years and will be there in a few weeks. What has happened following the collapse of agriculture in rural Caribbean countries?

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. Will the hon. Lady speak a little more loudly? I am having difficulty hearing her and others are also indicating that they cannot hear her. Her points are important and we would all like to hear what she is saying.

Ms Abbott: It is not often that I am accused of not speaking loudly enough.

Agriculture is the anchor of stable civil society throughout much of the third world. When traditional rural agriculture collapses, those who were employed in agricultural pursuits cannot diversify into computer inputting. They cannot even diversify into growing flowers because the new forms of agriculture do not employ labour in the same numbers as traditional agriculture. What often happens in Africa and the Caribbean is that people drift to the city with the resulting problems of instability. When legitimate agriculture does not develop and is not allowed to flourish, people all too often diversify into illegitimate agriculture. There is a clear relationship between the collapse of agriculture in the Caribbean and South America and a move into drug production. I only wish that the Government, who talk so much about joined-up thinking, would apply some joined-up thinking to the relationship between the lack of an agricultural development policy and the war against drugs. Without a coherent policy on developing and sustaining agriculture in the third world the international war against drugs is doomed to failure.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the British Caribbean, I was privileged to lead a delegation to Belize in the Caribbean last year. I heard bitter complaints from all sides about the role of the CDC. At that time it was a major investor and employer in citrus production, which is a key anchor of stable civil society in Belize, as elsewhere. The CDC was in the process of selling lock, stock and barrel its holding in citrus production. Many people—not just politicians, but agriculturists and workers in citrus production—could not understand why the CDC was selling, helter skelter, its interests without even trying to identify whether local co-operatives and growers could step in. They wondered how it could call itself a development corporation when it was selling off a key industry in Belize apparently without thought for the short and medium term developmental consequences of that sale to the people of Belize. It is all very well for the CDC to have to obtain the maximum return on its investments to be viable, but the example in Belize is that the CDC makes short-term, shareholder-driven decisions to the exclusion of any consideration for the short and medium-term development cost.

Belize, where the situation has not been reconciled, is an example of the decisions that the CDC is making in its new manifestation as a sort of Goldman Sachs of the development world.

I can only repeat what has been said earlier. It must worry any hon. Member who is concerned about development and the third world that investment in sub-Saharan Africa by the CDC has dropped by £30 million.

It is difficult to understand the logic of closing down offices in Jamaica, the Ivory Coast and Uganda and opening them up in China. China is not short of investment. The logic of the CDC opening an office there is wholly commercially driven. I share hon. Members' concern about what is happening to the CDC, which now appears to be wholly driven by the interests of shareholders. I share their concern about what is happening as experienced agriculturalists, engineers and business managers leave to be replaced by people who understand the market and about making deals.

If we are serious as a Government about raising the standards of living of people in sub-Saharan Africa and Africa as a whole, in the Caribbean and all those parts of the world that have historic links with this country, we must take the role of the CDC more seriously and subject it to more scrutiny. Yesterday, the whole country was swept up in the emotion of the Queen Mother's funeral. But if the Queen Mother and the royal family mean anything, they mean a commitment to those parts of the world that were part of the empire and are currently part of the Commonwealth. I need to be reassured by Ministers that the CDC's current policies firstly are subject to sufficient scrutiny by the House and, secondly, fulfil our historic and moral responsibility to the Commonwealth.

10.26 am

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Thank you, Mrs. Roe, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on raising this vital issue. The speeches this morning have shown an enormous degree of consensus. I reiterate the comments of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott): yesterday we witnessed an immense display of unity as the nation and Commonwealth countries throughout the world came together to commemorate the passing of Her Majesty the Queen Mother.

If the Commonwealth Development Corporation means anything, it is to enable Britain to support countries to which we are historically and traditionally linked. They are the poorest countries in Africa and other parts of the world. I hope that everything we do is designed to help them, rather than simply to make profit out of the CDC. That is why there is considerable concern about the effect that Government policies have had on action on the ground. The part-privatisation of the CDC is ill thought out. It is having detrimental effects on development assistance to poorer countries, promoting headlines such as that in *The Times* on 2 February 2002:

"Privatisation of Atlee's aid agency hits the poorest of the poor".

No Labour Government could be proud to see that.

I should like to emphasise many of the comments that my hon. Friend made about the effects of the part-privatisation of the CDC. It is clear that the CDC in the new climate, even before the PPP is fully completed, is changing its investment strategy to the detriment of the poorest countries. Take, for example, the fall in investments in sub-Saharan Africa, as reported in *Hansard* on 14 February. The region's share of all poor country investments fell from 56.9 per cent. in 1998 to 43.3 per cent. in 2000. Figures in *Hansard* on 12 February show that the value of CDC investments in the region has fallen massively—from £87 million in 1996 to £56 million in 2000. Investment in Malawi fell from £9 million in 1996 to nothing in 2000. Similarly, investment in Swaziland went from £19 million in 1996 to no money whatever in 2000. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East said, CDC offices have closed in many countries, including Malawi and Uganda, which, coincidentally, have recently received no new investment.

The Government's answer has been not to compensate such countries with overseas assistance, but to pretend that everything is perfectly okay. The Secretary of State may promise the House that the new-look CDC will retain its development focus, and he may note the Government's majority share in the CDC. That does not, however, hide the fact that investment in the countries that I listed has gone down and, in some cases, disappeared altogether.

Mr. Barker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the CDC is sometimes the only provider of real equity finance in sub-Saharan countries such as Swaziland? In places such as China, however, its capital is but a drop in the ocean.

Mr. Rosindell: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and I endorse his sentiments.

Generally, I would be the first to agree that politicians and Governments should not intervene in privately run companies. I should have thought it obvious, however, that at least some Government action was necessary given the crisis in CDC funding. That there is a crisis is clear, in particular, from the fact that the Government demanded at least an 8 per cent. return on CDC investments before partial privatisation. Returns are now falling drastically below that level, which diminishes the attractiveness of projects to new private investors.

Hon. Members on both sides want the CDC to work, but it is clear from the facts and figures available that it will not. An article in *The Times* on 2 February demonstrated that the 10 million people who live in grinding poverty in Zambia—the very people whom the CDC was designed to help—feel that the corporation has abandoned them. That is too significant to be ignored.

When the evidence is so clear, there is no excuse for the Government not to take hold of the situation. They must ensure that the development focus and intended investment strategy are not undermined by pure profit motives. To achieve that, they must focus on several core issues, including using the safeguards available to them to ensure that the CDC achieves what it was created to do.

It would be catastrophic for the CDC to lose its development focus, and increasing parliamentary scrutiny of the investment strategy would be an option worthy of consideration. Too many lives are at stake and too many people are involved for us to pretend that nothing has changed. We have an international duty, for which DFID takes responsibility. It is time for DFID to be bold enough both to admit that the evidence shows that its scheme is not working and to respond accordingly.

10.34 am

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on securing this important debate, on which a common view has been expressed by hon. Members who have spoken so far.

I was not in Parliament when the Select Committee on International Development first considered the Government's proposals in 1997-98, and when the Bill facilitating the partial privatisation was considered, so I do not have the same track record as other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), whose contribution has already been referred to. However, it is regrettable that the Government seem to have ignored the Select Committee's warnings about the viability of the plans and their potential negative impact.

As a member of the Standing Committee that considered the International Development Bill, I was impressed by the Government's focus on poverty reduction and sustainable development, considering that so much aid has been misused and misdirected in Africa and elsewhere over the years. It was my perhaps somewhat naïve assumption that that approach would inform all Government action in relation to the developing world, not just the giving of aid. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) rightly drew attention to the absolute imperative for joined-up thinking on such issues. However, since the Committee stage of the International Development Bill, the issue of the Tanzanian air traffic control system arose shortly after this country wrote off a substantial amount of debt. That seemed to be contrary to the core of that Bill—something that has clearly been recognised by the Secretary of State for International Development.

Some hon. Members have already referred to the article in *The Times* on 2 February. I was horrified when I read that report, which highlighted the failure of CDC Capital Partners to attract interest from the private sector, and, more importantly, the impact of the change of investment strategy on the poorest nations. Why should we be so concerned about that? The original purpose of the CDC was to operate a pioneering approach in the private sector, with a mandate to go where private capital would not normally go—to where it can make a real difference. It has been operating in some of the poorest countries in the world, where the absence of financial markets meant that it was impossible to borrow to start a business. It has helped thousands of people, particularly in the agricultural sector. It has been innovative and has a good record both on labour practices and on social responsibility. It has been used as a model for the creation of the World Bank's International Finance Corporation.

All that is now threatened by an investment strategy that requires much higher rates of return. It is self-evident that if a higher rate of return is required, something must give, and one ends up investing in projects in areas that already attract plenty of private sector interest, such as leisure, property, communications and shopping malls. The danger is that such work ceases to have any real development value because there is a conflict between securing a high rate of return on investment and achieving development priorities. The two may sometimes match, but we must recognise that there is a conflict of interest.

What has actually happened? It seems to me from the statistics that have already been quoted that there has been a shift of new investment away from the poorest countries towards less poor or middle-income countries, moving investment in the opposite direction from the central thrust of the International Development Bill. As we have already heard, offices are closing in some of the poorest countries and opening in less poor countries. In the financial year ending 2000, the CDC failed to meet its target of 50 per cent. of new investment in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. I shall not repeat the statistics because time is short, but money invested even in the poorest countries is too often going to those projects with a high rate of return—and money is available for those projects from other sources. CDC Capital Partners is selling off its agricultural investments. The agribusiness portfolio fell in 2000 by £75 million or 35 per cent, and all agribusiness interests in Zambia are being sold.

The Government assured the Select Committee in 1998 that agribusiness would remain a priority. However, although CDC Capital Partners' annual report for 2000 stated that there were six priority sectors, did not include agribusiness. The report stated:

"Many of our agribusiness investments, with which CDC has been proudly associated throughout its history"—

that is the great irony—

"are unlikely to meet our minimum financial return requirements".

Yet Ernest Mtamboh, the development economist with the CDC until, like many others, he was made redundant, pointed out:

"At a time when the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation is predicting a food deficit across most of Africa for the next 15 years, the CDC is achieving record yields for grain and maize and getting premium prices for its coffee—these business are not losing money".

It seems that the rate of return is not sufficient to interest private investors. Is the Government's commitment to investment in agribusiness still in place?

I said earlier that the International Development Bill focused on sustainable development. However, the new investment strategy and the fact that investments are not legally obliged to achieve sustainable development or positive results for the poorest people suggests a worrying shift. Examples have already been given, but I shall mention two more. A rural management training school in Mnanga in Swaziland has closed, and the building sold for use as a fee-paying school; it seems that training is no longer part of the CDC's core business. Friends of the Earth has been critical of a big CDC investment in palm oil plantations in Papua New Guinea, saying that it is harsh on farmers and the environment; is that where the CDC should be investing its money? We have already heard of the Konkola copper mine investment in Zambia, which has been criticised by Oxfam and others.

It is now time for an inquiry, to be undertaken either by the International Development Committee or an outside body, into three separate but related issues. I urge the Government to consider the following matters carefully. First, we need to review the routes

that the Government have chosen. Does the direction in which the CDC is going have potential development value? In the light of experience, is it not fatally flawed? Secondly, we need to consider CDC's performance and the decisions that it has taken. We have heard about the lack of scrutiny of the work of the CDC, but its decisions seem to be not only having a negative impact, but failing to achieve what it has set out to do.

Thirdly, we need to consider whether the provisions of the International Development Bill should be extended to focus on sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty and to cover a wider range of dealings with the poorest developing countries. If other policies and strategies, such as the control of arms exports, the sale of arms, tariffs and quotas, and the activities of the CDC, conflict with the central duty in the International Development Bill, the danger is that that duty will become little more than a fig leaf.

10.44 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I shall try to keep my remarks brief, because we want to hear from the Minister. However, I do not wish my brevity to suggest that, as Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, we were not keen to make a concerted effort to secure the debate. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) was successful, because he cares deeply about international development and speaks about it with real concern. The debate has been interesting because hon. Members from all parties have spoken in a tone of sorrow, without scoring political points, and I should like to continue in that vein.

It is poignant that we are meeting in Committee Room 10, rather than in Westminster Hall, on account of the funeral yesterday of the Queen Mother, whose achievement as head of the Commonwealth should be placed on record. In the light of that, we should be aware that what is happening to the CDC, and the change that Commonwealth citizens are experiencing, is detrimental to the spirit of the Commonwealth. It takes a lot for an international development issue to reach the front page of a broadsheet newspaper, our national media having been made aware not of a massive natural disaster but of a problem that is quietly getting worse and worse, affecting some of the poorest in the world. The comment of the former Agriculture Minister for Zambia, Guy Scott, regarding the decision of the CDC to sell off one of its projects—a 26,000-acre farm in southern Zambia, where the workers had set fire to their crops in dismay that it was being sold off for just £2.1 million after £8.5 million had been invested in it—reflects on this country and on the Commonwealth. He said:

"For the CDC to be pulling out of this sector in search of short-term returns means the end of British foreign aid."

We cannot deny that the shift—which we have seen demonstrated statistically today—from helping the poorest and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa is detrimental to those whom the Commonwealth set out to help.

A number of hon. Members have emphasised the significance of withdrawal from agricultural investment. I have worked in agriculture for 15 years and I am sad to say that our farmers would be happy to see a return of 8 per cent. on their investment; times are hard even in this country. The CDC's change of investment strategy is resulting in the developing world in a withdrawal from agricultural production, which, as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, is the bedrock of stability in rural societies. Where will the investment come from if the CDC withdraws from those areas? We are about to debate change in the terms of trade for agriculture at the talks in Doha. That is not the moment at which to withdraw investment from agriculture in developing countries where, through trade liberalisation, opportunities might well open up.

There is a moral imperative to bring to the Government's attention the need for action in an area where something is going wrong. We gave the benefit of the doubt to the Government's assurances that the development focus would not be undermined; however, there is evidence that it is being undermined. Therefore, we are here to ask the Government to think again—perhaps to rework the model of the partial privatisation. In July 1999, during the passage of the International Development Bill, my predecessor placed on record his misgivings. However, he gave the Government the benefit of the doubt in order to see whether they could make it work. There is evidence that rethinking is needed. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. It might sound counter-intuitive for a Conservative to be arguing that the paramount concern of the CDC should not be about getting the very best market return for its capital. However, we are very concerned that a development agency with a good reputation is abandoning its principles at the expense of the world's poorest. In July 1999, my predecessor as shadow Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), said

"The jury is still out on the Government's Bill . . . and I continue to hold grave reservations."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1999; Vol. 335, c. 529.]

I share those reservations and, as a jury, our verdict is not in the Government's favour. We hope that they will listen again and we are here to help them through the means described by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and through the assistance of the International Development Committee, to prevent things from going seriously wrong. There is still time to heed those words and put the matter right.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): May I first join other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on securing this debate on this important topic? This is an example of the House scrutinising the CDC and its work and I welcome that. We are meeting here in Committee Room 10 because of the events of the past few days and this is the first opportunity that hon. Members have had to pay tribute to the staff of the House for the enormous amount of hard work that they put in to make possible the visit of the many people who passed through Westminster Hall.

I also welcome this debate because it gives me the opportunity, in the short time remaining, to respond to the many points raised and to deal with some misconceptions, particularly those created by the article in *The Times*. Unfortunately, time does not permit me to deal with all of them, but to correct just one point—the

[Hilary Benn]

chief executive, Alan Gillespie, does not work three days a week, but full-time. That is one of many inaccuracies in that article.

As hon. Members will be aware, when the Prime Minister announced, in October 1997, the Government's intention to turn the CDC into a public-private partnership, the aim was to encourage more private capital to invest in poorer developing countries. It was recognised at the time that that measure did not constitute an abandonment of the CDC's role, but the beginning of a new chapter in carrying out that role in rather different circumstances to those that existed when the post-war Labour Government founded the CDC in 1948.

My first point—one that has been raised by several hon. Members and to which I shall return at the end of my speech—is that in the world of investment finance, the CDC continues to be distinctive, seeking to show that responsible investments can be made in markets that investors too often shun as risky, and helping to encourage greater investment in countries that need it. In the longer term—this is one of the motivations behind the change—its aim is to help poorer countries participate more equitably in the world economy.

It is essential that private capital flows benefit poorer developing countries and that those countries do not become increasingly marginalised in relation to the growth of the global economy. Although we clearly want wealth to be more equitably distributed, the truth is that far too often poorer countries are starved of the investment they need. For example, overall foreign direct investment in developing countries increased dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, but that investment was not evenly distributed. The lion's share went to Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and central Asia, east Asia and the Pacific.

In 2000, only 4 per cent. of the foreign direct investment in developing countries went to low-income developing countries. That is the scale of the challenge that we face. Too little private capital goes into the poorer developing countries. That is why the CDC, with its specific and unique investment criteria focusing both on poorer countries and on sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, is so important.

Africa loses 40 per cent. of the savings that it generates. That money flees the continent every year. That is the scale of the challenge. The public-private partnership concept is not just about accessing new sources of funding, but about the CDC demonstrating that it is possible to make commercially worthwhile investment. The effect needs to be judged over the whole business cycle. That was recognised by the former Chairman of the Select Committee, Bowen Wells, when he said:

"Some things will change radically as a result of the Bill . . . The CDC will have to look for a much higher return on equity".—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1999; Vol. 335, c. 530.]

The Conservative spokesman acknowledged that at the time. I have heard some confused arguments during the debate. Some people suggested that the rate of return achieved was currently too low, and others argued that the rate aimed for was too high. I am not sure where we could find the balance. If we are to have a demonstration effect, the CDC must operate successfully and commercially within the framework.

It is important to make a point about selling on. To judge from some arguments that hon. Members have made, it is almost as though when the CDC moves out of a business, as it has traditionally done, the business disappears into the ether. The CDC has sold on, rather than sold off, several of its previous investments, and it is true that those include some of its agribusiness interests in Africa. In case hon. Members have the impression that that means that the CDC has completely lost interest, it is important to acknowledge that it still holds 80 per cent. of its agricultural portfolio. It continues to invest in agribusiness, such as in sugar in Swaziland, rubber in Cote d'Ivoire, arable farming in Zambia and tea in Tanzania.

Some important points were made about the role of agriculture in development. I want to correct the impression given by some contributors that DFID's broader interests no longer include agriculture. A vast amount of an increasing DFID overseas aid budget supports rural livelihoods, for precisely the reasons alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). When considering the balance of where people live in developing countries, we have to recognise that all the growth during the next 25 years will be in the numbers that live in towns and cities. A shift is taking place, so it is not unreasonable that the CDC and others should respond to it.

Some argue that the CDC must continue to stick to non-commercial investments that perform poorly. In the end, that means that the concept of trying to encourage more private-sector investment in the poorest countries is doomed to fail. It is a counsel of despair. That is why the CDC is moving into other aspects of investment. Telecommunications was given as an example, and it will be an engine of economic growth and development. We have to pause for only one second to think of our own industrial history. We have lifted many people out of poverty in Britain during the past 300 years, and we have only to consider the mechanism that achieved it.

The CDC is not like any other investment company, because it operates within the investment policy in place, which cannot be changed without the approval of the Secretary of State. Both investment objectives—that 70 per cent. of investments have to benefit poorer countries, and that each year 50 per cent. of the CDC's new investments should be in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia—were comfortably exceeded in 2001. Eighty per cent. of investments went to poorer countries, and 69 per cent. of the CDC's new investments were in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. I ask hon. Members to name another worldwide investment company that invests as successfully in poorer countries as the CDC has demonstrated that it does, including in its performance in 2001.

Mrs. Spelman: Does the Minister accept that if the target for the level of investment in sub-Saharan Africa were set below the level in place before the investment strategy was changed, that target would be likely to be achieved? The target is lower. In 1998, 72 per cent. of investment in poor countries went to sub-Saharan Africa.

Hilary Benn: The CDC remains committed to Africa. For example, it invested £216 million in 81 separate businesses in sub-Saharan Africa during the past three years. In 2001, almost half of the CDC's new investments were to be found there. I welcome the scrutiny offered by today's debate and hope that the House will join me in congratulating the CDC on clearly having met both investment objectives in 2001. The CDC plays an important role and it is right that there should be scrutiny, but we must crack the fundamental problem—private capital does not want to invest in the poorest countries. However, the purpose of the exercise is for the CDC to provide a lead. Then those countries will get the chance to do what we take for granted—to earn a living.

Royal Ordnance Factories

11 am

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): It is a distinct pleasure to be in Committee Room 10, and I echo the thanks offered in the previous debate by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development to the staff of the House for working so hard to enable us to continue our debates despite the tragic loss of the Queen Mother and the necessary effects on Westminster Hall and its Chamber. I also thank the Minister for Defence Procurement for meeting me, along with colleagues as well as trades unionists, on 11 February to discuss this subject, and all the hon. Members who have signed my early-day motion.

Royal ordnance factories have a long history. They were set up because King Henry VIII needed to secure the quality and quantity of ammunition and guns for the navy and his other military objectives—he could not rely on private industry then. Henry VIII was not noted for his socialist tendencies, but he set up the first nationalised industry; the royal naval dockyards could arguably be the first, but I will return to that subject later.

The royal ordnance factories were privatised in 1987. I remember that because I was privileged to be Opposition Whip on the Bill that privatised them. I distinctly remember the assurances given—from almost exactly the spot on which I am now standing—about the future of royal ordnance factories and, most importantly, about the supply of ammunition, guns and ordnance for the British military.

British Aerospace bought Royal Ordnance plc—there have since been many mergers—and almost immediately set about rationalising the company. Among other sites, it flogged off Enfield for massive sums; effectively, Royal Ordnance was given away. Since then, Birtley has been under continuous threat.

The Select Committee on Defence, on which I had the privilege of serving, produced several reports on supply, notably one on Bishopton. In preparing that report, we questioned BAE Systems about the rationale behind privatising Bishopton and what was manufactured there. We collected some extremely interesting evidence. For example, we were told that Bishopton had to import gun cotton from Holland—but interestingly, that was originally manufactured at Bishopton and exported to Holland for return. It took much probing and prying to find that out.

In the brief that has been kindly donated by BAE Systems, it is asserted that Bishopton closed because of its failure to get the extended-range ammunition contract. That is interesting, because our evidence at the time did not suggest that that would happen, nor did the Government's reply suggest any direct link between that contract—which is running into serious trouble—and the future of Bishopton. BAE Systems, acting as a private company—as indeed it is—was merely looking out for the interests of its shareholders, not protecting the defence needs of the country. It is important to remember that BAE Systems operates under company law, and its principal duty is to its shareholders. That was known at the time of privatisation, and the results can be seen in the proposals being made by Royal Ordnance.

[Mr. John McWilliam]

There has been a continuous threat to Birtley since privatisation. Birtley is an area of very high long-term adult male unemployment. Indeed, unemployment there is so high that when the Conservative Government were confronted with a proposal to close the unemployment and benefits office there, Ministers decided not to, thanks to submissions made by Gateshead council, and a meeting that I had with the Ministers. The office still exists.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am enjoying the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I agree with most of it. However, he seems to be trying to blame everything on privatisation. He says that the Conservative Government decided to keep Birtley open, but his Government are closing it.

Mr. McWilliam: No, the Government are not closing the unemployment and benefits office in Birtley; they are keeping it open. There is no threat to it. Indeed, they have just spent an awful lot of money relocating it and doing it up. We should not get the Governments mixed up.

Mr. Gray: I meant the factory.

Mr. McWilliam: We shall see.

There has been a huge increase in productivity at Birtley since it became part of my constituency in 1983 after a boundary redistribution. That is to the credit of the management, the staff, the co-operation of the trade unions and the way in which we reorganised things. The BAE Systems brief says that there has been huge investment in royal ordnance factories. I do not know where it went to, but it did not go to Birtley. All the machines brought to Birtley since then have been transferred from other factories. Birtley has not received investment. It has been trying to rationalise on its large site and has succeeded to some extent, but a lot more still needs to be done.

The company are considering five options for the Birtley factory. Option one, the consolidation of the factory to reduce overcapacity, is designed to reduce overheads and take out loss-making activities so as to increase profits. The trade unions support that activity and have driven that option from the outset of the current crisis. That is being carried out in line with confirmed orders within the company sales plan, and includes firm orders only. It would include a reduction in the number of workers—but that is assuming that no further orders are placed in the meantime.

The second alternative is to look for another location in the region. The trade unions also support that option, which must support the projected work load and the needs of the current workers, as the skills base must be maintained. They are currently working with One NorthEast and Gateshead council on it—but I must say that that alternative is proving extremely difficult.

The third option is a delayed closure in line with the current sales plan. That would ensure a significant reduction in the work load by 2005-06, assuming that no other orders are placed. The trade unions and employees do not support that option. The fourth is a transfer of all work to alternative BAE Systems factories in the UK, and that is not supported by the work force either. The fifth, which has been bitterly opposed and which I am totally against, is closure.

The company has accepted that the original closure plan was flawed and has reluctantly opened up the debate. The major stumbling block from the trade unions' point of view is the company's claims about the costs of outsourcing Birtley's work. The prices divulged to the trade unions are extremely ambitious, and validation of those prices has so far proved impossible, with the company declaring that the detail behind the prices is commercial in confidence.

Another price about which the company is extremely ambitious is that for revalidating all the ammunition currently made at Birtley. If orders are outsourced, that ammunition must be revalidated, which will involve not minor price increases but costs involving many millions of pounds. I ask hon. Members to remember what is made there, and the fact that when it is filled and fired it is extremely dangerous—to the people firing it, as well. It must be validated and revalidated so that it is as safe as possible for people on the firing end.

There are several more points that we must not forget. The company's strategy to outsource overseas is a real threat to the continuity of supply to the Ministry of Defence. BAE Systems owns 30 per cent. of Denel, and the other 70 per cent. is owned by the South African Government. One of the options that the management proposes is outsourcing to South Africa. Although I have no reason to believe that South Africa is unstable, it is in an extremely unstable region. I caution Members to realise that if our forces were in action somewhere else in Africa, it is not necessarily guaranteed that we could rely on that source of supply.

Before the Gulf war, cases and shells for 155 mm FX70 ammunition, which is our mainstay artillery ammunition, were manufactured at Birtley. The contract was transferred to Rhinemetall of Germany, which discovered that it could not make them and subcontracted to a Belgian company. During the Gulf war, for political reasons, Belgium, an ally and a member of NATO—indeed, it is the home of NATO headquarters—refused to supply us with artillery ammunition. That artillery ammunition was desperately needed to support the major assault that our armoured corps was making through Saudi lines to retake Kuwait.

That is one of the problems of relying on overseas manufacture—and presumably that is why Henry VIII set up the royal ordnance factories in the first place. I do not for a moment suggest that the Minister has any responsibility for BAE Systems as a company; he does not. However, he does have total responsibility for ensuring that our armed forces are supplied in time of need.

There is another problem. If we were to go by purely commercial considerations, the royal ordnance factories would be slimmed down and the end result would be outsourcing, and filling at Glascoed. Quite apart from the security implications of concentrating on that one site, there is the problem of surge. I sincerely hope that

this will not happen, but what will happen if we become involved in a major conflict? How will we surge our manufacturing capability to supply our forces?

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I apologise to you, Mrs. Roe, and to hon. Members, for the fact that in a few moments I may have to leave to attend a meeting.

The threat to ROF Birtley follows the recent bad news that Vickers Defence Systems in my constituency failed to secure an order from the Greek Government for Challenger 2 tanks. As a result, the future of that company, too, is now in doubt and hangs in the balance, awaiting a decision by the Government on the allocation of an order for Terrier support vehicles. Ironically, the other competitor is BAE Systems. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government seriously want to maintain a viable defence manufacturing capability in this country they may have to intervene as well as support through the distribution of orders?

Mr. McWilliam: I agree with my hon. Friend. Many people employed at Vickers are my constituents; it is just across the river from my constituency. Before I return to my original subject, it might be worth noting that BAE Systems is also tendering for the two aircraft carriers. On the one hand, it says, "We are a great British company," but on the other hand it says, "Except for ammunition; we'll make that in South Africa or somewhere else."

As I said, there is a threat to supply—to our ability to surge, to our defence strategic capability and to our defence manufacturing base. That is serious. Please recall that Birtley makes all the metal bits. It does not make explosives, but it does make all the bits that fly through the air, or that contain explosives or propellants.

A further problem is that technology transfer to overseas competitors cannot be in the United Kingdom's interest. Under present defence procurement arrangements, intellectual property that was developed by BAE Systems, Royal Ordnance—some developed at Birtley and some developed in conjunction with QinetiQ—is being handed willy-nilly to our competitors.

At present, one reason why the Ministry of Defence can buy ammunition cheaply abroad is that other countries with defence manufacturing capabilities that are by and large owned by their Governments are selling to us at marginal cost, to keep things ticking over. However, if we did not have our own capability, those countries would sell at the price that they think the market would bear. That would be more expensive, and that has not been taken into account, although it clearly has been taken into account by BAE Systems management because it is trying to reduce costs and increase profits. The major customer—the British Government and our armed forces—is not being looked after.

There are specific examples, too. Birtley manufactures the 4½-inch naval shell. Nobody else uses 4½-inch guns on their ships, so where will we get the shells from? They would be expensive to import. The latest version of kinetic anti-tank ammunition, which will not contain depleted uranium, is being designed and developed at Birtley. The Charm ammunition makes the Challenger 2 tank, which my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) mentioned, such an effective hunter-killer tank. If we cannot get ammunition of that quality, our army's ability to use Challenger 2 tanks to their full advantage will be threatened, so we also have technical problems.

There is the prospect of the loss of 300 high-quality jobs at Birtley, with the possibility of more being lost—that will be inevitable if the company is allowed to get away with this. I have no doubt that the company wishes to outsource all the Royal Ordinance work, and its recent history supports that idea. Closures at Bishopton, Nottingham, Blackburn, Faldingworth, and Featherstone ROSM—that is where the depleted uranium was manufactured—are threatened, in addition to those at Chorley, Bridgwater and Birtley.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) wrote to me apologising for the fact that he could not be present today. He has an important meeting with Leyland Trucks about a contract for future military vehicles; otherwise he would be here to speak about Chorley's future and the worries of its work force.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): My hon. Friend mentioned the recent history of the company. Does he agree that there has been a history of underinvestment that has caused much insecurity for the work force? They thought that that insecurity had been lifted by recent orders. There are lessons to be learned about how to value work forces and how to plan for the future of such an important part of our country's needs.

Mr. McWilliam: My right hon. Friend is right. When it was announced, the recent agreement between BAE Systems and the Ministry of Defence regarding the 10-year rolling supply programme was greeted with great relief by the work force at Birtley. It seems, however, that the company thinks that it can get round that. I am not sure how, but it seems to think that it can, given that there is a contract. Not only the work force but the whole community in Birtley and in the surrounding constituencies is concerned. People from that part of Tyneside and Wearside travel a long way to work in the factory. I am pleased that so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent those constituents—some of them are precluded from speaking in the debate because of the offices that they hold—are here this morning.

We have been told that the future is in insensitive ammunition and that Birtley is not to be involved in that. Fine, but who will make the shells? Who will make the cases? BAE Systems has a history of playing other games. For example, several ammunition contracts were deliberately lost to BAE Systems and Birtley, in my cynical view to offset commercial aircraft sales by other sections of BAE. It is appalling that that was not supported by a memorandum of understanding on offsets or anything else.

That is illustrated in the BAE Systems company brief, which was issued to all employees:

"In 2000 BAE SYSTEMS and Saab signed a contract with the South African government to deliver 24 Hawk and 28 Gripen aircraft plus associated offset. The combined industrial offset commitment associated with this contract is valued at over 8 billion US Dollars, made up of direct offset activities at 1 billion USD and indirect offset activities at 7 billion USD. . . . We need

[Mr. McWilliam]

to explore all avenues for claiming offset credits against this commitment and need to hear from you at the Hawk South Africa Programme office at Brough, if your Business Unit, or one of your suppliers or partners, has placed or is planning to place work in South Africa as the value of this work may be able to be claimed as a credit by the Company."

That is fine for the 24 Hawks, but the 28 Gripens is a Swedish job. We have no memorandum of understanding with Sweden to offset, but that is what is being suggested. BAE Systems is serious in its intentions.

I am confident that the discussions with the trade unions are bearing fruit, that the analysis of costs and the talks with the company are effective and that, on an objective stance, Birtley will remain open. However, I am not confident about the ammunition commitment of the board of BAE Systems to the defence capability of the United Kingdom. I remain sceptical. I accept that the Minister has no responsibility for the board of BAE Systems, but he has every responsibility to maintain supply. As the largest customer of BAE Systems, my hon. Friend must bear in mind that he has a huge say in what decisions are made and not made, and which contracts are acquired from abroad and which are not.

I thank all my colleagues who have turned up to support me this morning, and other hon. Members who have royal ordnance factories in their constituencies, or who have an interest in the subject. I thank Gateshead council for its help and the work that it has carried out—Councillors Neil Weatherley and Kathy King are listening to the debate now. I also thank the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* for its campaign to save ROF Birtley. It is an important defence resource. We are an island. We must maintain our defence manufacturing capability as one of our strategic objectives, and that is why I introduced the debate.

11.24 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): One of the privileges of being an Opposition Whip is that one is allowed to open one's mouth in Committee. The problem with being a Government Whip—and in particular a Government Chief Whip—is that one cannot do that. I think that the record should include an explanation of the rather cryptic remark of the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) about office holders, which was made when the Government Chief Whip was present, listening to her constituency concerns being expressed, although she was unable to express them herself. She is leaving the room now, as she obviously cannot stand hearing Opposition Whips speak.

I am glad that we have gathered in Committee Room 10, rather than in Westminster Hall. We should make better use of existing House resources, rather than build expensive new facilities next to Westminster Hall. I am glad to be in this Committee Room, and I hope that our presence here sets a precedent that will be followed many times in the future—although the reasons why we are gathered here, rather than in the Westminster Hall Chamber, are profoundly sad.

I was glad to hear the concluding remarks of the hon. Member for Blaydon, because I had a simple philosophical objection to much of what he said: the Government, rather than private sector companies, are responsible for the defence interests of this country. However, I entirely endorse his concluding remarks. I want to speak mainly about my own constituency facility, Summerfield, which is part of the Royal Ordnance network, but if the hon. Gentleman's analysis is correct with regard to his constituency facility, a heavy burden of responsibility rests not on the board of BAE Systems but on the Minister responsible for defence procurement. Therefore we look forward to hearing what he has to say when he winds up.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) intervened to make the case, implicitly, for increased defence expenditure. I think that that was what lay behind the intervention, because when a business such as BAE Systems is competing in a difficult environment, with the Government cutting expenditure in wide-ranging areas of defence procurement, it has a problem. Its brief to all hon. Members says that at the privatisation of Royal Ordnance, the Ministry of Defence ordered ammunition products to a value of circa £250 million per annum. That figure has now declined to less than £100 million. That is an example of the problems that defence contractors are currently facing, for which they cannot share any responsibility or blame.

My interest is in Summerfield, the rocket motors division of Royal Ordnance. It is a very large employer, employing about 360 people at a site that is largely in my constituency, although a small part of it is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor). I have frequently visited the factory, and it is extremely impressive; the work done there is of a high order. Rocket motors involve dangerous operations; incredibly advanced chemical processes are used, but it is always a joy to go to Summerfield and see the work done there.

I have always made a point of supporting bids by the company, and I recently wrote to the Government about the next generation of light armoured weapons systems. I think that a decision on that is due soon. That would bring modest but useful benefits to my constituents, and I hope that the contract goes to the right consortium.

On my visits to the company, it has always been made clear to me that foreign partnerships are inevitable for the future of the rocket motors division; that is the way the world is. The question is not if a foreign partnership should be arrived at, but how and when.

I strongly hold the view that politicians should not seek to second-guess business. Many hon. Members gave up business careers to enter politics, and we are now politicians rather than business people. We should applaud an attempt by a company to find stability in a changing world, and the world of defence procurement has changed enormously in recent years, since the end of the cold war.

My judgment is that BAE Systems is right to proceed with its proposals for Summerfield, although I appreciate that there will be a degree of unease among some people, as change is never comfortable. It plans to enter in to a joint venture with a French company, Celerg, which will make a new company twice the size of the present one. That company will be much better positioned to compete in the very difficult world that the

separate companies now face. The new company will be 50 per cent. owned by the French company SNPE, which is currently a 50 per cent. shareholder in Celerg, and the other 50 per cent. will be owned by MBDA, which is the successor company to the Matra BAe Dynamics missile company, which was formed in 1996. That highlights the bewildering rate of change.

In December 2001, the company announced its extension to include the Italian Finmeccanica missile business. The new name is MBDA. I am glad to say that all BAE Systems guided weapons business is invested in MBDA, and that BAE Systems, through its 37.5 per cent. shareholding in MBDA, enjoys a right of veto on all strategic matters affecting the company. Therefore the right balance has been struck: a bigger company and a foreign partnership has been established, but there is also still a great deal of UK control, which gives my constituents the comfort that they should look for, as those very important manufacturing and scientific jobs will be maintained at Summerfield.

To quote from a letter from Shaun Mills, a director of the rocket motors division:

"In other words, strategic decisions affecting the Rocket Motor business require the unanimous approval of all three MBDA shareholders and hence of BAE Systems. A UK subsidiary of the joint venture will be established, with a majority of directors being British nationals, and this will in effect manage the site and business at Summerfield."

I am content with those proposals. Links with MBDA are hugely important: it is the major European contractor for guided weapons systems in which BAE Systems has a shareholding of more than one third. The proposals for my constituency, at least, offer stability in a changing world. I have no complaint about what the company plans to do.

11.30 am

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) on initiating this debate on the future of Royal Ordnance Birtley. Before being elected to the House last June I was a senior official with the GMB northern region, and I have been involved over a number of years in the discussions about the site's future. I declare my membership of the GMB and draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests of the support that the GMB gave my constituency at the general election.

Although Royal Ordnance Birtley is in my hon. Friend's constituency, many of those employed there live in my constituency. The discussions about its future have been numerous and frequent, and they have led progressively to a contraction of the site and a decline in the numbers employed. I add my thanks and give credit to the trade unions, management and work force who have resisted closure and adapted to change to keep the site open.

The factory currently employs 298—a massive drop from the halcyon days when it employed upwards of 3,000. The number of people who face possible redundancy is one of the issues that I wish to cover today. Another issue is the scandalous way in which BAE Systems has dealt not just with Royal Ordnance Birtley but with Royal Ordnance as a whole since acquiring it in 1987 from a Tory Government. The third issue that I wish to raise, which is of direct concern to the Government, is the security of supply of ammunition to the armed forces if Royal Ordnance Birtley is allowed to close.

My hon. Friend mentioned the effects of unemployment on his constituency. Similar effects will be felt in North Durham if the closure is allowed to go ahead. We have had a good news story in North Durham since 1997: unemployment has fallen by 45 per cent. But unemployment remains doggedly high in some communities, including many in which people working at Royal Ordnance Birtley live. They face a bleak future if the closure is allowed to go ahead.

We are talking not only about numbers of jobs, but about types of jobs. The jobs at Royal Ordnance Birtley are skilled. Expertise has been built up over many years, and the economy of the north-east cannot afford to lose it. To close Royal Ordnance Birtley will be another hammer blow to the manufacturing sector in the region. The skills are not those of a inefficient smokestack industry, but are some of the most technically advanced in modern engineering. The loss of those vital skills to the north-east would be of great significance and would clearly be a personal tragedy for many of those who have given lifelong service.

The manufacturing and defence sector is important to the economy of the northern region. The work being carried out by the Northern Defence Initiative, with its 90-strong membership, demonstrates the vibrancy of that sector and its importance to our regional economy. Closure of Royal Ordnance Birtley would damage the confidence of the sector in the region.

I now turn to the scandal of the way in which BAE Systems has dealt with Royal Ordnance at Birtley. Its approach is one of determination to squeeze the last bit of value from Royal Ordnance with no regard at all to the loyal service of the work force or to the wider economic effects on the economy of the north-east. British Aerospace, now known as BAE Systems, acquired Royal Ordnance from the Conservative Government in 1987 at what was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon said, a knockdown price. Its strategy since that acquisition has been slowly to dismantle what was a great company.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Gentleman answer two questions? First, although I do not accept that the company was bought at a knockdown price, let us imagine that it had been bought for a higher price than that paid at privatisation. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that that would have made the company more or less likely to be making cuts now? Secondly, let us imagine that the company had stayed in public ownership. Had that happened, can he guarantee that his party's Government would still be buying the £250 million worth of ammunition that was being bought at the time of privatisation? If so, what other aspects of health and education would the Government be cutting to pay for the jobs that he describes?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is clearly expressing an idea that is now common in the Conservative party—the idea that before 1997, politics somehow did not exist. The fact that the company was sold cheaply, at £190 million, is quite clear. My hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Jones]

for Blaydon referred to the sale of Enfield, which recouped most of that investment straight away. As for the reduction in ammunition, clearly the hon. Gentleman has not realised that the peace dividend since the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union has led to a reduction in the amount of ammunition that the British armed forces, and armed forces throughout Europe, need.

Mr. Luff: Exactly. That is precisely the point.

Mr. Jones: That does not detract from the fact that the company was sold by the Conservative Government with very little regard to the future of jobs in that important sector, or to the long-term future of the arms industry in the UK.

Mr. McWilliam: May I remind my hon. Friend that after the 1987 privatisation, two Conservative defence reviews slashed our armed forces? That had to be put right by the present Government when they took office.

Mr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend. Clearly, the Conservative Opposition also have a selective memory of their attitude to defence expenditure during their time in office. We saw that recently in their attitude to the Territorial Army, which was badly slashed in the reviews that took place under the Conservative Government. Somehow, they conveniently forget about that.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman did not understand my point. Let us imagine for one second that he is correct and that £190 million was too low a price for BAE Systems to pay. For the sake of argument, let us say that BAE Systems had been required to pay £300 million or £500 million, or who knows what price. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that if it had paid a great deal more—if it had paid what he believes to be a correct market price—for what was then the royal ordnance factories, closures such as those under debate today would have been less likely to happen than if it had received what he sees as a giveaway?

Mr. Jones: I accept that the Conservative party is an apologist for BAE Systems, but it is a matter of record that Royal Ordnance was sold very cheaply. Since then we have seen the asset-stripping of a company, with no regard at all for its work force, either in Birtley or elsewhere in the UK. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) to shake his head, but I want to defend workers in the UK defence industry, not necessarily the companies that generate the profits that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues seem to want to protect at all costs.

BAE Systems' strategy since acquisition has been slowly to dismantle what was a great company, and to maximise the disposal of its assets. The list of site closures reads like a regimental battle list: Enfield 1998; Waltham Abbey 1989; Bishopton 1998—my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon referred to that—and Nottingham 2002. Chorley and Birtley are other possibilities. Those are just a few sites that Royal Ordnance has withdrawn from since its acquisition by BAE Systems in 1987. This is a sorry tale of the dismantling of a once great company into a shadow of its former self.

Who is to blame for the contraction? I wilfully admit that the arm's-length approach of the Ministry of Defence to competitive tendering has led to costs being driven down. I also admit that competition from overseas companies—usually vigorously supported by their Governments—has been a factor. Those two issues were identified in the May 1999 Select Committee report on the security of supply and the future of the royal ordnance factory at Bishopton. I accept that other factors exist, but a major influence has been how BAE Systems has handled the management of Royal Ordnance since its acquisition.

The Select Committee report states:

"At the same time, it appears to us that Royal Ordnance may well have compounded its problems by a failure adequately to invest in and to modernise Royal Ordnance's manufacturing plant *and* intellectual property. If this is so, it is particularly disappointing in view of the easy terms on which British Aerospace acquired Royal Ordnance, and the latter's guaranteed MoD work following the sale."

That is clearly true of ROF Birtley, which the work force and management say has seen little of the investment outlined in the letter that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon received from BAE Systems yesterday. The site has been starved of investment over several years, although £1.5 million in rent is paid to BAE Systems each year, so the site has been paid for many times over.

By exposing hidden costs, local management and trade unions were able to counter BAE Systems' assertion that Birtley should close on economic grounds. The proposed closure is scandalous. Birtley has sufficient orders to cover the work force until 2005, and the firm has a viable order book of work for the MOD to maintain current levels until 2010. We are not talking about a site that is uneconomic; that is why the Royal Ordnance Birtley proposal angers me.

The loyal work force at Birtley are having to deal with a BAE Systems that is determined to squeeze the last bit of value from a company that it acquired on the cheap in 1987. That strategy has left the country littered with closed former Royal Ordnance sites, and unemployment has followed in their wake.

One of BAE Systems' options, which has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon, is for production to be switched to overseas supply. Some might say that to allow that would be a disgrace. BAE Systems prides itself on its Britishness, which is why the MOD should procure equipment from it. During the past few months, I have heard the argument strongly put forward by BAE Systems and its supporters that it should be considered as a prime contractor for the new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy because it is a British company. I ask people to remember that when BAE systems is laying off workers at Royal Ordnance Birtley, and exporting those jobs abroad to countries such as South Africa.

BAE Systems acts like a chameleon: it picks and chooses when to wrap itself in Britishness. There is no clearer demonstration of that than the possible export of jobs to South Africa. I say to BAE Systems that if it wants to demonstrate its Britishness, it could secure 300 highly skilled jobs at Birtley in the north-east. The loss

of those jobs will not be lightly forgotten in the north-east. Any promises that BAE Systems makes to the north-east concerning guaranteed work on two future aircraft carrier orders must be taken with a pinch of salt, and will ring hollow to the BAE Systems workers at Royal Ordnance Birtley.

I now turn to the Government's role and the wider security implications for the United Kingdom. In June it will be the 20th anniversary of the retaking of the Falkland Islands. Birtley and the other royal ordnance plants worked flat out and with pride to produce high quality munitions for our armed forces in their time of need. That is easily forgotten, but on that 20th anniversary, it should not be.

Security of supply for the armed forces is an important issue, and was the subject of the Defence Committee report in 1999. It is universally agreed that Royal Ordnance Birtley produces high quality products, covering a range of munitions, which the armed forces take pride in using. Clearly the MOD is under pressure to get value for money, but not at all costs. It must ensure that quality and continuity of supply are guaranteed. I agree strongly with the conclusions of the 1999 Defence Committee report:

"Governments cannot, for strategic supplies, claim that their responsibility ends with the signing of legally enforceable contracts. In matters of national defence they have a duty to exercise more direct control."

I ask the Minister and the Government to take more direct control and ensure that we continue to provide high quality munitions for the British armed forces. They must also ensure that BAE Systems is not allowed to close a highly successful site at Birtley, and that people who have been loyal to the company, and to this nation in times of need, are rewarded.

11.47 am

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am delighted that the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) secured this debate. There is a tie-up; I came to this place from the north-east, and I know the plant at Blaydon well. I also know the Vickers plant—we destroyed the tanks that it built, because it was our job to examine how to stop them. The factor that connects the three plants is that one builds shell cases, another builds the explosive, they are put together in Wales and the military fires the end product. It is a British operation—British manufacturing—and it works well. That is, it did until now.

In 1986, David Greenwood of the Centre for Defence Studies in Aberdeen was asked to produce a report examining the future of the royal ordnance factories. That was before privatisation. The report, which the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union and the Transport and General Workers Union paid for, was to examine where we would be in the future. No one understood at the time—certainly not David Greenwood—that a system on which we depend for national security could be sent out of the country. I am talking about the packaging, the explosive and the means of supply—the heavy guns, which are now made in America.

The report considered the way in which PBX and other high-polymer explosives would be made. Now, the difference is between sensitive and insensitive explosives. Insensitive explosives are what the Americans build; we build sensitive explosives. If we are to maintain continuity with partners, surely we should be in a position to build the same materiel, so that it can be used by our armed forces in all theatres. Otherwise, we would be starting from the wrong basis.

Bridgwater employs about 150 people and puts about £4.5 million into the local economy. Obviously, if it shuts down, unemployment and demands on social services would increase in a manufacturing area that is slowly recovering from past changes, and it would lose the skills of a unique work force. Who nowadays teaches people to make explosives? No one. Once those people go, we will not be able to replace them. One cannot easily find explosives manufacturers. We will lose a unique work force and, once they finish, no one in this country will take over.

Why are we in that position? Let us consider the Bridgwater plant. It is not new, as it was built in 1939. Why was it built? We wanted continuity of munitions supply, in case of war. There was a war. Since then, Bridgwater has made explosives of the highest grade, but it has not done so on a fair or level playing field. It is not its own profit centre. It has always been part of an organisation. It has been making a small loss, because costs there cannot be broken down to show the company's true position. That would not be a problem if the plant made only the explosive, but that does not happen. British Aerospace will not allow Bridgwater to be its own profit centre, and it has to absorb the costs of operational inefficiency. The plant, which has been in use for 60 years—a very long time—could be renewed and made very efficient.

If one were inclined to negotiate with British Aerospace for continuity of supply, why not consider a five-year dispensation? Why not set up a joint fund to diversify the factory's products and make civilian explosives and other propellants that could be sold to other countries? The hon. Member for Blaydon also mentioned responsibility to buy the products.

We are also discussing the way in which Royal Ordnance has changed. The point made by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) about the figure of £250 million at privatisation is valid; it is now about £100 million. To an extent, that is understandable because, since privatisation, we have experienced the fall of the Warsaw pact, the total disappearance of our traditional enemies and the changes, which we have been delighted to see, in Northern Ireland. We also buy more equipment from overseas—for example, the Milan anti-tank missile and other longer range artillery such as the AS90—so I understand that the value has decreased, but that does not explain the situation during the Gulf war.

As the hon. Member for Blaydon said, we could not buy ammunition then because people disagreed with what we were doing. If our explosives manufacturing industry went to America and a Democratic President decided that he did not like something that was happening in Britain—perhaps, God forbid, Northern Ireland going back to how it was—he might refuse to supply us with ammunition.

In a written question, I asked the Minister what will happen when the 2001 Security Assistance Act, which is going through Congress, becomes law in America. He

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

replied that he does not expect it to make any difference, as it does not deal with exports. I cannot believe that a nation—any nation, of any persuasion—would not question exports to a country with which it does not agree. One cannot expect a nation simply to say, "We'll send the stuff, but we don't agree with what you're doing."

If we are to make propellant overseas, we should remember that it is the most fundamental component. We may be able to build the shell case, but we may not get the propellant if we do not have the work force to make it. We could end up with no bombs, shells or bullets. What would we go to war with—the pikes in the museum at the Tower of London? We could do little else.

There is concern at Bridgwater. Royal Ordnance at the site has been in negotiations at the highest level with Jack Dromey of the Transport and General Workers Union to resolve the situation. We are discussing a unique work force in a unique organisation, and we cannot replace them. There is something fundamentally wrong if Jack Dromey cannot get the hearing that he requires to defend a work force who may disappear and to keep them together to build propellant.

Mr. McWilliam: I may be able to assist the hon. Gentleman. BAE Systems has acquired a propellant and explosive manufacturing company in the United States of America, which, of course, is covered by American law, not British. Therefore, his Democratic President scenario could easily come to pass.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I was just coming to the plant in Tennessee. I thought that we might build to a crescendo, Mrs. Roe, as that always makes debates much easier and more fun.

I received a copy of a letter that Lord Bach sent to a Member of this place on 2 March, saying that the Ministry of Defence entered a framework partnership agreement that came into force on 1 April 2000. The agreement

"covers the design, manufacture, supply and . . . life support of ordnance and ammunition sub-systems. Gainshare is one aspect of the Agreement".

In other words, the MOD will make savings, which would be passed on. However, the letter continues:

"Security of Supply and Value for Money are the key criteria that underpin the procurement of safe and reliable ammunition. On the matter of the alleged refusal of Belgium to supply ammunition for the Falklands conflict, this incident, in fact, occurred during the Gulf War."

In one letter, therefore, the Government tell us that the new arrangement is cheaper, but that they cannot get the supply right. Something is fundamentally wrong with that.

Let me deal with the Tennessee plant. Some $3.7 billion has been spent and 22,000 people are employed on the biggest explosives site in the world, which covers 6,000 acres at Holstein, Tennessee. There is a joint venture between BAE Systems North America and the American military to produce insensitive ammunition. What have they got? Four months ago, they were awarded nearly $12 million to operate and maintain the Holstein ammunition plant and to undertake scope work for future contracts that they will be allowed to seek around the world.

The contract, which has a title value of $163 million and lasts 25 years, is for building high-grade explosives for anyone who wants to buy them, such as the MOD. Some 25,000 people in the area now benefit from changes that this country could lose out on. Some 113 British companies have set up in the United States to supply us with the ordnance that we require—shell cases, propellant and the finished article—and which they will ship over here to our own people. I worry about Democratic Presidents.

The first $88 million of the contract is intended to be used over the next five years to produce RDX and HMX explosive—the very stuff that Bridgwater makes to fill the shelves in Birtley and which is finished in Wales and sent to the military. How on earth can we achieve continuity and a guarantee of supply, given the situation that may arise in the near future?

My predecessor, Lord King of Bridgwater, was Secretary of State for Defence during the Gulf war, and he could not get the explosive that was required because we were not allowed to have it. Continuity of supply is by far the most important consideration. The work force at Bridgwater make a unique product. If that source disappears, where will we get it from? Surely, the prime responsibility of any Member of Parliament and of any Government, whatever their political persuasion, is the defence of the nation. That must be this Government's overriding priority.

12 noon

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate on this important issue, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) on giving us the opportunity to debate a wide range of topics, including, due to the ingenious interventions of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), the history of the privatisation of Royal Ordnance, which I shall not touch on.

The primary issues that we have discussed are the constituency implications for many hon. Members of the reorganisation of Royal Ordnance and the related national policy issues highlighted in the fifth report of the Defence Committee, 1998-99 Session, to which many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger), have referred. I do not intend to talk about the impact of the reorganisation of Royal Ordnance on constituencies, not only because it does not affect—

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: What about the Hellfire rocket, which will be put on the helicopters built in the hon. Gentleman's constituency?

Mr. Laws: The hon. Gentleman should contain himself, because I shall come to those issues in a moment.

I do not intend to spend my time second-guessing the commercial decisions made by the company that we are discussing. Hon. Members have commented on the fact that the Ministry of Defence ammunition budget has diminished by about 60 per cent. since 1987, from £250 million a year to nearer £100 million a year. In

addition, defence expenditure in all the major defence expenditure countries has fallen by about a third, so the company has had to deal with an extremely difficult commercial background. In the light of that, reduced employment in that part of the military sector is inevitable, as has been the case in most other parts of the defence industry.

The issue that I most want to touch on—the national interest and the security of supply of key defence equipment—has been discussed by many hon. Members, most recently the hon. Member for Bridgwater. It was also raised by the Defence Committee in 1998-99, because the Royal Ordnance reorganisation involves outsourcing supply to other countries. That is an issue of great importance, which the Government need to consider and respond to. It is inevitable that any company operating in a commercial environment will have to make judgments about its commercial interests and the interests of its shareholders. Such companies do not necessarily have to consider issues relating to security of supply, which are national policy concerns, but the Government most certainly do. That matter was highlighted by the Defence Committee.

Mr. Kevan Jones: I take the point about the commercial world in which BAE Systems finds itself, but does not the hon. Gentleman accept that the partnership agreement has provided the long-term stability that BAE Systems has been asking for? That was certainly referred to in the Select Committee report. The company has not invested in sites, but has callously considered sites in terms of their value. It has asset stripped where necessary, has not taken a long-term view and pays no regard to the long-term security of supply of the British armed forces.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. Anything that the Ministry of Defence can do to secure greater certainty about its procurement activities should be welcomed. Such certainty helps small companies, including some major manufacturers in my constituency. I remain more nervous about second-guessing in the manner suggested by the hon. Gentleman, although I understand why he advocates it—the matter is extremely important to him and his constituents.

In terms of the commercial activities that such companies engage in and the decisions that they make, it is easy for hon. Members to argue that particular companies have under-invested in certain areas, but we do not always have easy access to the information required to make such commercial judgments. In this debate, I am more concerned about national policy issues relating to security of supply.

In that regard, it is important to consider ammunition procurement. Fortunately, conflicts in the years ahead are unlikely to last as long as those of the previous century, which continued for many years—at least, I hope that that is the case. So, in terms of procurement and security of supply, we should concern ourselves not so much with large items such as aircraft carriers and whether they can be rebuilt or procured during a conflict, but with our ability to get our hands on ammunition speedily in conflicts that often involve its rapid use.

The Government's response to the Select Committee's 1999 report dismisses to some extent the Committee's concerns about the speed of ammunition use in conflicts such as the Falklands and Gulf wars. However, as is often the case with pronouncements made by Governments of all parties, what is significant in their response is what is missing from it. Specifically, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I have gained very little in 31 years in this House, but I do have the title Deputy Speaker for sittings in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Laws: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a new Member, my ignorance is showing.

The Government's response referred to security of ammunition supply during the Falklands war and said that there was sufficient ammunition for the land forces. However, they made no mention of the air or naval forces. Many of us recall the difficulties that British forces had in procuring and replacing items such as the Sidewinder missile, which was used a lot and was important in the Falklands. Although stocks of such expensive weaponry are necessarily kept low, because of the cost of holding them, they can be used very rapidly in certain types of conflict. I hope that the Government consider those issues of security of supply.

The hon. Member for Bridgwater referred to Governments making decisions about which wars they approved of or otherwise. He is concerned about Democratic US Presidents making such decisions, but I am just as concerned about Republican Presidents. First, there is the issue of the countries on which we rely for the supply of ammunition deciding that they support or do not support conflicts in which we are involved. Secondly, there is the issue of the priority that they would give us in a more broad-based conflict in which we may be merely one of several countries that they supply with ammunition.

Other hon. Members have touched on the security of classified information. In the Falklands war, there was a strong incentive for our opponents in Argentina to get hold of information on the weaponry that we were using. The same was true for us with respect to the Exocet missiles being used by the Argentinians. We need to be sure that such classified information can be protected, so that in a conflict situation the countries with which we are at war cannot get sensitive and important information about the weaponry that we are using from a third country.

There are several issues that the Minister must address when he wraps up that relate specifically to security of supply. First, what are the key procurement national interests? Which weapons must we either make for ourselves or, if they are produced abroad, stock in large numbers, because of their sensitivity in particular conflicts? Secondly, what are the Government doing to ensure that ammunition stocks are appropriate to take us through serious conflicts? In their response to the Select Committee's 1999 report, and privately, the Government acknowledged that there was a shortfall in artillery shell stocks. Have such deficiencies been dealt with? What security of supply guarantees can the Government secure from those countries that

[Mr. Laws]

manufacture key defence items such as ammunition? Will any letters of intent that the Government are able to establish with those countries involve guarantee of supply rather than softer words saying only that they will not hinder the supply of such items?

Those are key national policy concerns that the Government must address. I hope that the Minister addresses them and deals with the legitimate constituency concerns raised during a debate that the hon. Member for Blaydon was right to seek.

12.11 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) on securing an extremely important debate. It is significant not only for hon. Members on both sides of the House who, as the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) said, have important constituency concerns and are not unreasonably worried about job losses, but, perhaps more so, for the strategic national standpoint. The truth of the matter is that we are facing what could be the end of ammunition manufacturing in the United Kingdom.

Hon. Members have referred to the helpful briefing paper sent to us yesterday by BAE Systems. In a truly Sir Humphrey-ish way, it seeks to avoid being straightforward about what is planned; it is full of management speak:

"Over the past two years RO Defence has been integrating these two businesses and determining a forward strategy for consolidation and growth . . . That volume has now declined to an annual order value of less than £100 m. We consider this to be a permanent market adjustment and this downturn in volume production has greatly impacted on the utilisation of our production capacity."

That means that if the Government buy less ammunition, the company will need fewer factories, but I wish that it would say so rather than use such obfuscation in an attempt to persuade trade unions and others that it will somehow keep the factories open.

The notion has been expressed that privatisation may be responsible for the royal ordnance factory closures that we face. If so, two things would have to have happened. First, we would still be producing as much ammunition as was required at the time of privatisation—it was then worth £250 million a year, but is now worth only £100 million a year. It will be interesting to hear whether the Minister chooses to blame privatisation for that. He will also have to guarantee that the Government would still be spending £250 million today. Even if the company had not been privatised, however, they would presumably still have had to consider closing the factories as a result of reduced production.

Secondly, it has been said that the business was sold at a cut price, and that that price led to the factory closures. That is entirely incorrect. As I told the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), had the price been higher, British Aerospace would have had to make even more reductions, more closures and more job losses to pay off the extra price that was paid. The lower the price, the better in respect of subsequent job losses. I do not accept that what BAE Systems is facing has anything to do with its privatisation.

Mr. Luff: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the briefing tells us that the company has made losses for many years and that it does not plan to return to profit before interest and tax before 2004? The impression of a greedy company asset stripping is way off the mark.

Mr. Gray: That is indeed the case. However, the hon. Member for Yeovil was right to say that we should not enter into company's commercial difficulties. We should lay to rest the notion that privatisation has somehow led to the appalling closures at Bishopton and elsewhere—and, if we read between the lines of BAE Systems' briefing, the other closures that the company faces. For instance, the hon. Member for Blaydon seems to think that Birtley might be saved, but BAE Systems says that the

"initial findings of the working group at Birtley are now available and the Company is actively considering alternative proposals introduced by the trade union team."

That means that it would like to blame the trade unions. The briefing continues:

"Two options seem to be emerging, the first would involve the closure of the site and the second would involve a reduction of 50 per cent. of the employees".

I find it hard to believe that the trade unions are proposing and are happy with either the closure of the site or a 50 per cent. reduction in the work force.

Mr. McWilliam: Briefly, the figures used by the company include more than £1 million in alleged annual rent, offset against the costs that would affect profitability. Since the site was acquired for nothing and its commercial value is zero—the company tried to sell the lot last year, but could not—why is it charging that rent?

Mr. Gray: That, of course, is a fair point, but I am certain that the trade unions would not have been content with the notion that the operation might close, which is what BAE Systems appears to suggest. Reading between the lines, the BAE Systems briefing indicates that the trade unions have a plan— *[Interruption]*. It is here. British Aerospace suggests that the trade unions came up with the plan that would result either in closure or in the reduction of the work force by 50 per cent. The hon. Member for Blaydon might be right in saying that they did not do so; I am ready to accept that, as it would be an extraordinary trade union that came up with such a plan. I do not suggest that the unions want that to happen, but I am saying that BAE Systems is trying to suggest that they are happy with it. However, plainly they are not. I spoke to some today, so the hon. Gentleman and I must not cross swords over the matter.

Companies across the nation face closure. The Chorley factory is another example and the Summerfield rocket motor business, which is becoming part of an Anglo-French joint venture, might be another, depending on whether the French decide to keep it in the UK. Those, the Minister might argue, are matters for the Department of Trade and Industry—jobs and the economy concern the DTI, not him. However, I agree with a number of hon. Members who

have spoken that the Minister bears a direct personal responsibility, because he is the prime customer of the royal ordnance factory. He cannot wash his hands completely of the matter.

I want to put to the Minister four simple questions, which he might wish to answer when he winds up the debate. First, does he believe that indigenous ammunition manufacturing is a strategic capability? Would he be content, for example, to see all ammunition manufacturing disappear from within our shores? If not, how much would he be prepared to lose before he pressed the panic button?

Secondly, can the Minister foresee any circumstances in which Her Majesty's Government should subsidise domestic producers for strategic reasons or should all contracts be awarded on a purely competitive basis?

Thirdly, what strategic safeguard should be built into contracts with overseas suppliers? Can the Minister imagine surges of demand in which an overseas supplier might look after its home Government's demands ahead of ours? In the Belgian example, of which we heard earlier, or one in which a German or South African Government happened not to agree with a war in which we were engaged, would those countries' manufacturers decline to give us the ammunition that we needed?

Fourthly, how large should war stocks of ammunition in this country be? Should the Government pay a premium to maintain a surge capability? Does the Minister accept that increasing reliance on overseas ammunition suppliers ought logically to mean a proportionate increase in war stocks held within these shores? He has so far declined to talk about war stocks and surge stocks. Are surge stocks held in the UK increasing? What action has he taken on the matter?

Since the Government came to power, manufacturing industry has declined—450,000 manufacturing jobs have been affected by recession, partly, no doubt, because of the unsustainable general defence cuts that the Government have introduced and partly because of the fall in the purchase of ammunition from £250 million to £100 million—and, from our side of the Chamber, it seems that there are signs that Royal Ordnance plc is no longer a viable company due to increasingly worrying numbers of factory closures, job losses and contracts placed overseas. Apart from the local consequences for many parts of Britain, there is a real risk of deep and lasting damage being done to our national defence capabilities when our global defence ambitions are becoming ever larger.

Labour Members will not like it, but the Prime Minister returned home this week after apparently agreeing with the President of the United States that we would take an active military interest in Iraq. That is the next thing coming our way. Our global defence ambitions are ever larger, but our ability to meet them is ever more undermined. Our increasing inability to supply our own ammunition for our own guns is symptomatic of a general malaise and deeply worrying for the defence of the realm.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) on securing the debate. I listened with interest to the points that he and other hon. Members made about the future of facilities owned and operated by Royal Ordnance Defence plc, and I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to set out the facts, and the Government's position. However, I must point out that although I speak on such matters in this House, I am not the Minister for Defence Procurement.

I shall briefly put the status of the factories into historical perspective. After 400 years in Government ownership, the royal ordnance factories were passed into private hands in April 1985, and were taken over by British Aerospace in 1987. After further mergers, the business unit became what is now Royal Ordnance Defence. That was, and remains, a private company wholly owned by BAE Systems. It is important to remember that Her Majesty's Government have no financial stake in the company, and that the factories and facilities mentioned today have not been in Government hands for the past 15 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Minister to speak up a little. I can see that Members all around the Room are finding it difficult to hear.

Dr. Moonie: I do not think that that is usually a problem when I am speaking, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

During those 15 years, and especially since the ending of the cold war, there has been a sharp decline in the worldwide demand for defence equipment, and it is against that background that Royal Ordnance Defence has operated. To put that into perspective, at the time of the takeover in 1987, Royal Ordnance received orders for ammunition from the Ministry of Defence to the value of about £250 million a year. The average value is now down to probably slightly less than £100 million. It is the view of the industry generally that the adjustment is permanent, especially in the munitions sector.

Royal Ordnance Defence is thus competing in a fiercely competitive international market for a shrinking amount of business. Like any other commercial company that competes in world markets, it has had to take the hard decisions necessary to optimise its manufacturing capacity and remain viable and competitive in the sector. The company simply cannot afford excess capacity and overheads that the market does not justify. I emphasise again that the hard commercial reality applies to all private enterprises, not to Royal Ordnance Defence alone. It is against that background that the company has embarked on its latest rationalisation plan.

The reviews undertaken of factories at Chorley, Birtley and Bridgwater are part of the process that began in 1987. At that time, Royal Ordnance business was on 15 sites and employed about 16,000 people. It was clear that the prevailing market could not bear that capacity. Since then several site closures and other rationalisations have occurred. Those actions, and other more recent consolidation and closures implemented at Blackburn, Bishopton, Featherstone and Nottingham, have resulted in a reduction of about 50 per cent. in overhead costs.

When we buy equipment from Royal Ordnance, the Ministry of Defence spends taxpayers' money. We have no interest in using those scarce funds to support facilities that are not needed by the private sector to deliver the requirements of the Department.

[Dr. Moonie]

It is useful to dwell on the subject of the factory at Bishopton for a moment. In 1998, Royal Ordnance failed to win the contract to supply the new propelling modular charge system for the shell for the AS90. The contract was awarded to an overseas company on technical and cost grounds, and Royal Ordnance took the commercial decision to close its propellant factory at Bishopton because it was no longer viable. The Ministry of Defence took the view that it would have had to pay a significant premium to keep the Bishopton factory open, and that such a premium would have supported the factory for only about another five years. It was concluded—I believe correctly—that such a premium would not secure value for money for the taxpayer.

The Defence Committee's inquiry has been mentioned. Verbal evidence was given on the matter in 1999, and the Committee was in general satisfied that the decision to place an order for the modular charge system contract with Somchem was justified on technical and value-for-money grounds. The Committee also examined the security of supply of propellant following the closure of Bishopton, and noted that sources were available in other allied nations. I understand that Royal Ordnance has secured alternative supplies of propellant in Germany. Much has been made of the so-called problems of supply during both the Falklands and Gulf wars. On neither occasion did the Government of the day run out of supplies of any form of ammunition. The resupply from Belgium rightly posed a problem for what was a coalition Government, and the Government decided to secure supplies from elsewhere—mainly from Holland—to provide back-up.

It is inevitable that when munitions are consumed—especially the larger, more expensive ones—there may be problems in obtaining full supplies, but the idea of our fighting a large-scale conflict on our own is risible in military terms nowadays. It will not happen. When we are involved in a conflict, we are involved jointly with allies such as the United States of America, which will be able to resupply us with some key larger munitions that would be consumed in certain circumstances.

In general, for strategic reasons we have maintained very large stocks of the ammunitions that we need—enough to fight a serious conflict. The military, not ministerial, orthodoxy is that we would have ample notice of a major conflict, so we could build up stocks still further. We cannot envisage a situation in which we would be fighting with less than six months' notice. That is just not the way of the world.

Mr. Gray: Is the Minister therefore now building up stocks for the Iraq conflict?

Dr. Moonie: I will not be lured into answering that question.

Royal Ordnance has informed us that it intends to invest heavily in its plant at Glascoed, and that it is retaining its expertise in the crucial areas of propellant charge design at Bishopton, ordnance engineering design at Leicester and small arms ammunition design and manufacture at Radway Green, near Crewe. There is no doubt that the company possesses and retains world class research and development personnel and facilities. It also has a growing reputation overseas; indeed, it operates a United States Government-owned high explosives facility in Texas. The MOD has no reason to believe that Royal Ordnance Defence will exit the business of providing munitions for the UK armed forces.

However, it would be wrong to pretend that the company does not have some hard decisions to make. The partnering agreement that we have put in place is not intended or designed to protect the company from prevailing market forces. As I stated previously, the world market for munitions continues to shrink, and the Department has been informed by Royal Ordnance that it is undertaking another review of its facilities. It seems that its record in implementing hard decisions shows that it is taking its responsibilities seriously. It has a consultation process, and it is willing to listen to counter-proposals. It has demonstrated that it is not just closing factories without listening to the people in the workplace.

The need for explosives and munitions has fallen. Rationalisation is inevitable. Coming from a similar area of manufacturing and military contact in the east of Scotland, where we have lost our traditional industry of mining and much of our military industry that was based on the dockyards, I assure hon. Members that I have great sympathy for the points that have been made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon spoke about the Royal Ordnance Defence factory at Birtley. He will know that the factory manufactures metal components for most of the company's munitions, including shot, shell and cartridge cases. It still forges and machines the shell cases on site and uses its own machine shop. The resultant components are sent elsewhere for filling with explosives and assembly. Although some doubt has been expressed, we understand that the trade unions have been involved with the review and have come up with a proposal whereby the forging may be carried out elsewhere, but the machine shop work will be retained, although with fewer workers than at present. That is still being assessed by the company, and the outcome will be announced later this month.

During our debate we have also discussed the factory at Bridgwater, which manufactures high explosives. It has been running at a loss for several years because of a lack of demand for its products. We are now committed to the introduction of insensitive munitions, which are less likely to detonate in an uncontrolled or unexpected way. In response to that policy, the company is proposing to introduce the appropriate technology based at its Glascoed plant. That in turn could undermine the case for the retention of Bridgwater.

We continue to keep ourselves closely informed about Royal Ordnance Defence's plans for the future. We are obliged to ensure security of supply for our munitions. That involves maintaining a large stock and being satisfied that our contracts are handled in such a way that companies can resupply us when we need them to. I regret that manufacturing and other supply facilities might go abroad—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret that we have run out of time. However important the debate is, we must move on to the next subject.

Beer Orders

12.30 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The Government have repeatedly expressed their commitment to a competitive business society, and I am puzzled by the idea that revoking the beer orders will achieve their aim. In case the Minister should misunderstand me, I am not in favour of regulation for regulation's sake, but those regulations have a purpose, which is to make the economy stronger. The beer orders served, and still serve, an important purpose and I advocate their retention.

The beer orders followed the publication of a Monopoly and Mergers Commission report in 1989, which said in no uncertain terms that the brewing industry was highly uncompetitive and involved in a complex monopoly. The commission was satisfied that action needed to be taken, and perhaps if I explain why that was, my objections to the orders' revocation will be clearer. When it considered the business practices of the large brewing companies, it was alarmed to the extent that it averted integration in the industry. It noted that brewing companies not only owned the majority of pubs, but tied others through business loans.

Brewers compelled their tenants and loan recipients to select drinks from their range of supplies. They were also found guilty of imposing restrictive covenants on pubs when they were sold, with the result that future owners were forced to buy from the former owner's brewery. Smaller independent brewers and wholesalers found it difficult to break into the market. Since the brewers often refused to publish their retail prices, wholesalers could not even hope to compete and offer a competitive service. The result was high prices and less choice for customers.

What impact have the beer orders had? They have not necessarily been an unqualified success. Independent wholesalers are still small and brewing companies continue to control a large share of the market, but beer orders have removed some of the most blatant anti-competitive forces and have granted consumers more purchasing power and choice. However, I accept that the commission would be disappointed by the lack of progress since 1989.

That lack of complete success does not mean that the beer orders should be revoked. It is true that the brewing industry has changed, and perhaps not for the better. There were six major brewing companies in 1989, but there are now only four. Those companies have been able to dominate the market with greater advertising power that strengthens pre-existing brands. How can the smaller micro-breweries compete against that? Such brewers have grown in recent years, and not only in the United Kingdom. I took a trip to the United States a few years ago, and was amazed by the breadth and depth of its micro-brewing industry.

Brewers have been forced to sell their pubs, many of which are now owned by large retail chains that have a countervailing buying power to the brewers. However, I am not sure that that new trend necessarily translates into greater competition and survival chances for the smaller brewers, wholesalers and free houses. I am not the only one who is troubled by that development. When the Office of Fair Trading was asked to report on the beer orders two years ago, it stated that it was

"concerned that the increasing concentration in the market at both brewing and retailing levels may, in the longer term, lead to competition being less intense through the demise of independent wholesaling and thence smaller brewers and truly independent free houses".

I regret that the Minister did not appear to have considered that before reaching her judgment that it was time to reject the beer orders.

I am not opposed to modifying the beer orders to reflect new realities, and I know that some medium-sized brewers are worried and want them to be abolished. However, their worries can be taken into account in a review of the beer orders, and we do not have to go as far as revoking them. The complete removal of the orders could make a bad situation worse, and would fundamentally change the nature of our nation's pubs. We always hear tourists—especially Americans—saying how nice our pubs are, and how they are unlike their bars. We should cherish that as part of our English tradition.

As I mentioned, the Government asked the Office of Fair Trading to review the beer orders, and its findings were published in 2000. It concluded that certain aspects of them were outdated and unnecessary, but equally concluded that other aspects were still needed. It favoured a requirement for brewers to be compelled to publish prices and to allow beer to be resold to support independent brewers and wholesalers. It also advocated that loan-tie agreements should continue to be forbidden. Conversely, it did not support keeping the guest beer provision. I considered that to be a step too far, and I was pleased when the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), decided to support the retention of the guest beer provision, among others. He said:

"The brewing industry has undergone major changes since the Beers Orders were first introduced, but the guest beer rules still help to promote choice and competition—benefiting small brewers, publicans, and their customers."

It is a shame that the Minister has decided to cast those fine words aside quite indiscriminately.

Earlier this year, the Minister said that the Government intended to revoke the beer orders in their entirety. She said:

"The former situation where brewers were able to prevent proper competition between pubs and restrict consumer choice has changed radically."

It is puzzling how she reached such a conclusion, and how she did so against the findings of the Office of Fair Trading and the former Secretary of State is a veritable mystery. Will she explain why she disregarded those thoughts? I realise that the Government have a reputation for not listening to the wider public, but I am surprised that they ignore the findings of their own people and Departments.

Revoking the beer orders will allow brewers to resume their anti-competitive activities. I disagree with the part of the Office of Fair Trading report that assumed that big brewers would not start buying up pubs again. In an industry in which mergers occur all the time, it is easy to

[Richard Younger-Ross]

imagine one of the big brewers buying one of the large pub chains. There are rumours in the industry about the likes of Scottish & Newcastle bidding for several pub chains.

If the beer orders were revoked, brewers would no longer have to publish wholesale price lists, and the Minister would presumably turn a blind eye when brewers refused to sell individual brands of beer for resale to independent wholesalers. Perhaps more importantly, however, revoking the guest beer provision would allow the brewers to resume their former habit of buying up pubs and tying them to their products. Retail pub chains, whose dominant position in the market is already a cause for concern, might be able to survive that due to their buying power, but what about smaller pub chains and free houses? Any protection that they have would be removed overnight. I fear that that would result in the closure of hundreds of small pubs, especially in rural areas where they already struggle to survive.

The Campaign for Real Ale estimates that 20 pubs close each week. Mike Benner, the head of campaigns and communications for CAMRA, said:

"The revocation of the Beer Orders will send shock waves through the industry as there will be nothing to stop large brewers and pub chains trying to tie up huge chunks of the market restricting access to smaller brewers and smashing consumer choice."

There are many rural pubs in my constituency. I know that the Minister is familiar with Teignbridge and, had she had the opportunity to visit many of those establishments, she would work to ensure their survival. I do not expect them all to survive. I had a long conversation with John Lawton, who runs a small brewery called Teignworthy in Newton Abbot. He is distressed at the revocation of the beer orders. He makes approximately 1,500 barrels a year of an excellent local beer and believes that that will be cut and cut. His small survivable business will end up as a hobby brewery when all he wants is an opportunity to expand. That is the direction in which we ought to move.

I strongly urge the Minister to reconsider the following questions. How will revoking the beer orders enable smaller, regional and independent brewers to access the market on a competitive basis? How will removing the guest provision give consumers more choice? How will new businesses be able to enter the market? How can she ensure that anti-competitive habits—which have been destroyed—will not resurface? The proposals seem akin to the farmer who concludes that, since there have been few deaths recently, it is safe to let the fox back into the hen-house.

A more sensible policy would be to exercise the strongest vigilance over anti-competitive forces and not give them a chance to flourish. Instead of waiting for the fox to attack, we should strengthen our levels of protection. If we fail to exercise vigilance, in a few years' time the big brewers and retail chains will dominate the market. That would kill off the small pubs, which have flourished and we have all enjoyed over recent years. We will lose much local character.

Most importantly, the customer—whom the Minister is attempting to defend—will pay more for less choice. If the Minister responsible for competition, consumers and markets continues with such detrimental policies, she will become the Minister responsible for monopolies, reduced choice and less competition.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I am delighted that we are having a debate on this subject and I congratulate the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) on securing it. I can sort out his puzzlement quite easily. I emphasise at the outset that the beer orders are no longer relevant to today's industry. We are simply getting rid of unnecessary legislation. I am sure that he agrees that we should have legislation only where strictly necessary.

The beer orders were radical and necessary in their time, but that was in 1989, when the landscape in the brewing and pubs industry was completely different. The orders sought to increase competition in the beer trade and widen consumer choice using several methods, but mainly by attacking the vertical integration in the six major United Kingdom brewers of the time. Those brewers, which all owned large numbers of tied estates, were compelled to sell off half of those held in excess of 2,000. The effect was that free trade expanded rapidly and soon overtook the tied trade in size. The other main provision of the beer orders was the famous guest beer provision, to which I will return.

As long ago as 1986, Lord Borrie, then Director General of Fair Trading, asked the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to investigate the possibility of a monopoly in the supply of beer for retail sale on licensed premises in the United Kingdom. The structure of the brewing industry then was completely different from that now. It was dominated by six major brewers—Allied, Bass, Grand Metropolitan, Courage, Scottish & Newcastle, and Whitbread—which between them owned three quarters of all tied public houses. The retail pub chains that populate our high streets today had not even been thought of in 1986. I shall discuss the development of retail pub companies later.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report to which the hon. Gentleman referred described the major breweries' stranglehold over the majority of pubs in the country—not only tied pubs, but half the so-called free houses, which through low-interest loans or so-called loan-tie agreements, were restricted to selling exclusively its brewer owner's beer and even the owner's own brands of cider and soft drinks. Consumer choice was severely limited, and independent producers and wholesalers were denied access to thousands of retail outlets. As a result, both wholesale and retail prices were higher than they needed to be.

The Government's response to the MMC report's recommendations formed the beer orders, of which there were two: the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order 1989, and the Supply of Beer (Loan Ties, Licensed Premises and Wholesale Prices) Order 1989. The Government decided to require brewers that owned more than 2,000 pubs to release from the tie by November 1992 half the surplus over 2,000, thus creating some 11,000 more free houses. Moreover, all national brewers had to allow their publicans complete freedom to buy wines, spirits, soft drinks and so forth from any source and to sell at least one draught cask-

conditioned guest beer. The tied estate order was amended in 1997 to extend the guest beer provision to include one bottle-conditioned guest beer.

It is worth lingering on the guest beer provision because it is probably the only provision in the beer orders to have become firmly lodged in the beer drinker's consciousness. It is important to consider it in context. It was one element in two statutory instruments whose overall impact was to widen the free trade by greatly increasing the number of retail outlets not tied to a brewer. They reduced the number of pubs controlled by the largest brewers, whether managed or tenanted. In the case of the tenanted variety, the guest beer provision further weakened the tie by empowering the publican to retail an additional beer from outside sources. That initiative conferred a new, legally defined right on a particular category of publican. The main gainers were regional brewers and, to some extent, independents and micro-brewers, which for the first time could offer their cask beers for sale in the large brewers' tied estates. The potential market for their products was, therefore, considerably widened.

It is also interesting to note that, beyond the strict legal provision that required large brewers to permit their tied tenants to purchase and sell a guest beer, the wider concept of offering a guest beer has been taken up voluntarily—I emphasise voluntarily—in other parts of the industry, by, for example, regional brewers and retail pub companies. Following last year's sale of Whitbread's remaining tied tenanted pubs, hardly any pubs now have formal guest beer rights as defined in the beer orders, and virtually all guest beers on offer in British pubs are offered voluntarily. I suspect that that is why the general concept of guest beers is so firmly entrenched in the beer-drinking public's collective mind.

I return briefly to the opportunities that the guest beer provision in the beer orders offered independent and micro-brewers in 1989. It is worth noting that they mostly under-performed in the following decade. Many independent brewers—such famous names as Boddingtons, Greenall's, Eldridge Pope and Morland's—withdrew from brewing. By contrast, micro-brewers have become more numerous. They have a high start-up and failure rate, and their collective market share has only ever been tiny. I announced on 19 February that the Government are keen to enhance the contribution made by the UK's small brewing industry to the diversity and competitiveness of the beer market.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the 2001 Budget that he was minded to introduce reduced rates of duty on beer produced by smaller brewers. In his pre-Budget report of 2001, he announced that he would consider the scope for introducing such a scheme in close consultation with the brewing industry, and he will announce his decision in the Budget.

The Director General of Fair Trading's review of 2000 was long overdue, as it had been clear for some time that the market had changed dramatically. There have been considerable structural changes in both the brewing and pub retailing sectors since the beer orders. There have been a number of significant mergers among brewers. Retail pub chains have developed and now own over a third of the UK's pubs, offering countervailing buying power to the national brewers. The director general consulted widely, with the aim of establishing the appropriate level of regulation. He found that the overall volume of beer that is supplied to the UK market has declined since 1989. The declining market, coupled with the rise of the retail pub chains, has forced the consolidation of both larger brewers and regional and local brewers. Apart from micro-brewing, entry into UK brewing has been limited, and there continue to be significant barriers to entry or expansion.

However, the most significant changes to competition in the beer market during the 1990s have occurred at the level of the retail on-trade. The structure of retail ownership has changed dramatically following the implementation of the beer orders and the subsequent emergence of the retail pub chains. At the same time, the retail on-trade market has become significantly more differentiated, with pubs increasingly competing alongside clubs, bars and, to some degree, restaurants.

Retail competition has been manifest in higher levels of capital expenditure on amenity and greater service provision. At the same time, with the emergence of low-priced retail pub chains, consumers have been given a greater choice of different price-amenity combinations. Therefore, against the background of the need to keep competition healthy in such an important market, it is perhaps not surprising that the director general concluded that the beer orders were complex and that there were many ways of amending them. I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that healthy competition and consumers getting a good deal go very much hand in hand.

The director general decided that the industry was not suited to regulation by the beer orders as they stood. He therefore recommended—as the hon. Gentleman said—that all the provisions of the orders should be revoked except for three specific provisions of the loan ties order, which should be retained to minimise foreclosure of the market to competing brewers and to maintain the position of independent wholesalers and free trade pubs. The three provisions were those dealing with loan-tie agreements, the publication of wholesale prices and the refusal to supply beer for resale.

As the hon. Gentleman has remarked, on 1 December 2000, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), announced that he was minded to accept all the director general's recommendations but wished to retain the guest beer provision and the rules preventing brewers from imposing conditions when selling a pub so that it could not remain a pub. He made his announcement on the basis that the director general's report—this is where I can solve the hon. Gentleman's puzzlement—noted that some 1,700 Whitbread pubs still had formal guest beer rights under the beer orders. My right hon. Friend rightly wished to preserve the consumer choice which such rights bestowed. However, soon after his announcement, Whitbread sold those pubs, leaving scarcely any others with formal guest beer rights. That put a completely different complexion on the matter.

Richard Younger-Ross: Would Whitbread have sold those pubs if the guest beer provision had not been in force?

Miss Johnson: I cannot speculate on that question; as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is impossible to give an

[Miss Johnson]

answer to that. However, the key point is whether there is a continuing need for the orders, as we do not believe in regulation where there is no need for it. As I said, the sale of those pubs put a completely different complexion on the matter. It made sense to look afresh at the director general's report. In the light of the Whitbread development, there was little or no point in retaining the guest beer provision.

More broadly, the problems that the beer orders were introduced to address—brewers' ability to prevent proper competition between pubs and to restrict consumer choice—no longer existed. That is why I concluded that the beer orders had served their purpose, and should be revoked in their entirety.

I know that the decision to revoke the beer orders in their entirety has not been universally welcomed. Some hon. Members, and their constituents, are worried in particular about the revocation of the guest beer provision. However, it is important to remember that the two main provisions of the beer orders of 1989—the cap on the number of pubs a large brewer could own and the guest beer provision—applied only to the then six large brewers owning tied estates of 2,000 or more pubs. No such brewers exist any longer, which is why I have decided that the beer orders have outlived their usefulness.

I wish to recap on the guest beer provision. There seems to be confusion in the industry, particularly among consumers, about guest beers. I welcome the opportunity to put that confusion straight. In 1989, the beer orders obliged the then six large brewers to permit their tied tenants to sell a guest beer. At the same time, other pub-owning brewers, such as the regionals and even non-brewer retail pub companies, often voluntarily sold so-called guest beers in their tenanted and managed houses. As I mentioned earlier, because virtually no pubs any longer have formal guest beer rights, as defined in the beer orders, guest beers available in pubs today are almost certainly offered on a voluntary basis. There is absolutely no reason why that practice should not continue, regardless of what happens to the beer orders.

To pick up one of the hon. Gentleman's points about competition, the Director General of Fair Trading has found no evidence that small brewers are operating in anything but a fair market, but he remains alert to their concerns about their ability to compete fairly in the UK beer market and, as I mentioned, he has pledged to remain vigilant in his pursuit of any anti-competitive practices that might come to light.

Richard Younger-Ross: I hear what the Minister says about the beer orders, but she skirts over the point about tied loans, which the Office of Fair Trading said should be retained. The Minister has not explained why those are going with everything else. When she visits Teignbridge, I can take her to small pubs where there has been a changeover of management because of the tied-loan arrangements under which people are placed.

Miss Johnson: We did not consider it necessary to retain the loans because of the nature of the market, competition and the opportunities. The hon. Gentleman may have identified a problem in his constituency, but in general we do not believe that there is a widespread problem.

Many people have argued that beer order-type measures should be applied to the retail pub chains. I think that the hon. Gentleman was on the verge of saying so. Even if there were a case for applying them—the director general concluded that there was not—we could not do so. The Government's powers flowing from the 1989 MMC report are limited to remedying the anti-competitive effects found in that investigation. Those related to the national brewing companies. Radically changing the beer orders by extending the guest beer provision to pub chains, which are not brewing companies, could be done only if a new complex monopoly investigation by the Competition Commission found anti-competitive effects in that sector. The director general has not found any evidence of such effects.

As for the possibility of brewers being able to sell pubs with restrictive covenants on their future use, the director general recommended the revocation of the provision banning that, given the relative ease with which new pubs can now be opened. It is worth remembering that that provision applied only to brewer-owned pubs, which have declined dramatically in numbers, and not to those owned by retail pub companies, the number of which, correspondingly, have increased dramatically. Slightly more pubs are now owned by pub companies than by brewers. It would be unfair to maintain a restriction on one type of company and not to apply it to the other type.

Finally, I should like to emphasise that even if competition problems arise following the revocation of the beer orders, the director general now has much stronger powers under the Competition Act 1998 than he had under the Fair Trading Act 1973. He has assured us that he stands ready to use those powers whenever evidence of anti-competitive behaviour comes to light.

Pneumococcal Vaccine

12.58 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Over the past few months, I have been increasingly aware of an issue that affects the health and well-being of thousands of children throughout the United Kingdom. It places a significant burden on national health service resources, results in the deaths of 50 children each year and in other cases can leave parents and the caring professions struggling to cope with permanently damaged and disabled children. Yet, much of that is preventable. The issue in question is pneumococcal disease.

Many hon. Members are aware of cases of meningitis in their constituencies, the fear that outbreaks of infection can cause among parents and communities, and the devastation that it may cause. Many may not be aware that pneumococcal disease is the second greatest cause of meningitis in Britain. As a Scottish Member of Parliament, I am particularly concerned that there is a greater incidence of the disease in Scotland.

Media attention inevitably focuses on meningitis B, and overlooks the fact that although pneumococcal meningitis is not as common, it is more life threatening. Fifteen per cent. of children—one in six—who contract it die. Despite this age of rapid medical advances, that figure has, sadly, remained the same for more than 20 years. The chances of a child dying from pneumococcal meningitis are twice as high as they are for meningitis B.

When cases of meningitis are reported in the media, they are usually reported in the stark terms of a child's death, but it is important to remember that in the majority of cases children survive meningitis, although often at a high price. Those children and their families have to live with the disabling consequences of the disease for the rest of their lives.

It is obvious to my colleagues that I have a slight disability; I suffer from visual impairment. That resulted from measles at the age of three. It is a disability that people learn to cope with and adapt to and is comparatively trivial. For children who survive pneumococcal meningitis, life is not so straightforward. One in six will be brain damaged, one in seven will have epilepsy and a quarter will suffer from deafness. Overall, half the children who survive pneumococcal meningitis will be left with some form of disability, including spasticity, learning disorders and behavioural problems. Again, the record is worse than that for other forms of meningitis.

Pneumococcal disease does not cause only meningitis; it may cause a wide range of other serious and life-threatening illnesses. Every year, serious pneumococcal diseases such as meningitis, blood infections and pneumonia devastate the lives of thousands of British children and their families. Babies and young children under two are most at risk.

When discussing health topics, Mr. Winterton—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I am one of the four Deputy Speakers for sittings in Westminster Hall, and today's proceedings in Committee Room 10 are equivalent to those in Westminster Hall.

Sandra Osborne: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There are many facts and figures, but I want to go beyond the statistics and provide a first-hand perspective and insight into pneumococcal disease. I shall focus on two aspects: the difficulty of diagnosis and the long-term consequences of the disease for those who are lucky enough to survive.

The story of a little boy called Sam—I am very pleased that his parents are present to hear our debate today—was recently brought to my attention. Sam was only five months old when his parents became concerned because he had a cold, a temperature and was not sleeping well. One might think that those symptoms, being the normal symptoms of feeling slightly off colour, would not cause alarm bells to ring. Nevertheless, Sam's parents, ever mindful of meningitis, did not want to take any chances and took him to the local accident and emergency department where they were assured that he did not have meningitis. The following night, Sam's condition deteriorated and he had a burning temperature and bulging fontanelle. His mum and dad telephoned NHS Direct, which advised giving him paracetamol to lower his temperature. The following morning, Sam seemed better but then became worse and was again taken to the A and E. A non-specific virus was diagnosed and he was sent home.

Back at home, Sam's condition continued to deteriorate. His parents were alarmed and returned to the A and E, where Sam had a fit on arrival. That time, the doctors recognised the signs of meningitis. Sam spent the next two weeks in intensive care, fighting for his life, and a further fortnight in an isolation ward. Laboratory tests revealed that he had had pneumococcal meningitis.

Let me make one thing clear: doctors' failure to recognise Sam's condition is not an indictment of the doctors who saw him, or of the national health service. In the words of a leading expert, pneumococcal meningitis can be extremely difficult to diagnose because babies under 12 months old do not always have the classic symptoms of the disease, such as the rash that is often seen with other forms of meningitis. There is an important lesson for us all to learn from that. Pneumococcal meningitis is difficult to recognise and often, as in Sam's case, is recognised only when it is much too late. Common logic therefore dictates that, with that type of meningitis perhaps more than with any other, prevention is better than cure.

To return to Sam's story, thanks to the skill of the medical team and the antibiotics pumped into his body, Sam survived. However, as we have already heard, more than half of the children who survive pneumococcal meningitis are left disabled, and Sam was one of them. He came home paralysed down his left side, brain damaged, epileptic and profoundly deaf. Sam has, with the support of his parents and a range of specialist carers, made considerable progress. He has regained the use of his left side and, despite the meningitis having destroyed his sense of balance, now begun to walk. According to his dad, he has a great sense of humour and is full of beans. Inevitably, however, as happens with many other children affected by serious pneumococcal disease, most of Sam's disabilities will remain with him for life. That will mean the need for some care for him from his parents, family and the wider community for the rest of his life—a lifetime of care and

[Sandra Osborne]

support, and, for his parents, the knowledge that Sam can never lead the life that they might once have hoped for him.

Why, if pneumococcal disease is so difficult to spot and can have such devastating consequences, are we not doing something to prevent it? In a small way, we are, but in another important way, it seems that we have not quite decided. In January, the Department of Health announced that a new vaccine for pneumococcal disease, which for the first time is effective in children under three years old, should be given to the children most vulnerable to the disease. They include those with chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disease, diabetes, sickle-cell disease and those with a poorly functioning immune system for other reasons.

The Department is to be applauded for that recommendation and for offering protection to those children. However, it is widely acknowledged that the vast majority of pneumococcal disease occurs in children who are otherwise perfectly healthy, just like Sam. Through the introduction of a routine immunisation programme, a major health gain could be won for British children. Despite that, the Department has not yet given a clear time frame for when the new vaccine will be made routinely available for all British children. That reluctance is surprising given that the Department has already conducted clinical trials on including the new vaccine in the routine childhood immunisation programme. At the moment, we have vague assertions that the possibility of an immunisation programme is actively being considered.

The disease is generally acknowledged as the commonest bacterial cause of pneumonia, which is a particularly dangerous condition in young children. Here in the UK, it is estimated that one in 200 children is hospitalised as a result of pneumococcal pneumonia before their first birthday. It is also important to recognise that the disease particularly affects older people. The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine could greatly benefit them, but I do not have time in this debate to pursue that further. Perhaps the Minister will comment briefly on it.

For the elderly and those in other age groups, pneumococcal pneumonia is responsible for the more serious types of pneumonia, which sometimes require surgery to resolve the damage caused and on occasion result in death. The disease does not only cause life-threatening and disabling conditions; it is a major cause of many common childhood illnesses, such as middle-ear infections. As any parent will know, such illnesses can cause considerable suffering and prove very troublesome, especially to those families who are least able to cope.

Nearly all children will have suffered a middle-ear infection by their third birthday. Although such infections can have many different causes, research shows that up to half of the cases that are bacterial in origin are due to pneumococcal disease. Moreover, severe, recurrent ear infections in children are more likely to be due to pneumococcal disease. Such infection can lead to a glue ear or a perforated eardrum—conditions that can have serious implications for a child's development, and which many families will have experienced. Those common diseases also impose a heavy burden on the national health service in visits to GPs and admissions to hospital.

There is growing concern about the use of antibiotics to treat conditions such as ear infections. Fears about the steady increase in antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria—already seen in many parts of world—are very real and are now starting to become a major source of concern in this country. Recent figures from Scotland, for example, show a tripling of the rates of resistance over the past decade to both penicillin and erythromycin. The problem is twofold. First, the effectiveness of drugs vital in the line of defence against serious diseases such as meningitis is being eroded. Secondly, in an attempt to rationalise unnecessary antibiotic usage for minor viral illnesses, the more serious causes of recurrent, severe ear infections, such as those caused by pneumococcal disease, are being treated later.

A routine immunisation programme to prevent the most serious forms of pneumococcal disease would also produce additional benefits in reducing the amount of less serious pneumococcal illness commonly seen in young children. It could help score a useful win in reducing pressure on NHS beds, cutting the number of GP visits, reducing the prescription of antibiotics, and cutting demand for surgical procedures, such as the insertion of grommets in cases of glue ear.

Why does the Department of Health appear to be dragging its feet in introducing the new vaccine for all children under two, and not just those at most risk? We led the world in the introduction of a routine vaccination programme for meningitis C in 1999. Indeed, an exemplary partnership between the Department of Health, public health agencies and manufacturers allowed the immunisation programme to begin many months earlier than originally envisaged.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): My hon. Friend is aware that I have tabled questions on the introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine, asking what assessment has been made of its impact in the United States and Europe on children under two, and asking when it will be introduced. Is she aware that my interest arises from the time when the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), allowed the meningitis C vaccine to be used in a village in my constituency before it was introduced nationally? At the time, there was complete desperation because of a series of cases of meningitis that were—and still are—completely unexplained. As my hon. Friend said, the meningitis C vaccine has been a phenomenal success nationally. We managed to introduce it a year earlier than planned, and I would like similar urgency to be given to the introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine, so that we can end the sort of desperation experienced by children in my constituency who suffered from meningitis.

Sandra Osborne: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I am aware of the situation that she experienced in her constituency. We want to see an early extension of the pneumococcal vaccine. The meningitis campaign itself has been amazingly successful. Cases of meningitis C—and resultant deaths— have tumbled by a staggering 90 per cent. in just one year. However,

despite this major public health success, no timetable has been seen set for the routine introduction of the new pneumococcal vaccine in this country.

The efficacy and safety of the new pneumococcal vaccine are not in question. The vaccine has had extensive trials in the United States and Europe. Studies have been conducted in this country by the Public Health Laboratory Service, and the Government see fit to give the vaccine to at-risk children. In addition, the new vaccine has been in routine use in the United States for two years with considerable success. There it is recommended for all children under two years of age, and it is part of the federal childhood immunisation programme.

The UK has a long-established pre-eminent global position in the promotion of public health and immunisation policy. Yet, with regard to the prevention of pneumococcal disease, there is an inexplicable lack of urgency on the part of the Department and its advisers on the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation. Perhaps the ongoing debate about the safety of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine has drawn the Department's attention away from the next logical step in protecting the health of the nation's children. In the media yesterday, Dr. Paul Gringas made the point that concern over MMR has set back research into autism. I wonder whether this is another parallel. Perhaps the Government consider that winning the battle against meningitis C means that we can take a rest from the continuing war against other forms of meningitis. Sam, his family and others like them would disagree.

I congratulate the Department on the chief medical officer's report, "Getting Ahead of the Curve". It points out the major health gain for the nation that routine immunisation against pneumococcal disease could produce, not only for children but for the elderly, who form another vulnerable group. The report remarks on the

"introduction of new conjugate pneumococcal vaccines to protect young children and the elderly from pneumococcal septicaemia, meningitis, pneumonia and ear infections, with the potential to reduce the annual toll of 22,000 hospital admissions and 3,000 deaths caused by pneumococcal infection".

"Getting Ahead of the Curve" is an insightful, forward-thinking document. However, there is a disconnection between its conclusions and the Department's resolve to act on them. The new vaccine is licensed and available, so surely the Department should act to protect our vulnerable youngsters as soon as practicably possible. Until the Department finds it timely to make its decision, its apparent procrastination and lack of commitment will continue to cost the lives of young children. Four will die each month, and many others, such as Sam, will be left with severe, permanent disabilities.

Can the Minister put on record when the Department of Health intends to introduce the new pneumococcal vaccine for all children under two as part of the routine childhood immunisation programme? An obvious first step would be to say whether the new immunisation programme is in her Department's identified spending plans for 2002-03. If it is not, she should say whether the decision rests on gaining adequate funding.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) on securing a debate on this important subject. I welcome her support for the Government's vaccination programme for children. She gave us a powerful description of the dreadful impact of pneumococcal infection on children and family lives, and she made a strong case for prevention by discussing in detail the pneumococcal vaccine. I shall set out how consideration of the pneumococcal vaccine for the under-twos has progressed, and address some of her points.

As my hon. Friend said, pneumococcal infection causes a broad spectrum of disease. It is the most common cause of pneumonia, and causes meningitis and septicaemia. It is also involved in a proportion of middle-ear infections. Those diseases are serious and can be fatal. The very young and the elderly are at greatest risk. However, I shall confine my remarks to the issues that my hon. Friend raised on pneumococcal disease and the vaccine for the under-twos. Should I have time, I shall return to the issue of the elderly; if I do not, I shall happily write to her.

The peak incidence of pneumococcal disease in children is in those under two years of age, and the risk of meningitis is largely confined to children under five. In 1999, 561 invasive pneumococcal infections—meningitis or septicaemia—were reported to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre in children aged under five years, and there were more than 5,000 hospitalisations of children with lobar pneumonia in that age group, most of which were due to pneumococcal infection. From such hospital admissions, approximately 40 deaths are reported each year as a result of pneumococcal infection.

The data from the Public Health Laboratory Service on the level of infection is supported by a recent independent study of deaths in infants and young children due to invasive pneumococcal disease. The results of that study will be presented at the spring meeting of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in York next week. Taking into account various concerns about the data, it concluded that for the age group of one month to four years there were likely to be 43 deaths per year due to pneumococcal infection.

My hon. Friend is right about the considerable disability burden that can result from pneumococcal infection. She described it powerfully with reference to a family with which she has been in discussion. Faced with a disease such as that, we should be promoting prevention. She is also right that another major concern about pneumococcal infection is the extent to which it may be developing resistance to antibiotics, which is an additional reason to consider the role of prevention. In the UK, the use of the two main antibiotics for pneumococcal infection—penicillin and erythromycin—remains at relatively low levels, but we are monitoring that closely. In some other countries resistance is increasing, and in some cases it is already at worrying levels.

The Government have shown their commitment to introducing vaccines once their safety and efficacy are demonstrated. I know that my hon. Friend supported the meningitis C campaign, which has had an immense

[Yvette Cooper]

influence on saving lives. I assure her that the current position on pneumococcal vaccine is not due to a lack of commitment. Extensive work is under way, and I wish to highlight the logistics of introducing nationwide vaccine programmes. I shall set out the progress that we have made so far and the things that need to be resolved.

A new pneumococcal conjugate vaccine was licensed in the UK last year. Unlike the existing pneumococcal vaccine, it offers protection to children under two years of age. The conjugate vaccine uses the same technology that was applied to the Hib and meningococcal C conjugate vaccines, allowing younger children to develop a protective immune response and stay healthy. Unlike those vaccines, however, it is several vaccines in one. Although the existing pneumococcal vaccine contains elements of 23 strains of pneumococcus, the new conjugate vaccine prevents the development of seven strains of pneumococcus.

Work is already under way to evaluate the new vaccine's suitability for use in the UK's routine childhood immunisation programme. The work is being done by the Department of Health's vaccine evaluation consortium, which includes the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research and the Institute of Child Health. It is a unique collaboration of Government-funded but independent organisations and institutions. Hon. Members will be aware that it was such across-the-board collaboration that led to the very successful meningitis C campaign.

With the prospect of the introduction of an effective pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for children, the Public Health Laboratory Service enhanced its routine surveillance systems to concentrate on the most serious infections, namely those in which the bacteria reach the bloodstream. Those are infections for which the most benefit can be expected from a vaccine. One of the most important questions for surveillance is whether the vaccine provides protection against the pneumococci strains that are causing the most disease in this country. The vaccine was formulated in the United States, but prevalent serogroups of pneumococci vary from country to country. From the data that the PHLS collects, it is able to determine the proportion of invasive infections attributable to the different serotypes included in and protected by the conjugate vaccines. The proportion of serotypes currently causing invasive disease in England and Wales that would be covered by the new vaccine is 65 per cent. for all ages and 86 per cent. for those under five. That is important information.

One of the next issues to be determined is the interaction between the new vaccine and the current vaccination programme. The pneumococcal conjugate vaccine has already been introduced into the routine programme in the United States, but since the vaccine was licensed, there has been little information on its national impact, other than on the population that took part in the clinical trials. The results of those trials were highly impressive, with the almost complete disappearance of invasive pneumococcal disease caused by the strains covered by the vaccine.

Recent population data from the Center for Disease Control suggest that there have been fewer cases—20 to 25 per cent. in children under four—of invasive pneumococcal disease since the vaccine was introduced in the USA. That does not mirror the success of the meningococcal C campaign, as a result of which the number of cases has fallen by 80 per cent. in the target groups, but it is important information nevertheless. We should remember that the vaccine protects against only seven of the most common strains of pneumococcus. However, importantly, the circumstances in which pneumococcal conjugate vaccines might be used in the UK are different from those in the United States.

The UK primary immunisation schedule is given at the ages of two, three and four months, compared with two, four and six months in the United States, where pneumococcal conjugate vaccine is given again as a booster at 12 months. We must carry out clinical trials to see whether the new vaccine is as effective at two, three and four months as it is following the United States' schedule.

Sandra Osborne: I am aware that the Minister is drawing to a conclusion, so can she can give us some idea about the time scales involved?

Yvette Cooper: I will try to give some indication of the time scale to which we are working, because many trials are already under way.

No booster doses of similar conjugate vaccines, such as Hib, are given in the UK, whereas they are given in the United States. We will have to decide whether a booster dose for pneumococcal conjugate vaccine is necessary. The addition of pneumococcal conjugate vaccines would represent a third conjugate vaccine in the UK, as meningococcal C conjugate vaccine is part of the UK but not the USA schedule. We do not know how the two conjugate vaccines interact and whether they work well when given together. That is why detailed clinical trials relevant to the UK are essential.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation will make the final recommendation to the Government. It has been made aware of the positive results in the USA, and has advised that the vaccine should be made available to those children under two who are at particular risk from pneumococcal disease, as my hon. Friend has said, but we need to assess additional factors and bear in mind that fitting the vaccine into the UK schedule cannot be taken for granted. All the evidence is that the more visits that parents and children have to make for vaccinations, the greater the chance that children will not complete the course.

When asked by Health Promotion England, which has already conducted a survey on pneumococcal immunisation on our behalf, parents said that they would prefer an extra injection to be given at a visit that was already scheduled, rather than scheduling a new visit. To see how a new vaccine would fit into the current schedule, it is important that the issues surrounding combinations of vaccines and their timing are properly assessed. Trials are being carried out and will be completed late this year. Studies to document the full burden of morbidity and disability attributable to pneumococcal disease in UK children are also in progress.

Vaccine safety is an important factor. The Government will not introduce any vaccine until all the appropriate research and clinical trials have been carried out. That work will then be reviewed by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which will make recommendations to the Government based on its conclusions. I assure my hon. Friend that there is no lack of commitment, but we have a responsibility to children and families to ensure that logistic, safety and efficacy issues are resolved.

There are also shortages of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine in the USA, and the full recommended schedule cannot be implemented. We need to consider supply, too. Several other countries are in the same position and are considering the impact of the vaccine on their vaccination programmes. We must recognise that there could be a big increase in the number of countries that want the vaccine to deal with their supply issues.

I shall inform my hon. Friend of progress, and give her any further information that we receive about the time scales in which the trials and the joint committee will report. I assure her, however, that we are committed to improving children's health.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are grateful to the Minister for her reply. We are also grateful to the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) for arriving in the nick of time.

Aircraft Noise (Gatwick)

1.30 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I very much appreciate the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), being present to discuss issues of serious concern to my constituents.

It is two years since I raised the issue of aircraft noise in the Dunsfold area. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who was the Minister at the time, was extremely helpful, and I am sure that he still remembers in detail the important points that were made. I hope that the present Minister has been able to consider some of the issues that I raised on behalf of my constituents.

People live in south-west Surrey because it is a particularly beautiful part of the country. There is real concern about development pressures and quality of life. There is anxiety that the Government may impose entirely unrealistic and appalling housing quotas on the area. There is pressure from traffic congestion, although it is hoped that improvements on the A3 at Hindhead will relieve some of the problems.

Over recent years, the number of serious concerns about aircraft noise has grown. When I raised the issue in the previous debate, I talked about noise preferential routes—NPRs—and the importance of raising the minimum vectoring level to 5,000 ft. I also talked about the speed of arriving and departing aircraft, the importance of enforcement and encouraging aircraft to adhere to the 250 knot limit below 10,000 ft. My third point concerned altitude levels and particularly those of arriving aircraft. I said that continuous descent procedures could be modified and that there should be greater enforcement. Finally, I mentioned the disturbance caused by night flying, which is identified time and again in Government reports about noise.

I am pleased to say that the then Minister responded helpfully to the debate and that the airlines, the British Airports Authority and others were extremely helpful. Lord Marshall made it clear that British Airways would be happy to comply with any restriction that required aircraft to fly at 250 knots until below 10,000 ft. As regards night noise, British Airways said that it would introduce a voluntary ban on departures scheduled after 11.30 pm and arrivals scheduled before 4.45 am.

Enthused by such activities, Bridget Bloom, John Burgess and many others from the Quieter Skies Campaign—for which I have the highest regard—organised a meeting of the most phenomenal proportions in Dunsfold in March 2001. At a time when fewer and fewer people seem enthusiastic about political gatherings, people from all over the south-east attended a spectacular meeting at Dunsfold village hall, which was the happy recipient of a lottery award for improvements. Points were made about increasing passenger numbers, the growing disturbance, the difficulties of non-adherence to NPRs, departure height issues, landing approaches and heights, and the problem of old aircraft. I am pleased to say that, once again, there were encouraging responses all round.

[Virginia Bottomley]

Aircraft noise has been deeply affected by the serious situation following 11 September. It would not be right or proper for me to speak today without referring to that. The Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions held hearings on the issues. Roger Wiltshire, the secretary general of the British Air Transport Association, said:

"Air space was closed affecting roughly 20 per cent. of the aviation businesses coming out of the UK and even after all the events were over and the airlines returned to normal operationally there was a major impact on demand for air travel . . . soon after that return to normal operations an insurance change . . . threatened all airlines, not just those flying to space closed after 11 September."

Virgin and British Airways gave evidence that their losses had been around 20 per cent., and that British Airways had relinquished 300 slots at Gatwick.

Inevitably, there has been encouragingly less noise. That is partly a temporary phenomenon, due to the effect of 11 September on the airline industry, but it is also a result of a more profound difference. Following the detailed lobbying and representations to the Minister's predecessors, as well as work with BAA and the airlines, I am pleased to report significant improvements.

The Quieter Skies Campaign has assiduously documented the changes. For example, a document produced by it records:

"In a four-day weekend in January 2001 there were 179 Westerly take-offs over the Dunsfold/Hascombe area compared with only 77 in the same period in January 2002".

It also states that there is less perceived noise because of the continuing move to modern aircraft. I am pleased that Virgin has now eliminated all its old 747-200s. The document also records that

"2 years ago 23 per cent. of all Gatwick outward flights passed over the Hascombe-Dunsfold area below 5000ft. Westerly take-offs were particularly bad, with 33 per cent. below 5000ft."

Recent figures for 2002 show a dramatic improvement, with

"only 12 per cent. below 5000ft, with 70 per cent. above 7000ft."

Those changes are encouraging.

Easterly take-offs, which are normally higher, show a marginal improvement in the period. Only 13 per cent. of flights were under 5,000 ft, compared with a previous figure of 16 per cent., and the average overhead height was slightly below 7,000 ft. I give enormous credit to the group. Its vigilance in monitoring the situation, taking matters up with the authorities and clearly stating that all breaches should be properly identified and chased up has made a significant impact.

I am pleased that several people contacted me before the debate. British Airways has been in touch about its continuing commitment to the code of practice for continuous descent approach, the stringent departure noise limits and other such measures. Alison Addy of BAA has been enormously helpful, and has talked about BAA's work for and commitment to further improvements. Those include ongoing work to reduce noise, the imposition of higher landing charges on noisier aircraft, the fining of aircraft that exceed noise limits, and the supplementing of restrictions on which aircraft can operate at night through a further voluntary ban. Also relevant are the establishment of the flight operations performance committee and the publication of a continuous descent approach code of practice.

The Minister may say that it is unusual for Opposition Members to raise subjects for debate, in Committee Room 10 or in Westminster Hall, in the light of so much encouraging good news. However, the real anxiety in the area concerns the future of aviation in the south-east, the future of Gatwick and the string of leaked documents, comments and reports. I pay tribute to the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign and Brendan Sewill, who has been most assiduous in documenting the issue and alerting councillors, Members of Parliament and others.

A new runway at Gatwick would be the most deplorable event. Such a runway would be designed to increase the airport's capacity from the present 30 million passengers to 80 million or 100 million—around three times its present size. There would be three times as many aircraft in the sky and three times as much noise, three times as much pollution and three times as much airport-related traffic. It would mean more houses, more congestion and more air pollution. I ask the Minister to be aware of the mounting concern over air pollution.

I am sure that the Minister and others will be aware of the Gatwick legal agreement. Some leaks have suggested that Ministers have found a way around the agreement. I would like the Minister to clarify the situation and how he envisages the future of Gatwick. When will there be further announcements and further consultation?

People in the south-east not only mind about the quality of life and the local environment but are deeply concerned about opportunities in more economically disadvantaged parts of the country. One way to compound the difficulties of the south-east and exaggerate the problems elsewhere would be to impose willy-nilly a new terminal at Gatwick, with all the ensuing difficulties. The expressions of worry throughout my constituency about aircraft noise, not only in Dunsfold but in Farnham—concerning Farnborough airport—and the complaints about noise from Chinook helicopters would be as nothing compared to the outrage and problems that would emerge.

As well as being concerned about the series of leaks on the future of Gatwick, the Minister should know that a growing number of voices in my constituency are deeply worried about the threatened erosion of local democratic accountability for planning decisions. Dr. Jenny Masding, chairman of Alfold parish council, has written to me about the planning Green Paper "Delivering a Fundamental Change". There is great anxiety that there is no mention of parish or town councils in the Green Paper and concern that their role is being undermined and threatened. No one disputes the need for reducing the time taken to conduct planning inquiries, but there is real anxiety about the erosion of local accountability. In particular, there is concern about the future of the work of the county council, which in my constituency has been very effective.

I refer also to the comments made by Mr. Thwaites of Waverley borough council about the development of further air traffic and the importance of the planning procedures and local accountability. There is a real sense that this Government have been characterised by centralising and imposing their will willy-nilly on local bodies and agencies. The effects of such an imposition on this area would be devastating beyond all belief and entirely irreparable.

I thank the Minister for being present today to answer some of those points. There are many welcome changes such as the reduction in aircraft noise, which has occurred partly as a result of the tragic and regrettable events in the United States but also because of changing practices and a co-operative approach. How does he clarify his own responsibilities in the area? Good practice is all very well, but the Minister has responsibilities. I thank him and the Government for recognising the importance of tranquillity measures in the rural White Paper; he will know the link with the ambient noise strategy. However, aircraft noise issues pale into insignificance in comparison with what is now the real anxiety about the future at Gatwick. I have been asked by colleagues, by Francis Maude, Peter Ainsworth and Crispin Blunt, to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. The right hon. Lady should be aware that she should address her colleagues by their constituencies and not their names.

Virginia Bottomley: I stand corrected, after 18 years, with profuse apologies for such deeply regrettable and reprehensible behaviour.

The Minister is aware of the issues and of my appreciation of the Quieter Skies Campaign and of his predecessor's contribution. However, deep and widespread anxiety now exists and I hope that he will take note of my points and offer some clarification and answers to my constituents.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) on having secured the debate. I understand that she secured a similar debate in January 2000, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) responded. She is, rightly, concerned about aircraft noise, which concerns many people who live near airports around the country. I am pleased that she has raised the subject again and given the Government another opportunity to respond.

The right hon. Lady will not be surprised to hear again some of the points that were made last time. However, there have been many positive developments, some of which she alluded to. I hope that I can reassure her on the points that she raised; all reasonable efforts are made to keep the disturbance from aircraft to a minimum and we continue to seek ways to improve the noise climate even more.

We need to minimise the impact of airports on the environment. At the same time, we must ensure that land use planning and conservation policies take account of the economic benefits of maintaining a strong, competitive airline industry and providing sufficient airport capacity where it is economically and environmentally justified. That involves striking a fine balance between aviation needs, providing jobs—Gatwick generates a substantial number of jobs in and around the right hon. Lady's constituency and serves the local, regional and national economy—and the need to minimise the impact on communities around airports.

The right hon. Lady is aware of my Department's broad role in respect of aircraft noise policy. Gatwick, along with Heathrow and Stansted, is designated under section 80 for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. That empowers the Secretary of State to impose requirements on the operators of the airport, and of aircraft using it, in order to mitigate the effects of noise. The requirements that we impose include departure noise limits, noise preferential routes—to which the right hon. Lady referred—for departures, night restrictions and certain regulations pertaining to the management of arriving aircraft.

A noise and track monitoring advisory group oversees the operation of the noise and track keeping system. The core of that system was updated a few years ago with a more modern computer system. The group includes representatives from the Department, the airport, consultative committee members, local authority officers representing the local community, National Air Traffic Services and the airlines. The group examines ways of improving the noise climate around the airport, and of monitoring and reporting. Gatwick also convenes a flight operations performance committee in which airline representatives and air traffic controllers examine technical issues and seek ways of improving performance.

Noise is the most prominent environmental impact of aviation locally. At Gatwick, the general trend in the daytime noise climate has perhaps surprisingly, although I think the right hon. Lady concedes it, seen a diminution of noise over the years as older, noisier aircraft have been replaced by quieter ones. That is despite a large increase in the volume of aircraft movements. It is best illustrated by the annual noise contour reports, produced on behalf of the Department. Those noise exposure contours show the equivalent continuous sound level experienced on the ground between 7 am and 11 pm during the busiest summer months. In the past 12 years, the area of the 57 dB Gatwick contour has more than halved. The right hon. Lady's constituency of South-West Surrey now lies outside that contour, and I am sure that she welcomes that reduction in the noise.

The right hon. Lady referred to noise preferential routes. It has long been recognised that the balance of environmental advantage lies in concentrating departing aircraft along the least practicable number of specified routes. Since 1968, the Department and its predecessor Departments have stipulated noise preferential routes for aircraft departing from Gatwick. As far as possible, those routes are designed to avoid built-up areas and so minimise disturbance to those on the ground. However, it must be accepted that some

[Mr. David Jamieson]

dispersion from flight paths is inevitable because of navigational tolerance, aircraft characteristics and, not least, the weather, especially the wind, which can be particularly significant. In practice, that means that there can be a swathe of tracks up to 1.5 km on either side of the nominal centre line of a route, with the greatest likelihood of dispersion when aircraft are turning. However, the right hon. Lady will be pleased to hear that compliance with the swathes has improved from more than 95 per cent. of departures in 1998-99 to more than 99 per cent. today. There is no financial sanction for deviations, but causes of and trends in significant track deviation are thoroughly investigated.

Once aircraft departing Gatwick have reached 4,000 ft on westerly departures, air traffic control may, if traffic conditions permit, assign them a more direct course to their destinations. The release height for those departures was raised to 4,000 ft two years ago, and that may benefit the right hon. Lady's constituents. That practice, known as vectoring, is intended to speed up the flow of traffic, which has the benefit that aircraft are able to clear an area more quickly and at higher altitude. That may result in more track dispersion once the required altitude has been achieved, but the amount of noise experienced by people on the ground will of course be relatively less than at lower altitudes closer to the airport. The vectoring height for easterly departures remains at 3,000 ft, and I assure the right hon. Lady that the possibility of raising the height to 4,000 ft is kept under review. The right hon. Lady mentioned her contact with the Quieter Skies Campaign. It has requested that the vectoring height be raised to 5,000 ft. That remains a difficult proposition and it is unlikely to happen in the near future.

It is inevitable that areas so close to the airport will experience overflight. The right hon. Lady's constituency is situated between 15 and 25 miles west of Gatwick airport. Two departure routes overfly the area when the airport is operating towards the west, as it does for about 75 per cent. of the time. Departures from Heathrow and elsewhere—for example, those navigating via the Midhurst beacon—will also overfly the area on both easterly and westerly departures, usually at higher altitude, but they will not climb above 6,000 ft until cleared to do so by air traffic control. That is to avoid conflict with Gatwick air traffic.

It is a fact of modern life that the airspace over the south-east of England is very congested. Overflight at altitudes of 4,000 ft and more over a large proportion of the region is inevitable. We are not complacent, however, and we actively seek improvements when possible, but the noise heard on the ground must be taken in perspective with that from other sources endemic in modern life.

Maximising the use of continuous-descent approach is of prime importance in reducing the noise impact of arrivals. Pilots at Gatwick are requested to use continuous descent as best they can, but air traffic control constraints—particularly the need to maintain clearance from Heathrow departures—mean that 100 per cent. adherence is not possible. At night, there is an additional requirement not to join the extended runway centre line below 3,000 ft closer than 10 nautical miles from touchdown. I accept that that may bring more traffic over the Dunsfold area, but that rule benefits other areas that would otherwise be overflown more noisily and at lower altitude.

The right hon. Lady also mentioned night restrictions. The Department appreciates that aircraft noise can be particularly disturbing at night and we operate a night restriction regime limiting the number and sort of aircraft that can take off and land. That regime is reviewed every five years or so through public consultation. There is a movement limit between 11.30 pm and 6 am, backed by a quota system in which noisier aircraft score more than quieter ones against the overall total. The system is designed to ensure that the overall level of noise from aircraft using the airport at night will not worsen, although the total number of night flights may increase as airlines substitute quieter aircraft for noisier ones, but only up to the movement limit set for Gatwick airport for night flights per season.

I turn to the national airports policy. The right hon. Lady is concerned, naturally, that in addition to noise disturbance on communities, the expansion of airports will have an impact on air traffic management and local infrastructure such as housing. I can assure her that any increase in traffic will be met with improvements and increases in air traffic control. There would be no increase in movements without the necessary air traffic control to cope with it. I assure her that safety is always the prime concern. That is fundamental to our planning and any changes in the use of airports and airlines in the south-east. If there is more development, there will also be more environmental measures to ameliorate or control that development.

My Department's work on a new air transport White Paper is well under way. Major infrastructure projects take a long time to come to fruition, so we must look a long way forward. Our aim is to provide a better framework to assist planning by all those concerned, including airports, airlines, local authorities and local residents, and to ensure that all relevant factors are taken into account. I do not pretend to know precisely what the aviation industry or even Gatwick airport will look like in a decade or more, but I do not share the right hon. Lady's vision of environmental measures being abandoned. I assure her that appropriate measures will be in place.

The right hon. Lady is aware of the South East and East of England Air Services study of airports in the south-east and east of England, which will inform the new policy. The study will take full account of the potential for airports in other parts of the country to attract a greater proportion of demand than at present. I am sure that the right hon. Lady will welcome that.

Projects for which planning applications have been made, or are expected to be made shortly, are not within the scope of the study because that would lead to duplication and delay. The study examines a range of scenarios based on those projects either going ahead or not going ahead. Implications of possible developments for the planning of airspace capacity, air traffic control and surface access to the airports are included. The Government have also consulted on proposals to reform the land use planning system and will announce their conclusions in due course. I assure the right hon. Lady that local people and local authorities have a say about any changes. She will agree that the procedures for terminal 5 did not reflect well on the planning system.

We want to avoid delay, which merely causes uncertainty and pours money into barristers' pockets without helping local people.

The right hon. Lady referred to leaks, but speculation might be a more appropriate definition of what she read in the newspapers. I ask her not to take that speculation too seriously. The SERAS study will be published shortly and at the end of the year it will be converted into a White Paper. The right hon. Lady's constituents and local authorities in the area will have an opportunity to contribute to both parts of the process.

Much work has been done to minimise the impact of noise on the communities around Gatwick airport. We shall continue to examine ways in which to improve the noise climate in the wider policy issues and in the details.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 11 April 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

UK-Japan Relations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I am delighted to have the opportunity to lead the debate, not least as all eyes will shortly be on Japan when the World cup takes place there. The debate follows my visit to Japan in January and the success of the third United Kingdom-Japan parliamentary seminar in Tokyo in February. A delegation of the all-party group on Japan—led by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson)—ably represented Westminster. I understand from my officials that our Japanese counterparts found the meeting so stimulating that they are already looking forward to a return match in the UK next year.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is my hon. Friend aware that during our visit to Japan we touched on the forthcoming World cup, to which he referred? Would he be interested in pursuing my suggestion that one of the best ways of maintaining good relations between Japan and England—there are English football fans in Japan—would be to ensure that no English football fan under the age of 65 were allowed to attend the World cup in Japan unless they were accompanied by their grandparents?

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's suggestion: he is a distinguished parliamentary sportsman. I am sure that Japan Airlines Co. Ltd. could arrange for him to distribute what I believe are called kilts to all English football fans before they set off for the great matches.

Parliamentary links between the UK and Japan are clearly thriving. However, they are just one example of the diversity of the flourishing relationship between our two countries. The UK and Japan are natural partners in many other areas, and we are working together closely and effectively. As the Minister who is responsible for the overall relationship with Japan, I want the already excellent partnership to broaden and deepen. Japan is a natural ally for the UK, and we should make the most of the common ground between us.

This is a good year to look forward to future co-operation: it marks the centenary of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance—the first international treaty that Japan signed following the 1868 Meiji restoration, which laid the foundations of modern Japan. It was the first treaty to be signed by the British Government since 1815, and in 1902 was primarily a military pact designed to safeguard our respective interests in the far east. The alliance marked the emergence of Japan as a world power and helped to underpin the expansion of trade between our two nations.

The current trade and investment relationship between the UK and Japan is still hugely important to both countries. Although I do not gloss over the need for effective structural reform in Japan, the regular litany in the press of depressing statistics should not blind us to the massive underlying strength of the Japanese economy. Japan is not broke. It is not Argentina minus five years, as the wiseacres of the City have sometimes said, nor is it Botswana—a comparison that was made in *Newsweek International*, which is usually a reliable and sensible journal. Japan remains the world's second largest economy after the United States, despite the fact that for the past decade it has had relatively low levels of growth that average little more than 1 per cent. a year. In 2000, its gross domestic produce was nearly $38,000 per capita, which is more than 50 per cent. greater than UK GDP per capita, and two thirds of the total GDP for Asia as a whole. It has the world's largest foreign exchange reserves, at almost $400 billion, and had a current account surplus of around $80 billion last year. It has a large number of cutting edge companies, and a well-educated and resilient work force. I doubt whether there is a household in Britain that does not own goods ranging from cars to DVD players that cost serious money and are made by Japanese firms.

Looking to the future, Japan is responsible for about 25 per cent. of global investment in research and development. That was 3.2 per cent. of GDP in 2000, compared with 1.9 per cent. for the UK, with strength in growth areas such as renewable energy, life sciences, communications, IT and nanotechnology. UK scientists are working closely with their Japanese colleagues on most of those strategic technologies. In January, I went to Sapporo in the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. It is a snow-covered area such as one would see in Canada or the colder parts of Europe. I noticed that the pavements of Sapporo were completely dry and easy to walk on. The roads too were easy to drive on. That was because the pavements and roads had central heating. I thought to myself, if this is such a poor country, could we have some of it in south Yorkshire?

Japan remains a key export market for UK companies. It is our largest market outside the United States and Europe. It accounted for £3.7 billion-worth of exports in goods last year, which is 1.2 per cent. up on 2000, and for £3.1 billion-worth of exports in services. Companies in the food and drink, pharmaceutical, chemical, healthcare and electronics sectors are doing particularly well. Investment in the UK by Japanese companies has long been a feature of our bilateral relationship and is continuing, with both large and small Japanese companies looking to invest. When Nissan came to the north-east of England in the 1980s, a distinguished trade union leader said that the Japanese companies would be exporting, as he put it, "alien practices". Those alien practices are jobs that are well paid and today fully unionised. Certainly, with a trade union background myself, I greatly welcome the investment of Japanese companies in all parts of the UK.

[Mr. MacShane]

Every region has benefited from having world-class Japanese companies in their area, providing jobs, new technologies, new skills and new management techniques. The UK now attracts 46 per cent. of Japanese investment into the EU. More than 1,000 Japanese companies now operate in the UK, creating over 80,000 manufacturing jobs, and many thousands more in services. This month we celebrate the first major investment in the chemicals sector by a Japanese company, with Nippon Gosei's decision to locate a £65 million investment in Hull. Moreover, Sony has centralised its global treasury operations in a new centre in London, creating more than 100 well paid, highly skilled jobs, Toshiba has established a mobile telecommunications operations headquarters near London and there have been further expansions in the automotive components circuit.

One of the companies, Nippon Gosei, recently opened in Rotherham and has expanded the employment opportunities it is able to offer my constituents and others in south Yorkshire. The Government are working to build on those successes and to attract more knowledge-driven, high-value investments in the information and communications technology, automotive, life sciences and financial services sectors, where the UK has particular strengths to offer. The investment flow is not merely one way. A number of large British companies such as Vodafone, Cable and Wireless, Virgin, HMV, Compass and Logica have made substantial investments in Japan, as have many smaller high-tech companies, often in niche service sectors.

I had the pleasure of listening to Mr. Chris Gent, Vodafone's chairman, extol the excellent quality of Japanese mobile phone technology. I heard today that the latest generation of Japanese mobile phones will be able to lip read, which will no doubt greatly assist many hon. Members.

The British industry centre in Yokohama has served as a vital incubator for many smaller companies, with the support of the local British chamber of commerce and our embassy. Its excellent work under the ambassador, Sir Stephen Gomersall, flies the flag effectively for British commercial and political interests in Japan.

Our two Governments are working together increasingly closely on the global agenda. The events of 11 September underlined more strongly than ever the importance of international co-operation in the interests of global security and prosperity. It is no exaggeration to say that those events have brought about a paradigm shift in the way in which the Japanese view their role in the world. Under the decisive leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi, Japan responded by swiftly amending its peacekeeping legislation to facilitate its participation in the war against terrorism. Japan has been providing fuel for US and Royal Navy ships involved in operation enduring freedom. Those legislative changes have this week allowed Japan to dispatch almost 700 peacekeepers to East Timor—the largest such deployment ever.

We are delighted that Japan is now looking to play a greater role in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Yesterday in New York, I had the pleasure of discussing the UN's new peacekeeping role and the modernisation of its approach. Britain and Japan will co-operate to make the UN's important work even more effective. We stand ready to offer assistance and to share the experience of our own armed forces.

We are working closely with Japan, the world's largest bilateral donor, on international development issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and her new permanent under-secretary, Dr. Chakrabarti, have visited Japan for talks this year. To increase our collective effectiveness, they have explored the scope for closer co-operation in countries where we both work. We are considering the scope for further work together on matters such as the reconstruction of Afghanistan, reducing the global proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and Sierra Leone. Japan has designated 2002 as the year of soaring co-operation with Africa.

Our close co-operation on the global stage on vital issues such as the Kyoto protocol, the middle east peace process and North Korea is aided by the closest of working relationships at the highest political level. The relationship between our two Prime Ministers is excellent. Prime Minister Koizumi, who studied politics at University College, London, met our Prime Minister on 1 July in London—his first overseas call after Washington. The role of the British Prime Minister in shaping the international coalition against terrorism, and in influencing Washington on the way forward, made a deep impression on Koizumi and the Japanese public.

Japan's new Foreign Minister, Kawaguchi, has already established a close rapport with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. They talk on the telephone regularly, and my right hon. Friend looks forward to meeting her in the near future.

We can do far more together internationally. As trading nations and key US allies who view the world from a similar perspective, we must work together to promote democracy, the rule of law and free trade worldwide. I encourage all my hon. Friends here to keep in touch with their Japanese counterparts and talk to them about the international issues that matter to us all as parliamentarians, so that we can encourage the UK and Japan to work together co-operatively and find ways of dealing jointly with many of the world's problems.

It is not only international issues that we have in common. As mature economies, we share many of the same domestic policy preoccupations and have much to learn from each other. Our two Prime Ministers have recognised that and have initiated a series of meetings between their personal policy advisers. In the most recent, Prime Minister Koizumi's top domestic policy adviser, Professor Shimada, came to London for talks at No. 10 last month. The main focus was on employment policy, welfare reform and urban regeneration. Professor Shimada visited regeneration sites in Docklands and the Paddington basin and toured a next steps jobcentre. I hope that, as a result of such contacts, we can contribute to the development of an effective policy response by the Japanese Government to the country's current difficulties. That will serve British interests too.

Another area in which we are thickening our relationship with Japan is energy. For the past 30 years, bilateral energy links have been mainly in the form of nuclear fuel cycle services provided by BNFL to the Japanese power utilities to support their civil nuclear power programme. That has been, and continues to be, a substantial business, contributing about £2 billion to the UK trade balance with Japan during that period. However, pressures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, global concerns for energy security and the need for further progress on the development of commercially viable renewable energy sources offer considerable scope for developing our energy relationship with Japan into other areas. During his visit to Japan last October, my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy discussed that with the Japanese Government. We are now looking to identify a number of specific areas in which we can work together to our mutual advantage.

Non-governmental links are nothing new. The UK and Japan established a host of non-governmental links more than 100 years ago, as Japan set about catching up with the west. The British railway engineer, Edmund Morel, played a key role in establishing the Japanese railway system; the Englishman Richard Henry Brunton built Japan's first modern lighthouses; and Henry Dyer helped to establish Tokyo university.

That tradition of vibrant non-governmental links between our two countries remains strong today and received a major boost from the spectacular success of the year-long festival Japan 2001, which kicked off in May last year and is now drawing to a close. The festival brought us a series of memorable cultural events, including the Hyde Park Matsuri, in which His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Naruhito and His Royal Highness Prince of Wales took part. It drew massive crowds to experience the essence of a Japanese summer festival and gasp at the yabusame horseback archery. The Chikamatsu-za kabuki theatre troupe at Sadlers Wells drew rave reviews, as did the British Museum's 100 Views of Mount Fuji exhibition.

However, Japan 2001 has not just been about the big headline events. One of its most striking successes has been the organisers' use of the internet and other modern technologies to foster Japanese cultural events at a grassroots level throughout the country. Interest in the Japanese martial arts has flourished, and more than 750 schools, from the Shetland islands to Penzance, have taken part. With more than 80,000 children involved, the festival has helped to build the foundation for continued firm friendship between our two peoples in the future. Many people contributed to the festival's success, and the leadership of Lord Blakenham was essential.

To keep up the good work, our embassy in Japan marked the alliance's centenary by launching a new green alliance, which will be a trigger for young people in our two countries to think together about environmental issues and participate in volunteer activities. More than 40 schools and universities are participating, and more than 170 venues throughout Japan will be planting UK-grown oak saplings as a symbol of our enduring friendship. I am delighted that the all-party group planted one of those trees in the gardens of the Japanese Diet, and that Foreign Minister Kawaguchi planted the first, in our embassy in Tokyo, in her last day as Environment Minister before her promotion. Two members of the Japanese royal family have been studying at Merton College, Oxford, again strengthening the links between Japan and our higher education institutions. When I visited Japan in January, I was delighted to be asked to launch an additional commemorative programme—UK Now 2002, a series of events put together by the British Council to challenge stereotypes of the UK and to bring the best of contemporary British culture and design to the young people of Japan. Links between our young people were also strengthened last year by the launch of the youth exchange scheme, which enables up to 400 young people on each side to live and work in each other's country, and by the continuing success of the Japanese Government's Japan exchange and teaching programme, under which hundreds of young British graduates get the opportunity each year to teach in Japanese schools and work as international relations advisers in local authorities. I spent a memorable evening of saki and Japanese food with them in Saporo in January. It is a curiosity that the Japanese Government are still the single biggest employer of British graduates.

Finally, I should acknowledge the valuable role of the UK-Japan 21st-century group in bringing together annually a wide range of UK and Japanese opinion formers. This non-governmental think tank held a successful meeting in Oxfordshire in February, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and with the participation of several of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) who is, to the best of my knowledge, the only Member fluent in Japanese. I am pleased that she is present. I was delighted to be able to speak to the group, which decided to pay particular attention in its forthcoming work schedule to the potential for enhanced science and technology co-operation.

This has been a necessarily swift overview of the diversity of the current bilateral relationship. I first visited Japan about 20 years ago, and the Japan that I returned to since assuming my ministerial duties is richer, more confident and has a more vibrant youth facing the challenges of the 21st century. One hundred years ago, we signed the Anglo-Japanese treaty and ushered in a new era of British-Japanese relations. I hope to see such relations in the 21st century become the cornerstone of Britain's engagement with the world and Japan's growing presence on the global political and economic scene. I look forward to an active discussion in today's debate. I am grateful to the House authorities for allowing it to take place, and hope that as many hon. Members as possible become involved in deepening and broadening the relationship between our two countries still further.

2.52 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): First, I warmly congratulate the Minister on initiating today's debate and thank him on behalf of all Members for his constructive interest in the region.

As a Member, I have had the pleasure of visiting Japan twice, but before entering the House I worked with many Japanese companies, particularly in the financial services industry. It is crucial that relations

[Mr. Richard Spring]

between our two countries are given reasoned and sensible consideration, so I am pleased that that is exactly what is happening in today's debate.

Japan is one of Britain's closest friends and international partners today, but we should not forget that we have enjoyed a close relationship with Japan for more than a century. It has not been a relationship without periods of disagreement, even intense conflict, but underlying it is a sense of mutual respect and understanding.

We are both island nations with long-established monarchies and a sense of our own histories and unique places in the world. In tracing the roots of this friendship, we can look back about 150 years to the Meiji restoration when Japanese teams began visiting British factories, dockyards and industry to learn new skills in shipbuilding, for example. Indeed, many Japanese still look back to the early years of the 20th century and the Anglo-Japanese friendship treaty as the golden years of our relationship, and many would like to revive it. In spirit, we have done just that, especially in the past 20 years. A mutual respect for the history, traditions and values of our two nations underpins our relations; traditions that blend with the inner resources and strengths of vitality, ingenuity, and social cohesion that the Japanese possess in such abundance. They provide a combination of qualities that I am certain will enable Japan to continue to modernise and to undertake the on-going structural readjustment that is so vital if it is to re-emerge as the fully fledged, key global player that it deserves to be. In the 1970s and 1980s we, too, had to undergo a series of structural changes.

The Anglo-Japanese relationship, on a practical level, used to be based on economic ties, and, to an extent, those were a one-way Japanese inward investment. That investment and those economic ties are still very important and most welcome, but our relationship is now much more a two-way affair. There are many mutually beneficial opportunities for extensive cultural, technological and scientific exchanges, not to mention the tourism to which I shall return later.

That closeness has benefited both our countries, as increased exchanges of information and ties have enabled us to offer important advice on how—and how not—to reform welfare services, and how to improve systems of social insurance. In many respects, as the Minister said, similar problems beset both countries.

Britain and Japan enjoy good economic relations, and in recent years relations between the two countries have continued to expand. Japanese companies now have more than 1,400 business offices in the UK. In manufacturing, the number of direct investments in Britain exceeds 260, which accounts in value for about 40 per cent. of all Japanese investment in the EU. Without a shred of doubt, this country has been transformed by inward investment from Japan in the past two decades. By directly employing about 80,000 people, those manufacturing companies play a part in stimulating the British economy and improving the country's trade balance. British exports to Japan in recent years have also been steadily increasing. The Japanese embassy has been supporting the British Government and industry's positive and constructive approach towards Japan, which is most clearly expressed by the Action Japan export campaign.

On 2 September 1996, our countries' then Foreign Ministers, Yukihiko Ikeda and Malcolm Rifkind, held bilateral talks in Tokyo and agreed to a UK-Japan action agenda, a programme aimed at promoting economic relations between the two countries and also at increasing British trade in Japan, and I hope that it will continue to be successful.

The Conservative party remains committed to making Britain a country in which business can flourish. We want this country to continue to function as a conduit for firms to gain access to British potential and to the European single market. Despite recent economic slow-downs and a degree of stagnation in the Asian economies, on which various economists, not always helpfully, have seen fit to comment regarding Japan, there is much that we can still learn from that country. It remains a hugely rich society, but one that continues to emphasise duty and obligation to fellow citizens. Japanese people also place a massive premium on educational attainment.

The link between Britain and Japan is strong at every level and the contribution made to this thriving relationship by Japanese citizens based in this country is highly valued. The connection reaches from grass-roots organisations with few members to the great multinational companies producing products worth billions of pounds a year and employing hundreds and thousands of people, the most visible signs of which, economic links aside, are the thriving academic exchange opportunities in higher education between Japan and Britain, and the tremendous volume of tourism. While some may be here to improve their language skills, I hope that many also enjoy the numerous tourist opportunities of a long stay. All those visitors represent major, welcome contributions to British life and society, whatever their length of stay.

On defence and security, we find a growing overlap with Japan in the new globalised context. Both Britain and Japan know that their security is wrapped up closely with the USA. Indeed, Japan has made a major move towards becoming an active international player again by offering to send military forces out of the homeland area into crisis spots. That constitutes a huge break with the Japanese post-war tradition of military non-participation and we, and the world, should welcome it as a significant contribution to international global security. It would be advantageous to have that Anglo-Japanese partnership enhanced on a global level. Together we must deal with common threats to world stability. In the war against terrorism, we welcome the fact that Japan has contributed an aircraft carrier and given her full support in so many ways.

East Timor has long been an area of conflict and it is to be hoped that Japan might soon take on a greater regional role, helping to forge regional solutions to problems. We should also co-operate in the face of challenges presented by issues such as environmental change and international development. Significantly, in the war against terrorism, Prime Minister Koizumi has taken a personal lead and from the outset offered Japanese support. Defence agency director General Nakatani ordered the dispatch of maritime and air self-defence forces to provide logistical support for US and

British troops fighting the Taliban and the al-Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan, the order being issued after Prime Minister Koizumi had earlier approved a detailed implementation plan for SDF logistical support to the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan.

That plan was formulated in line with the new anti-terrorism law in Japan that enables the SDF to be dispatched overseas to provide support to the campaign. The maritime self-defence force plans to send three warships and 1,200 troops; the air self-defence force plans to send eight planes and 180 personnel. That is a vital step and one that required a degree of soul-searching and political courage in Japan. I pay tribute to Japan and thank it for its invaluable help. I also pay personal tribute to Prime Minister Koizumi for his courage and his far-sighted plans for reform. We wish him every success in his reforming endeavours, as they will benefit not only Japan but, indirectly, the British economy. A prosperous Japan is good for Britain.

As the Minister and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) said, it will not have escaped the notice of many in Britain, and certainly in Japan, that an influx of fans will visit Japan for the World cup series. While I wish the Japanese the best of luck with the organisation and success of the tournament, I hope that all will be well during the period of the games. I endorse what the Minister said about our cultural links, particularly on the success of the festival, which was a great tribute to the organisers and an eye-opener to so many in Britain as to the cultural and artistic riches of Japan.

In conclusion, I say unhesitatingly that UK-Japanese relations look very healthy. We can look forward to a new era of co-operation and a 21st century in which I hope Japan will play an even more important international and regional role. I am confident that British Governments will take the lead in forging new and mutually beneficial partnerships with Japan and in building upon and consolidating existing ones.

3.4 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I welcome the debate and the privilege of contributing to it. Many people have long awaited the opportunity to debate the issue of relations with one of our most important allies.

I first had the opportunity to visit Japan in 1979. That turned into a long stay, and I did not return until late 1980. I studied the Japanese language, which is a study that I urge upon all hon. Members. They would find that the language is mellifluous and that it contains slightly fewer sounds than the English language, which makes the spoken language relatively easy to master. All one needs is determination or, as the Japanese say, "ganbatte". As a pastime, many languages are studied in the House, so I hope that Japanese will soon be one of them.

My constituency, Reading, East, is home to many Japanese residents, partly because it is home to the only Japanese higher education institution in the UK, Gyosei college. The college invites several hundred young Japanese people to Reading to undertake study courses, from which they benefit. The people of Reading also benefit from their presence and the opportunity to get to know them.

The UK and Japan are partners in the world. It has been said that we are both island nations and as such we have much in common. We both drive on the left, and I have been told that that is because of the horseback knightly tradition, which is different in each country. That may or may not be true.

I look forward to an expansion of our partnership in the world. In the past, it has been said that Japan has been a little reluctant to play its full part in world affairs. In the 1980s, the concept of Japan's internationalisation was much talked about. That is now a reality. I particularly look forward to the UK, Japan and other nations working together in Africa as part of the new African partnership. The plight of many African nations is a shame to the civilised world. It is up to relatively wealthy nations—Japan, the UK, other European nations and, of course, the USA—to work together to help African nations, and to help them to help each other.

Although relations between our two nations remain good, some issues can be an irritant to their maintenance. For example, our two nations take a different position on whaling. Rather than insulting the Japanese Government, as some anti-whaling groups do—with the best intentions—it would be better to work together to solve the issue.

I could not continue without mentioning the World cup. I am delighted that Japan is to be one of the host nations. Japan plays very good football—I shall not compare Japanese with Korean football because that is for another debate. English football fans have a reputation that goes before them. For the vast majority of fans, the reputation is unjustified. It would be unfair to ask English football fans to acquaint themselves with Japanese culture in any depth before they travel to Japan. However, I hope that they will remember that drinking beer is not a competitive sport, but to be enjoyed in moderation, as Japanese people understand. Some of the best beer in the world is produced in Japan, and I hope that our football fans go there and drink Sapporo beer in moderation.

There is a beer hall in Sapporo where people can pay an entrance fee and then drink as much beer as they want, until they have had enough—I shall not give out its address.

Mr. MacShane: I have to announce the sad news that, for the duration of the matches in Sapporo, that beer hall will be closed.

Jane Griffiths: I thank my hon. Friend, and congratulate the management of that beer hall on its wise decision.

I hope that our football fans take part in the life of Japan while they are there. They will find a warm welcome and much that is familiar, although they will find an entirely different culture. What has not been emphasised in discussions about relations between the UK and Japan is the cultural influences that we have upon each other. I am not talking in particular about great works of art or theatre, which we know about but which are rather rarefied. I am talking about, for example, sumo wrestling, which has been shown on television in this country. When I lived in Japan, I became a great fan of sumo wrestling, and I have long

[Jane Griffiths]

hoped that there could be sumo in this country. Sumo challenges our assumptions about sport and athletics. The bulk, body fat and mass of the wrestlers leaves one to believe that they could not possibly be consummate athletes, but that is exactly what they are. The spectacle is to be recommended to all.

Japan has had other cultural influences on the UK, well known to young people in particular. The influence of manga cartoon on our film and on our young people's television has not been emphasised enough. It has been a great influence on European artists and altered the look of many of our cartoons and films. It is an important cultural tradition in its own right. There is a spectrum of cultural influences, including the phenomenon, with which I hope hon. Members here are familiar, "Hello Kitty".

We have a long way to go in developing our relations, but we have come a long way already. I know that we, Britain and Japan, will go forward together, shoulder to shoulder, as key players in the world and as a joint force for good in it. I look forward to greater progress.

3.12 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This is a very important debate. It might even be timely, as many hon. Members have referred to the World cup, although, to Scottish ears, the slightly gratuitous over-repetition of references to the World cup this afternoon does not necessarily chime positively. None the less, I liked the suggestion from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) that, as an ambassadorial gesture, the English fans might be kitted out in kilts. If the Minister or the Minister for Sport wishes to take that up, I can suggest a company of leading kilt makers in my constituency, Lochcarron of Scotland, that would, I am sure, be delighted to help out. That would give a whole new take on international diplomacy.

The hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) made some interesting points, particularly on the cultural aspects of the debate. She made two suggestions: that we should learn Japanese or take up sumo wrestling. I had not imagined learning Japanese, but if there is to be a choice between the two, I think that that would be the easier and I would have to sign up for it very speedily.

Seriously, this is an important debate. We in this House should acknowledge regularly the significance of Japan and Britain's relationship with Japan. Japan is a phenomenally important world economic power and, as has already been mentioned this afternoon, has an important and growing world diplomatic role. We in this country must be seen to encourage that positively.

On 22 February at Ditchley park, the Minister made a speech on Japanese relations, in which he mentioned four themes: the importance of strengthening bilateral relations between our two countries, the need for us to focus on international security and the fight against terrorism, the pressing need to open trade and remove the forces of protectionism and the importance of building democracy. Not surprisingly, we have heard echoes of those matters today. They are a useful focus for this debate and I want to turn my attention to them.

Japan has been the key economic success story of the post-war period. In recent years, there has been a danger of that being forgotten because of undoubted difficulties in Japan. Stripping away the occasional example of schadenfreude, we must recognise that Japan is of huge importance. That should be encouraging to us because it is good for Britain. The complacency in this country about Japan's role in the world that was evident 30, or even 20, years ago has been brutally shaken up. In a generation, we have moved from sneering to cheering—from mocking Datsun Sunny cars to queueing up for PlayStation 2 releases. That is an image transformed and a success that we would do well to replicate in our country.

However, there are problems that have consequences for the region and the world economy. We must hope that Japan finds its way out of its present economic difficulty. In that process, trade will be of key importance. This country, and the west in general, used to be concerned about old-style protectionism in Japan. That protectionism has largely disappeared and the trend towards openness is continuing. The balance of trade is still rather one way, and Britain has to make up much ground.

Nevertheless, I would highlight the strengths of British success in Japan. To make another reference to my constituency interests, Locharron of Scotland is an important part of a textile industry that is still finding strong markets in Japan. The key industry in the borders is knitted cashmere. My home town, Innerleithen, features such world names as Ballantyne, which has top shops in Tokyo as well as in other key world capitals. Although some of these matters are now devolved, we would welcome whatever support the Minister and his colleagues could give to help small British companies to promote top-quality products and expand their markets in Japan.

In the papers this week, an interesting story showed that things have moved on. An Oxfam report highlights that the European Union is deemed to be more protectionist than Japan in its dealings with developing countries. That is not the self-image that we would want to have in Britain and is another wake-up call for us. We should consider that carefully.

Trade is not just a bilateral issue; it is multilateral. The current dispute about steel in the World Trade Organisation is a good example of an issue on which Britain—as part of the EU—and Japan have similar interests in their dealings with the United States, and their concerns about the consequences of its actions. I am sure that Japan is watching carefully how Europe handles the matter. I am anxious because I am a veteran of the banana war between the USA and Europe, where collateral trade damage to other trade issues and countries became a great concern. Japan will be taking careful note of that at the moment. It is a warning to us all that it is not just a matter of ensuring that the USA behaves properly in the dispute, but that Europe does, too. In doing so, we must not work against the interests of our other trading partners across the world.

The WTO has become particularly topical in Asia recently. Japan's huge neighbour, China, is now a member of the organisation, which must surely give Japan a different perspective on it. I hope that it will also make Japan join in the reformist agenda, which recognises the strengths of the idea of the WTO—what

it stands for—but is not oblivious to its problems and failings. There is no question but that disputes between international trading blocs are becoming more complex and bitter and that the WTO is unable to cope with them. Some of its decisions are opaque, and at times it certainly does not provide international leadership. As Japan observes and co-operates with China's entry to the WTO, I hope that it will act with Britain and others to ensure that the organisation has the skills and resources that it needs to do the very important job of policing world trade.

Investment is closely linked to trade and, as the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) mentioned, there is a vital relationship between our two countries in that regard. A statistic that I believe has already been highlighted—I hope that it is right; it comes from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website—is that the UK receives about 45 per cent. of all Japanese inward investment to the European Union. That affects a thousand companies and 88,000 jobs, which is not insignificant. There are still issues surrounding financial services deregulation in Japan, but in Britain we certainly have a very strong Japanese presence. I understand that the second largest of the overseas-owned banks in the City of London is Japanese.

I do not wish to provoke the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok, who seems to be enjoying himself this afternoon. However, Japanese investors increasingly raise the issue of the single currency and ask whether Britain will be part of it. The FCO website says that

"increasing numbers of Japanese investors have expressed concern about the high value of sterling and UK's policy on the Euro."

I always listen carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Like him, I would be wary of entry to the single currency at the current rate, but we cannot duck for much longer the long-term questions about the future of outside investment in this country—particularly Japanese investment—if we do not do something about the single currency.

Mr. Spring: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that a good way of dealing with that very important issue would be to invite the Government to produce a White Paper, for which we have consistently asked, on the economic, political and constitutional implications of the single currency as well as the possible investment impact, and to elevate the debate beyond website level?

Mr. Moore: I am very conscious, Mr. Gale, that I will soon be in deep trouble if I attempt to turn this into a debate on the single currency, so I will not seek to do so. Instead, I invite the Minister to comment on the hon. Gentleman's and my observations when he replies.

A priority in our trading, investment and economic dealings with Japan must be a commitment to the open and competitive relationship that has developed in leaps and bounds during the past 30 years. I hope that it will continue.

For much of the post-war period, Japan's foreign policy was largely dominated by the events of the war and its role in it. As a consequence, there has been considerable nervousness about any development of an external role for Japan, and there has at times been some concern in the region around Japan about its domestic developments. Not long after he became Prime Minister, Mr. Koizumi caused some concern with his visit to the Japanese war graves. There was also concern from South Korea and China about the content of certain school textbooks. That sensitivity might have grown into something bigger, but during the past year the skill of the Japanese Prime Minister has taken Japan into a more outgoing, expansionist phase instead of moving into an isolationist phase. That move could cause concern, but I view it positively and hope that it will continue.

Some Opposition politicians have made unwise comments about the potential development of nuclear weapons. By contrast, the recent visit by the chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress was a great success and provided a flavour of the growing confidence of different countries in dealing with one another. What is good for the region must be good for the rest of the world, particularly Britain. The Minister highlighted the fact that we have been strengthening our direct ties, and the UK-Japan 21st century group, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), plays an important role in that and should be encouraged.

Japan is playing a more confident world role, not least in building democracy. Its work on behalf of Afghanistan is clear and strong. It hosted the conference on the rebuilding and development of Afghanistan in Tokyo on 21 and 22 January. That was important and the generosity of Japanese aid pledges has not gone unnoticed.

The hon. Member for Reading, East made an important point about the new partnership for African development. Japan is a key player in G8, alongside the United Kingdom, and helps to drive that initiative forward. The initiative was born in Africa, which is taking the lead but needs western industrialised support. Potentially fatal hesitation might have resulted from the wrong reaction to Zimbabwe and its role in the Commonwealth, but President Mbeki of South Africa played an important role in keeping Africa focused on the right issues. I hope that Japan and the United Kingdom will respond positively to that development and give every support to the initiative.

The Minister referred specifically to the prospect of Japan becoming a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and Liberal Democrats strongly support that aspiration. Its present set-up, which reflects a bygone age, should be changed and Japan has developed an important new role.

If I may say so in passing and not too cheekily, today marks the creation of the International Criminal Court, which will become effective at the beginning of July. Some permanent members of the Security Council—most importantly, America and China—have not adopted or do not support the court, and perhaps the Government will encourage Japan to endorse it as a sign of its commitment to a peaceful world order and the development of the United Nations role.

On the whole, our relationship with Japan is positive, but it would be wrong not to touch briefly on some trickier issues that bedevil it. One area of difficulty between our two countries concerns the nuclear issue. The Conservative Member who referred to the nuclear

[Mr. Moore]

stockpile of plutonium and how it could be developed into nuclear weapons may have been speaking wide of the mark, but I should be interested to know what discussions and representations the Government are having with the Japanese to discover the reason for that stockpile and how it may be used. Nuclear energy is a fraught issue, to use British understatement, and the fiasco of BNFL's falsification of records concerning MOX waste was the defining moment in that relationship. It regularly sends delegations to Japan to seek to reassure it that that serious matter was a one-off.

Japanese domestic opinion is alarmed about what is going on, and trust, which is a key word, may not be possible in those circumstances. Perhaps the Government can grasp the issue and recognise that many countries across the world are not interested in nuclear energy and will move away from it as a future fuel source. Such countries will consider BNFL's future to be dealing with the clean-up of existing problems with nuclear energy, and not trying to develop technologies for a new generation of nuclear stations. Japan is rightly and proudly associated with environmentalism, not least symbolically through Kyoto, and it is important that we support it in improving that reputation.

The hon. Member for Reading, East referred to whaling, and I should like to ask the Minister a couple of brief questions about that. Whaling has been a long-running source of international tension. Non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace have highlighted their worries about the increasing number of whales caught for scientific research. Perhaps more seriously, they have also made allegations about the ways in which bilateral aid between Japan and other countries is being used to influence votes at the International Whaling Commission. Those are damning and damaging allegations that are in the interests neither of Japan nor the rest of the world. The Government surely have a role to play in understanding that issue, explaining its dangers to Japan and its truth to the rest of us. I hope that the Minister will be able to touch on that in his closing comments.

Those are two difficult issues, but I do not want them to overshadow what I regard as a very positive and overwhelmingly beneficial relationship between our two countries. It is important that we build on the success of the past 50 years since the second world war. We need, particularly in economic areas, to build on what has developed very strongly during the past 20 or 30 years. Japan is rightly taking a stronger international role, which Liberal Democrat Members support, and we also support the Government in strengthening those ties.

3.32 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I have never been to Japan, but I was recently a member of an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation that was involved in extensive discussion with countries from all over the world. Japanese parliamentarians made a very positive and intense contribution on globalisation.

Globalisation is an all-embracing term defining the economic and communications revolution set in track by industrialisation and imperialism. Over a considerable period, it has shaped the contours of the modern world in which we live. The effect of that process has been far-reaching, and it has had an impact on all of us, wherever we live, on whichever continent. Globalisation will continue to have an enormous effect on the world that our children inherit. It has given birth to an economic market without frontiers; it has increased the nature, extent and volume of world trade; and it has created a truly global community that makes us more closely linked and interdependent.

Although that process originated as a product of our industrial revolution, and other western countries' subsequent industrial revolutions, Japan has undoubtedly made a huge contribution to it. Its 19th-century cultural revolution, which was set in train by the Meiji restoration, opened what had traditionally been a very closed society to western thought, industrial change and innovation. As a graduate in modern history who specialised in courses on the far east, I have studied Japanese history. Japan's tremendous growth and the cultural changes that it went through are hugely engrossing areas of study that should be of interest to us all.

The United Kingdom and Japan have had historic links through the industrial revolution and globalisation, and it is important to stress the involvement and input of Scotland in such a special relationship. It is worth emphasising that although the formal treaty relationship was struck in 1902, informal contact and economic exchanges had occurred between the two countries for the greater part of the 19th century. I refer to two important links that were forged between north-east Scotland and Japan in the middle decades of the 1800s. At this point, I may fall out with the Minister. He said that Henry Brunton was an Englishman, but my records show that he was an engineer from Muchalls near Aberdeen, who went to Japan in 1868 and stayed there for eight years to supervise the installation of a scheme for lighthouses for the entire coast of Japan. Thomas Glover was certainly a Scotsman. He was another product of north-east Scotland and was born in Fraserburgh. He went to Japan in 1859 and was involved in various business ventures in Nagasaki. His house continues to be a popular tourist attraction.

Subsequent to such visits by the Scots, the first real intergovernmental Iwakura mission to be mounted by the Japanese Imperial Government was to the United Kingdom and America. It visited Scotland in 1872 during a two-year programme of intense fact-finding in the outside world as part of the Meiji restoration. The mission was led by Ambassador Iwakura and included four associate ambassadors, 48 delegates and 54 students. It was a forerunner of the foreign excursions frequently undertaken by our all-party groups. The mission precipitated the development of important cultural and industrial links between Scotland, the rest of the UK and Japan. Indeed, two Scotsmen, Henry Dyer and Sir Alfred Ewing, became principals of prestigious engineering colleges in Japan.

That close reciprocal relationship was disturbingly disrupted by war in the 1930s and 1940s, but happily it was resumed with greater vigour and enthusiasm by both countries in the later decades of the last century. As a result, we have witnessed the creation of a special relationship between two highly industrial, modern market economies of constitutional democracies, which,

although separated by the extent of the globe, have many things in common. It is not well known, but Japanese society is based on an intense clan society such as the one that existed in Scotland before the highland clearances. Much of Japan's industrial development was based on a system whereby clan chiefs received money from the Government for giving up their feudal rights for the clansmen. Japan has a prosperous and developing constitutional monarchy with bicameral Houses of Parliament.

A century on from our initial formal treaty of alliance, we are now partners in a new alliance to create better understanding between two great countries. We have the joint aims of creating a peaceful and co-operative world order to eradicate terrorisms and third world poverty, and to promote greater and more equitable levels of prosperity and well-being throughout the world.

When contact between the countries was first made, the United Kingdom was truly the workshop of the world and Scotland was a significant component of the UK economic equation. Since then, compared with the Japanese economy, the UK has suffered a relative economic decline. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Japan became the innovative centre of new technologies and new industries throughout the world. In the past decade, however, I am glad to say that the UK has witnessed a resurgence of its enterprise, with Scotland again playing a leading part in the development of the high-tech IT revolution. It is creating and enjoying a synergy with our industrial and economic partners in Japan and the United States of America, with which both countries have close relationships.

A joint goal for all three countries in the industrial partnership is to continue to foster a positive and progressive partnership and to encourage trade, enterprise and prosperity. At the same time, they want to ensure that the growing economic strength and potential of Japan's close neighbour, China, is harnessed and productively channelled into constructive economic relationships with its Asian and western trading partners. They also, whenever possible, encourage democratic reform in the Chinese system of government.

As major players in the process of globalisation, and as two of the four major economies that have benefited from the world economic system, Japan and the UK are morally obliged to ensure that more disadvantaged emerging countries can more equitably share in the wealth and material well-being produced by our two countries' entrepreneurial efforts. There is also an obligation—this is the nub of the debate—to ensure that proper management of our economies is a top economic goal. We must ensure that the international economic trade regime enshrined in the WTO operates equitably so that the depressions that caused so much chaos and despair in the past are consigned to the bin of history. We look forward to more even economic progress in decades to come. A major feature of that economic management is ensuring that the production and extraction processes needed to fuel economic activity and development take place within the parameters set by the Kyoto agreements.

I welcome the positive comments made by my hon. Friend the Minister on 22 February in a speech entitled "A new Japan/UK alliance for the 21st century". He suggested that our two nations have a pivotal role in ensuring a wider world community for peace and prosperity. At the centre of that is the creation of greater understanding in our two countries of our respective values and cultures. Much has been made of this year's World cup, to be played in Japan and Korea. That will be a lesson for the Japanese population, who will witness at first-hand the football tribalism so evident in both British and English society—a culture that, to judge from watching television, the Japanese community has taken to heart. Unfortunately, the civilising influence of Scotland's tartan army will not be available in the tournament. However, the people of Japan have already taken tartan and Scottish whisky to their hearts. Japan is one of whisky's best customers and biggest importers, and long may that last. There is whisky, as well as beer, to be enjoyed and to supplement the sake.

As in the earlier period of the UK-Japanese relationship, Scotland plays a major role as an economic partner and cultural collaborator. Indeed, my own city, Dundee, on the east coast of Scotland, is playing a major role in heightening that greater cultural understanding. I draw the Chamber's attention to an article that appeared in the *Daily Record* of 20 November 2000 with the headline "Our Dennis is big in Japan". According to the byline, the journalist is Alistair Munro. The Dennis in this case is not my hon. Friend the Minister, but none other than Dundee's own Dennis the Menace. The rest of the headline reads: "Menace helps teach kids English". The article states that research shows that the Dundee-born tearaway comic strip is doing more to help Japanese children to learn English than the usual English textbooks, with growing numbers of schools in Japan using the *Beano*, Dennis the Menace and Gnasher. I have many back copies because of my young family, and anyone present is welcome to take them home.

On a more serious, academic note, I draw the Minister's attention to another link that Dundee has with Japan. The prospectus of the university of Abertay, Dundee offers a course that is not matched anywhere else in the UK. It is a BSc honours course in computer games technology with Japanese studies. The course is progressive, and the university of Abertay has many links with the far east and near east. The course is a variation of a highly regarded computer games technology course that is already available at the university, and it allows students who are in the concluding years of their studies to gain work experience at placements with Japanese games companies and research facilities. Such collaboration is the essence of our relationship both today and in the future.

Hopefully, the initiatives that have been undertaken in my home town are being replicated throughout the United Kingdom. Our relationship has been built on inward investment into the UK through, obviously, the growth of the Japanese motor industry and through IT investment from Japan, which is all too evident in Scotland. That will continue to secure friendly and prosperous relationships between our two great countries. We should examine fields in which my city has great potential, such as biomedical research, which is a strong point of the Dundee economy.

The point was made that we should try to learn Japanese. My grasp of languages is fairly poor, but I had a joyful experience when I was at the Scottish business

[Mr. Iain Luke]

school at Edinburgh university. One of my friends in the class was a Japanese banker who came to the university to study the postgraduate MBA course. His English was not so good, but his mathematics was red hot, and he gave me a great deal of help with business economics. We had a great Burns night together when he gave a good rendition of Japanese drinking songs that mirrored some of the more bawdy works of Burns from his productive times. There was a great feeling of comradeship and enjoyment, and the event was much more sophisticated than the karaoke that occurs in other hostelries throughout Scotland.

There is growing awareness and collaboration between the two countries, which I am sure the Minister and his team encourage. In the long term, it is for our mutual benefit and for the benefit of the wider global community that Japan and the UK—and Scotland, as part of the UK—build greater bridges and links to continue the dialogue that has existed since the 19th century. We should learn from the mistakes of the past to ensure that the economic future of the globe is peaceful and prosperous so that future generations will have a pleasant existence in a harmonious world that works for the benefit of all.

I am glad to have made my contribution. As I said, I have never been to Japan, but I hope that the links between Dundee and Japan have been relevant to the debate. I look forward to hearing subsequent contributions.

3.47 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I echo many things that were said about the UK and Japan. However, I start on a negative note by referring to the comments of the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) about whaling. I share her worries, but surely the matter is not without the possibility of a reasonable settlement. I share the hon. Lady's view that it is inappropriate to throw insults at each other—particularly from this direction towards our friends in Japan. I hope that we will be able to conclude that rather unfortunate part of the relationship between Japan and the UK, and that the Minister will comment on that.

When the Minister opened the debate, he mentioned the forthcoming World cup finals in Japan. We have heard about that event so many times, and it grates on the Welsh ear because we have no representation there. Repeating that does not help—the fact becomes more hurtful as time goes on.

However, speaking of football—rugby football—there was a time when the Welsh rugby team could defeat the Japanese team comfortably. Alas, for two main reasons, that is not so now. There has been a vast improvement in the standard of Japanese rugby. It has grown in leaps and bounds over the past 10 to 15 years, but there has been a sad transient reversal of the standard in Wales. I was at one of the first post-war matches between Japan and Wales some years ago in the old Cardiff Arms Park stadium. On that splendid occasion I had the great fortune to sit next to the coach, Shiggi Kono, who I believe is still associated with the game in Japan. The sun is rising on Japanese rugby, and I wish it well.

Economic links between Japan and Wales began about 50 years ago. Some 50 major Japanese companies have set up in Wales. Japan is traditionally a significant investor in Wales and an important export market for Welsh goods. In the first three quarters of 2001 the Welsh export market to Japan was worth £60 million, which is a considerable sum for a relatively small economy. Wales has gained significantly from that relationship, which has brought it jobs and good training, and has helped to create a viable high-tech industry there. Workers were given high-quality training to ensure that they developed the essential skills for a dynamic industry and the opportunity to run high-quality high-tech factories.

Not only those who work for the manufacturing plants have benefited. Japanese companies have also helped indigenous Welsh companies. Over time, firms moved their sourcing of components from Japan to local companies, and smaller Welsh firms have flourished as satellites around the plants. Japan has contributed a great deal to the economic development of Wales, and the legacy of all that it has done is crucial to our future. I pay tribute to the Welsh Development Agency and other agencies in Wales that had the foresight to visit Japan early on, many decades ago.

Like many people, when I purchase electronic goods I look at the Japanese products first, because of their high standard and reliability. I can think of hardly any electrical or IT goods in my household—or, indeed, in any offices—that are not manufactured by Japanese companies. However, those companies are going through a tough time. Hitachi, NEC, Toshiba and Fujitsu have announced global job losses and drops in profits last year caused by the falling demand for electronics and other IT goods around the world. The effects of that have been felt badly in Wales, with several plant closures and inevitable job losses. Many Japanese firms have relocated from Wales to eastern Europe. For example, Hitachi moved 350 jobs from Hirwaun to eastern Europe. The closure at Christmas was a sad moment, as it spelled the end of nearly half a century of television production, nearly two decades of which was under the management of Hitachi, one of the first Japanese companies to invest in Wales.

More than 2,000 redundancies were announced last year at Japanese plants in south Wales. There have also been some positive announcements, such as a £100 million investment programme by Toyota at its Deeside engine plant, but the overall pattern is still one of slight decline. However, I am sure that that can be addressed when the economic outlook improves. The Government are doing a lot, and I hope that they continue to do all that they can to secure Japanese investment in Wales. The Minister is positive on that point as on others, and I am sure that he has his eye on the ball.

The Japanese companies that I mentioned are under great pressure. Their tighter profit margins mean that considerations such as the cost of labour must be uppermost in their minds, hence the relocations to Europe. Possibly, the relocations are also partly due to the euro debate; I do not know, but I think that they could be. Leading Japanese industrialists have recently made statements that hint that something should be done, and that an indication, one way or the other, should be given about the euro.

I hope that the Government will create the correct economic environment to secure those jobs. As I have said, that environment will be influenced by the strength of the pound. It is vital that those jobs—which are highly skilled and essential to local communities—are retained, and that we are able to sustain the high level of investment not only in Wales, but in the other constituent parts of the UK.

In September 2000, the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales led a trade delegation to Japan. This is what he had to say:

"The warmth of welcome that we received everywhere emphasised the regard Japanese industry has for Wales and the remarkably high profile of Wales relative to our size. They also recognise the top quality goods and services produced in Wales and this is confirmed by the significant number of orders won in the Japanese markets."

That is excellent news, and it continues to happen. Since then, I understand that there has been a further delegation, and that the Minister has visited Japan. I hope that that relationship between Wales, the UK and Japan will go from strength to strength.

Because of the falling demand for electronic goods, Japanese technical expertise focuses increasingly on systems, services and software. We need to ensure that the partnerships between Wales and Japan continue into that new era. Wales has an excellent record in engineering expertise. For example, the world's first fibre-optic cable was developed and manufactured in St. Asaph in north Wales, and I hope that Japanese companies will make increasingly large investments in that sector in Wales—and throughout the UK. I strongly believe that if that happens, those investments will prove to be as successful for Wales and Japan as Japanese investment in the traditional manufacturing sector in its heyday.

The Minister rightly referred to the need to encourage more knowledge-based industries. That is a crucial sector, in which Wales needs to make headway. A report by the Cardiff-based economics consultancy Robert Huggins Associates describes how the percentage of knowledge-based business in Wales increased by only 0.4 per cent. between 1983 and 2001, despite the expertise that Wales has in that sector. Therefore, Wales has a lot of ground to make up.

Trade and investment are not the only links between Japan and Wales; tourism is also important. In 2000, there were 13,000 trips by people from Japan to Wales, and their estimated spend was £4 million. That is a small but significant part of the overseas visitor market, and I hope that it will rapidly grow, not just because such trips bring economic gain to Wales, but also because they give Japanese people the opportunity to visit Wales and its people.

Last year was excellent for Welsh-Japanese investment because, as part of the Japan 2000 festival, several events were held in Wales. For example, the Fujisawa male voice choir joined Côr Bro Ogwr at Sony hall, Pencoed, when the choirs sang in each other's languages. Other highlights have been a matsuri at the museum of Welsh life at St. Fagans in Cardiff, and the creation of a traditional Japanese garden at the national Welsh botanic garden. Many Welsh arts organisations that have never been to the far east are now planning to stage work there, while their Japanese counterparts are planning return visits to Wales. That can only be good for the future.

My children told me to say that some Welsh groups, such as Gorkys Zygotic Mynci, Super Furry Animals and Big Leaves—all of which record in the Welsh language as well as in English—are big in Japan. That is what my kids have told me, anyway—although I am not in a position to deny or confirm that.

Not a lot of people know that there are at least two universities in Japan that offer courses in the Welsh language. Both courses are hugely over-subscribed. I happen to be—for my sins—a member of the White Robes of the Gorsedd of Bards in Wales. I am not bragging when I say that that honour is not readily bestowed. I was privileged at Llanelli national eisteddfod to see the induction of a Japanese professor of Welsh into the White Robes. His Welsh speaking was beyond perfection. I hope that we can build on that excellent cultural exchange between our two countries for the good of our economies, our future happiness and growth, and the creation of mutual respect.

I am upbeat about relations between our countries. There has been a slight downturn in the Japanese economy, but it will come back. It is a strong country and will come back stronger than ever, and I hope that when that happens, we in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom can share in the growth.

4 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): I am proud to speak as joint secretary of the all-party British Japanese group which, I am happy to say, is the second largest in Parliament—an indication of the friendship and good feeling between our colleagues here and in Japan.

I congratulate the Minister on securing this debate. I do not always agree with him on those issues about which he is wrong. I make that distinction, because many agree with him even when he is wrong, simply because he is the Minister, whereas I choose not to do so. However, he has been absolutely first class on issues related to building links between the United Kingdom and Japan. I especially wish to pay tribute to the way in which he was able to increase from five to 10 the number of hon. Members in the parliamentary delegation who recently visited Japan, which made the visit more successful than it might otherwise have been.

The Minister mentioned heated roads in Japan, to show the prosperity of that country. There are heated roads in my constituency sometimes—when one of the neighbours has set cars on fire in the street. I agree that recent reports about the economic crisis in Japan are exaggerated. I have been there on many occasions and, goodness me, if that is a crisis, I would certainly like to have some of it in my constituency.

British parliamentarians' recent visit to Japan to meet our counterparts followed a visit by Japanese delegates to the House some 18 months earlier. I hope that the Minister will encourage such visits, because the relationships and dialogue built up during the process of parliamentary debate and discussion are valuable and ought to be encouraged. I am grateful for the efforts of Keith Haines of Japan Airlines who ensured that those of my colleagues who are not as accustomed to travelling as I am were able to do so in comfort and security. We were well looked after.

[Mr. Ian Davidson]

It was noticeable that our discussions with Japanese colleagues were frank and open. That is usually a euphemism for an argument, but that was not the position in this case. The Japanese delegates were more open than has sometimes been the case about the difficulties that they face and the way in which they want us to co-operate. Frank and open discussion was especially helpful when we discussed our countries' relationship with the United States. There is a growing appreciation, both in the United Kingdom and in Japan, about the extent to which our positions are parallel. We both see ourselves as allies and friends of the United States, but we do not wish to be taken for granted or to provide uncritical support. We both feel that there are occasions when the Americans do not fully take into account the views of others in the world, and they sometimes need to be led to solutions that more fully reflect a world view. On several occasions, the Americans have acted in a unilateral manner and have sought to bully others in their own interests.

We need to build on our links with Japan to ensure that we act in accordance with our mutual interests as a restraining force in the world. Both countries can take credit for having restrained the Americans, especially in their response to the events of 11 September, which were so horrendous. The undoubted gut reaction in the United States was to lash out vigorously and immediately. What we achieved there as allies of the Americans was remarkable, and the Minister and the Prime Ministers of Britain and Japan are to be congratulated on their work.

We should also consider building on our relationship with Japan as regards aid to the third world. Japanese generosity in that respect is well understood and noted by those involved. However, there may be scope for greater co-operation. Operating with insufficient dialogue between us is not necessarily the most efficient way of utilising our resources. I am aware that third world countries who do not wish to reform practices that we would regard as corrupt tend to play donors off against each other. Presenting a more united front would help to promote good governance. As the Minister and others mentioned, Japan's role in East Timor is to be supported, as is its increasing role as a peacekeeper throughout the world. The British armed forces recognise and appreciate the support that Japan has been providing to British naval forces in the Indian ocean, and I hope that we can build on that support.

Co-operation in military matters should be taken further. Is the Minister prepared to reconsider enhancing procurement collaboration between the UK and Japan? We have a mutual interest in not becoming dependent on the United States for procuring high technology. Neither Britain nor Japan can go it alone in so many high-cost military spheres, but together we could achieve a greater balance between the United States and the rest of the world. I endorse the comments about continuing our support for Japanese membership of the UN Security Council, which is long overdue.

People-to-people links are also important, as are links at a high political level. It is only appropriate to draw to the attention of the Chamber the series of matches that have been held between the British and Japanese parliamentary rugby teams. We have each won a match, which is a politically balanced outcome. We should pay particular tribute to the work of Yoshiro Mori, the former Prime Minister of Japan, who has been a moving force behind the Japanese team and one of its stars. Following on from his previous proud sporting record as a stand off, he has transformed himself into a prop forward, which has different physical characteristics, as those who are familiar with the game will know. He scored a try in a recent game in Tokyo after the British players agreed that we would co-operate by freezing when he was near the line with the ball. Unfortunately, our planning had not extended to explaining our intention to the Japanese players.

Mr. Mori did not move at the fastest of speeds, and when he received the ball, the Japanese players pushed in behind him. As there was no resistance, he was completely flattened by his own players, which demonstrated the truth of the old political adage that it is not those in front that one has to watch out for, but those behind. However, we explained our intention to them later, and Mr. Mori succeeded in scoring a try. An attractive picture of it was taken, which he then displayed in the office that he occupied as Prime Minister. It was obviously the subject of discussion on several occasions. The building of such links is very important. As far as I am aware, no other country has its players displayed on the wall of a Prime Minister's office in a picture that shows the Prime Minister himself scoring a try.

In that context, it is only fair to draw attention to the multi-talented nature of British ambassadorial staff in Japan. Both Sir David Wright and Stephen Gomersall played in games against the Japanese Parliament, which, if not the greatest of sporting achievements, was greatly to their diplomatic credit. The Japanese parliamentary team have also played here on occasions, and their friendliness and sportsmanship was apparent, not least in the recent World cup parliamentary tournament.

It may be appropriate to mention, on behalf of the Government and the Opposition, how disappointing it is that the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore)—despite coming from an area with a long tradition of playing rugby and being young enough to make a contribution—has not managed to turn out for the parliamentary team. I mention that to several of his constituents, including my father, when I meet them. It is a great cause for regret that the Liberal Democrats have yet again betrayed the traditions of Parliament by showing themselves as weak-kneed and lily-livered. Does the hon. Gentleman have an explanation?

Mr. Moore: No. The hon. Gentleman is consistent in his attempts to attract me into this great parliamentary sporting body. I have to say, however, that I do more for world peace by staying off the rugby pitch.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. As the hon. Gentleman's sporting integrity was challenged, I felt obliged to allow him to respond, but I now ask that we return to debating the matter in hand.

Mr. Davidson: How very perceptive of you, Mr. Gale; I had just reached that point.

Hon. Members who have been to Japan, either through sporting or parliamentary visits, would want to pay tribute to the support that we received from

embassy staff. It is always difficult to single out individuals, but I want to mention Mara Myers who was particularly helpful. I hope that my reference to her helpfulness will not result in her transfer to Paraguay or somewhere similar. Foreign Office staff in this country have also been helpful, but it would be invidious to mention them by name, as they are too junior to have learnt how to be unhelpful while appearing pleasant. No doubt they will correct that as they develop their careers in the service of this country in the Foreign Office.

The World cup has been mentioned. I speak as the chairman of the Scotland-Nigeria Friendship Society, which will take a keen interest in the first round. Many of my colleagues have found an affinity with Sweden; others with South Africa: hopefully someone will support England in due course. Many English football fans are barbarians and I hope that the Minister will pursue the problem vigorously and seriously. This country's reputation, built up over many years, is in real danger of being destroyed by the misdeeds of some fans and by inappropriate cultural behaviour. I was horrified when my attention was drawn by some of my colleagues to alcohol-dispensing slot machines on the streets of Tokyo. The mind boggles at what English football fans might make of that. Many bars in Japan allow customers to run up tabs and pay at the end of the evening. I anticipate difficulties, especially if fans order without ascertaining the price and seek to avoid payment.

The Japanese have made strenuous efforts to ensure that the World cup will be a success. Some of my colleagues and I had the privilege of visiting one of the stadiums where England will play and of looking at some of the facilities. Excellent arrangements have been made, but the event could too easily be spoilt by inappropriate behaviour. I hope that the Government will make enormous efforts to ensure that it goes as well as possible.

Finally, we have similarities with Japanese parliamentarians. There, too, "finally" usually means that Members are 40 per cent. through their speech, but they want to give their audience hope that they are about to draw it to a conclusion. As in this country, Japanese parliamentarians say that they will not repeat what their colleagues have said but go on to do so. I want to avoid that, and mention a couple of points, not about trade, which has been adequately covered, but about cultural and social links, and the considerable efforts that have been made to build them up.

It worries me that the culture involved is what may be described as high culture, appealing only to an elite. We have not made quite as much effort as we should have done to promote popular culture as well as high artistic endeavour. I was impressed recently in Glasgow with a group doing Japanese drumming which had been trained in one of the local secondary schools. It was entertaining and gave people an interest in and a feel for Japan; many of the group's school mates were involved in a constructive way. The Government should try to focus more of their expenditure in the area on such issues.

I hope that in time the Government will establish people-to-people links with Japan that are as strong as those that have rightly been established with our European partners. I appreciate that the costs are higher and that the effort must therefore be greater, but earlier expenditure will bring results in the longer term, and I hope that the Government will take heed of that.

I want to pick up some of the points made about Japan's economic future and its present policies. When Labour Members and I were in Japan recently, we were a bit concerned that Japanese parliamentarians had a rose-tinted and misleading understanding of this country's economic reform, especially under Mrs. Thatcher, which they seemed to think had been relatively pain free. We explained that it had led to mass unemployment and social unrest on an almost unparalleled scale. Perhaps there is a role for the British embassy in compensating for the over-enthusiastic view of right-wing economic and monetarist reforms expressed by the consultants who are shipped out to Japan. We are in danger of giving the Japanese a distorted view of the process of Thatcherism. I am sure that the Minister, who is aware of the issue, will take it into account when further discussions take place.

I want to follow up the points made by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale about the euro. It has been my impression for a while that the economic difficulties that would be caused by a rush into the euro and the problems of entering the euro at an inappropriate exchange rate have not been adequately explained to the Japanese. There is undoubtedly a loss of investment from Japan and other countries to the United Kingdom. That loss affects not only the UK, but the whole of western Europe, as Japanese firms move to the low-wage economies of eastern Europe. I have discussed the matter with a number of Japanese colleagues and companies as well as in other eastern locations. The advantages that we offer in language, transport and skills remain, irrespective of our membership of the euro.

Planning issues have been identified from other potential inward investors. I note with interest that the Government are moving to overcome some of those difficulties. In my experience, Japanese inward investors welcome above all our friendliness and responsiveness. Gratitude has been expressed for Japanese inward investment, particularly by communities in Wales. Japanese inward investors also welcome the economic, social and political stability, which goes beyond questions of foreign exchange rates. It is too trite to say that the lack of membership of the euro is the main or only factor that discourages Japanese investment. We need to take a wider and more mature view of those issues.

I endorse the points on whales and whaling made by my co-secretary of the Japanese group, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths). The issue has caused a great deal of concern to many in this country. We should continue to reflect our anxieties to the Japanese on those matters.

I have enjoyed greatly the links that I have established with Japanese parliamentary and other colleagues. They have always struck me as having an extremely good sense of humour. Their love of scotch and golf makes them similar in many ways to the Scots. We have a bond. Had we been given the choice of having the Japanese or the English as neighbours, I am not sure that we would necessarily have ended up in our current position, but we are where we are and we have to make the best of it. Antisocial neighbours are always a problem. I hope that

[Mr. Davidson]

the Minister will take on board the points that I have made and redouble his considerable efforts to ensure that we build on our already good relationship with Japan.

4.22 pm

Mr. MacShane: This has been an agreeable debate. There have been no manifestations of inappropriate cultural or nationalistic behaviour, but simply the natural effervescence of people who believe that the English football fan in a kilt would be a peace-loving horticulturist who would lay off alcoholic drinks just as long as he wore that noble garment. I will pass that on to the other Government Departments that are specifically concerned with that issue.

Throughout the debate reference has been made to points of policy that are the responsibility of other Government Departments. At the Foreign Office we try to co-ordinate and make a common international position that is tenable and sustainable, but I hope that remarks made in this debate will be noted, whether on whaling, which is a matter for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, or on tourism, which is a matter for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with its oversight of the British tourist industry.

We have had good contributions from real experts on Japan, who have been there often: the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) has visited both as an hon. Member and in a private business capacity. It is probably fair to say that this is not an area where there is a great deal of bipartisanship. That is why, having greeted with some dismay the news that Baroness Thatcher will never make a speech in public again, this may be the moment to draw the veil of history over her activities as Prime Minister. It is time for all of us to start living in the 21st century.

Mr. Spring: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: The 20th century would like to speak.

Mr. Spring: May I presume that the Minister is paying tribute to the extraordinary role played by my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher when she was Prime Minister in encouraging so successfully huge inward investment from Japan into this country?

Mr. MacShane: This week, Lord Callaghan celebrated his 90th birthday. There was no doughtier a champion of Japanese inward investment, particularly into the Principality. A great strength of Welsh politics is that it has not sought to make party political points; all sides have worked for economic investment into Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) invited us all to learn Japanese. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is committed to all his Ministers speaking at least one civilised language. I should be happy to undertake Japanese lessons. I agree with what my hon. Friend said about learning Japanese; I have many friends who have learnt the language and they confirm that although it seems mysterious at first, it has the same vowel sounds as Italian and a reasonably logical structure. The fact that it is an ideographic language may make it difficult for us to read, but we should not be put off. The company Linguaphone generously distributed its cassettes to hon. Members last year and if any hon. Member would like to start learning Japanese, I will do what I can to help.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) made an important point about Britain's high niche exports. I have been encouraging all our embassies aggressively to promote Scottish whisky, in its many splendid varieties, as an after-dinner drink. The UK produces fabulous textiles and woollens, and I would be happy to help the industry, through Trade Partners UK or in any other way, to promote its products.

I am reluctant to enter the debate on the euro because that could prolong my speech. Japanese firms come to the UK for many reasons. We are probably the most international and open economy in Europe, and our regional and municipal authorities go out of their way to make our friends from Japan welcome. All Prime Ministers, whatever their political views, have a strong commitment to such inward investment. However, the fact that we are part of a single market of 350 million people—a figure that will increase to 500 million in the next couple of years—is also important; if one produces in this country, one can export anywhere, duty-free and tariff-free, in the world's biggest market.

The issue of the single currency must be considered. I do not know how easy it would be to invest and sell in the United States if California, Wisconsin and Florida, for example, each had to deal with its own, separate currency. I must put on the record comments—not specific warnings—that make it clear that if at any stage there were a perception that Britain were turning its back definitively on the single currency and thus on Europe, the future of Japanese investment would need considerable rethinking. I put it no more strongly than that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) has not been to Japan. "Go east, young man," is all I can say to him. It is a wonderful and welcoming country of extraordinary stillness and beauty. It has lively politics, a great ecological movement and one of the most expressive youth cultures in the world. I have enjoyed every moment that I have spent in Japan. Apparently, the best way of getting there is by becoming a great parliamentary rugby player: I therefore invite my hon. Friend to polish his jockstrap and start training, in the hope of an invitation to be scrum half—since it seems that no hon. Member from Wales can play any better than most of its club sides.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) talked about Japanese whaling. One must be honest: that is a pebble in the shoe of the relationship between our two countries, as it is with many others. The problem is not unique to the UK and Japan; many countries are concerned about Japanese whaling, but they are equally concerned about whaling by Norway. That country is a close ally, friend and partner of Great Britain, although we believe that there is no justification for whaling, other than perhaps for some subsistence whaling by indigenous people.

We have expressed concern: we have told Japan that extending the JARPN II research programme is unnecessary and provocative. We strongly oppose any effort to lift or weaken the moratorium on commercial whaling, which was put in place by the International Whaling Commission. We will make that clear at the IWC meeting in May, but I stress that Japan is not being singled out. The British Government's position is clear.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) referred, in the serious part of his speech, to the need for greater co-operation on overseas development issues. The new permanent under-secretary at the Department for International Development, Dr. Chakrabarti, recently visited Japan, where he signed what I think was called a "sister alliance" between the relevant two Departments, along exactly the lines that my hon. Friend suggested.

I agree that we need to step up foreign policy discussions, but I do not think that there will be many takers in Japan for anything other than a welcome for the United States security contribution in the region, just as we welcome its security contribution in Europe. I particularly welcome the contribution that the US makes in the Balkans, where I have some ministerial responsibility.

The swift action by Prime Minister Koizumi after 11 September showed how clearly the Japanese understood the need to tackle terrorist action. Their willingness to change the law and provide refuelling support for the US and the Royal Navy on the high seas showed that Japan was prepared to match a political commitment not only with words, but with concrete military action. The Government very much welcome that.

I could not agree more with the points made about popular culture. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East referred to manga cartoons, and all our children are imbued with Japanese culture every morning. If we do not get up early enough to switch the blasted television off, there they are, watching the best cartoon films for children in the world. The extraordinary strength of Japanese sport and culture, and the way in which Japanese artists are able to absorb and transform the best of western European art and culture, are a marvel to us all.

I hope that parliamentary links can be strengthened, and I am pleased that we could help to increase the delegation's size. I hope that those hon. Members who have participated in the debate will be able to visit Japan more often. There are problems with finance, but I hope that Parliament may consider changing the rules to allow hon. Members to make more visits on the parliamentary vote. That is certainly my wish.

So long as I am the Minister responsible, I will continue to support all efforts by any hon. Member to get to know that great country and to invite friends from the Japanese Diet to visit us, and to ensure that, in the 21st century, Japan and the UK march as friends, allies and partners, grow together and work jointly to solve many of the problems in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 16 April 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

EU Enlargement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): It gives me great pleasure to begin this morning's debate on one of the great issues of our time—the proposed enlargement of the European Union.

The enlargement of the EU is not new. It was enlarged in 1973, when Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined what was then the European Economic Community. Greece joined the European Union in 1981, Spain and Portugal joined in 1986 and Austria, Finland and Sweden joined in 1995. Significantly, the enlargement anticipated in 2004 will be bigger and more ambitious than any we have seen before: it is hoped that eight countries from central Europe—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia—plus the islands of Malta and Cyprus will join the EU.

The other three candidate countries are Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Negotiations with Turkey have not yet begun because it does not meet the so-called Copenhagen criteria, and Romania and Bulgaria are some way behind the other applicant countries. Although Romania and Bulgaria will not be joining the EU in 2004, we should not forget about them because progress is being made in both states. Equally, we should not link them because differentiation is vital. Bulgaria is way ahead of Romania in its negotiations and the number of chapters that it has closed in anticipation of entry.

You may wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why I have elected to debate enlargement. Some may think that it is an esoteric subject, and others may think that it betrays the obsessions of the European anorak brigade. However, the enlargement of the EU is of tremendous importance to both this country and the present EU, and its importance cannot be exaggerated.

I am passionately in favour of enlargement for three reasons, the first of which is economic. Enlargement will create a huge single market, the size and significance of which will dwarf the United States and Japan put together. It will have more than 500 million consumers. There will be huge economic benefits for us. It has been estimated, for instance, that the gross domestic product of the United Kingdom alone will increase by £1.75 billion as a result of enlargement. It has also been estimated that, through enlargement, 300,000 new jobs will be created in the present European Union, the economic worth of which cannot be legitimately doubted.

Secondly, I strongly support enlargement because it will give us an opportunity to develop broader policies for co-operation and co-ordination on a pan-Europe basis in a way that has never before been possible. As we often say, pollution knows no national boundaries, because what happens in one country inevitably affects other countries. Crime is increasingly developing on an international basis, and if we are serious about creating safer communities we must take a pan-Europe approach to tackling it. In a more positive sense, there is tremendous scope for developing cultural and educational opportunities across eastern, central and western Europe. For those reasons, I am strongly in favour of enlargement of the EU.

My third and final reason for believing that the process is so important relates to the need for peace and stability throughout the European continent. It is opportune to end the artificial division between western and eastern Europe. The appalling events of recent years in the former Yugoslavia emphasise the need to work consistently and diligently for peace and stability in our continent. Enlargement alone will not achieve that, but it will make a huge contribution.

Enlargement is in the mutual best interests of the citizens of the European Union and applicant countries. We may discuss the process of enlargement and how we anticipate and hope that it will happen in 2004, but the reality is that the process of bringing people closer together is already happening. Yesterday, I was in Poland where I addressed a conference in Sopot just outside Gdanz. The conference examined how links can be developed between local authorities and other local organisations in Poland and Britain. I learned that 36 twinning projects between local authorities here and in Poland already exist, and the number will increase with enlargement. Nottingham is linked with Poznan, Southend is linked with Sopot, where the conference was held, and in Wales links are being established between the National Assembly for Wales and Silesia, two areas with much in common, not least their previous reliance on heavy industry. The British Government are actively pursuing various links and some senior civil servants are regularly seconded to help Poland and other countries prepare for enlargement.

Although I am a fervent advocate of enlargement of the European Union, I recognise that others have reservations. Some fear "floods" of people coming to the EU from the east, but the reality is that most people in central Europe want to stay in the countries where they were born and brought up, and have no great desire to migrate. When enlargement takes place, transitional phases will ensure that the free movement of people is introduced gradually.

Some people fear that footloose capital from the EU will move eastwards and we must acknowledge that some firms have relocated from Britain to central and eastern European countries. South Wales has experienced that. However, that process is the result not of anticipated enlargement but of globalisation. We must seize the nettle and ensure that our industries are truly competitive and our work force have the skills and adaptability to ensure that we retain capital investment and attract more inward investment. We must face that challenge whether or not enlargement takes place.

Some people have expressed concern that present recipients of structural funds in the European Union and particularly in this country will lose out as those funds are reallocated to central and eastern European countries. However, after 2006 there will be an opportunity to renegotiate the financial perspective and

[Mr. Wayne David]

the structural funds, and I am sure that tough negotiation from the United Kingdom will ensure that adequate transitional arrangements are made for recipient areas, particularly of objective 1 funds. With sensible decisions, I am sure that we can reach a financial agreement that will benefit central Europe as well as existing members of the EU.

Those are some of the reservations that have been expressed about enlargement. However, the obstructionists who have seized on the issue and attempted to raise obstacles to enlargement have raised two issues in particular. The first is the ratification of the Nice treaty. I believe that that is a sensible treaty for taking Europe forward. It contains a realistic extension of qualified majority voting and a re-weighting of the votes in the Council of Ministers that benefits the United Kingdom. It takes reasonable and moderate steps to ensure that smaller states cannot outvote larger ones. Those measures are necessary for the enlargement process to take place and be successful. I hope that the Irish people will endorse the Nice treaty in their forthcoming referendum.

As well as opposition to the Nice treaty, there has been an attempt to suggest that the common agricultural policy must be reformed before enlargement takes place. I am sure that none of us questions for one moment the need to reform the CAP. Changes have been made, but more radical ones are required. However, we cannot make CAP reform a precondition for enlargement—if we do, enlargement will not take place for a generation. That is the clear fact of the matter. That would be tremendously detrimental to this country's national interest and to the interest of the whole European continent.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My hon. Friend suggests that we should not reform the CAP before enlargement. Can he say whether the CAP will apply to new member states, or whether they will be insulated and kept out of its arrangements?

Mr. David: There will certainly be transitional arrangements. Some negotiations on the most difficult chapters have begun, agriculture being one of those. The European Commission has proposed modest subsidies for farmers in eastern Europe, which are contentious in terms of Poland, which has the greatest concentration of farmers. However, transitional arrangements are being negotiated and, at the same time, a marker is being put down, not least by our Government, about the need radically to change the CAP in the future.

There is also an acknowledgment in all central European countries, not least Poland, that the CAP must be reformed. That is because of pressure from not only the European Union but the World Trade Organisation. The old agricultural regime simply cannot continue in the modern world, as most people now recognise. A momentum for change is undeniably building up, and it will ensure that the CAP is fundamentally changed once and for all.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): On agricultural policy, is my hon. Friend not concerned that the chapter on access that has been closed with the Polish Government allows direct payments to Poland, although it was quite clear that that would lock new countries coming in under enlargement into a system that was being phased out, and had to be phased out, in the interests of agriculture throughout Europe?

Mr. David: Tough negotiations on the agricultural chapter are quite rightly taking place. However, if enlargement is to proceed according to the timetable set out, we must recognise the need to accept the acquis communautaire and the rules that currently apply, including agricultural regulations. Equally, as part of the negotiation process, an earnest debate is taking place on how those regulations can be reformed. We must move away from a common agricultural policy based on subsidy and encouraging overproduction to one more akin to a rural policy, which will bring about the transition of rural economies, making them more efficient and more realistic about the demands of the modern world.

I commend members of our Government who went to Poland and engaged in that debate, while those negotiations were taking place. The current twin-track approach is a realistic way forward to secure enlargement and bring about meaningful change at the same time.

Progress is being made on that and on other contentious areas. The negotiation chart that was drawn up at the end of last month shows that, of the 10 countries that are actively engaged in negotiations, eight have closed some 23 of the 29 chapters that have been opened. That is very significant. I take great comfort from the fact that Poland, which is the largest of the applicant countries, has successfully completed one of its most difficult chapters, which dealt with land ownership and the free movement of capital. Colleagues who were in Poland only a few weeks ago were involved in some of the detailed negotiations. We know full well the sensitivities at issue, so the agreement that has been reached with European Union negotiators on that extremely contentious matter is a huge success that bodes well for the future.

Informal as well as formal negotiations are taking place. Applicant countries must adapt their social and civil infrastructure to ensure that they are able to implement EU policies, and there has been a great deal of success with that as well. However, although it is right and proper for the EU to negotiate a whole raft of policies and, inevitably, for us to take into account our own national interests, we should also bear in mind that the applicant countries, as well as securing a deal with us through negotiation, must sell the package to their electorates in referendums.

Generally, recent Euro barometer opinion surveys show that support for EU membership among applicant countries is holding firm. However, there is cause for concern in some countries. For instance, only 33 per cent. of the Latvian electorate are in favour of joining the EU. Much will depend on the terms that their Government are ultimately able to negotiate with the EU. If we are genuinely committed to the enlargement process, we must keep in mind not simply our own needs and negotiating positions but the need to secure the support of the applicant countries' citizens.

I am optimistic about the enlargement process. There is a very strong chance that it will take place in the near future, probably in 2004. All of the applicant countries already engaged in the process of developing links with EU countries are also contributing to the debate about the future of Europe, which focuses on the work of the convention. A little while ago, our Prime Minister made a statement with the Prime Minister of Poland, which was published on *The Guardian* website, if not in the newspaper itself. It set out several areas of common ground between Poland and Britain. For example, both Prime Ministers emphatically said that they did not want a European superstate, that intergovernmental co-operation was very important and that the role of national Parliaments was absolutely central to Europe's development.

Leading politicians in Poland are contributing to the debate about the future of our continent. One of the most significant speeches about the future of Europe that I have read for a long time was made last month in the Royal Palace in Warsaw where, in 1791, the first European constitution was officially launched and published. The President of Poland said:

"The most important decisions cannot be taken by politicians alone, or panels of experts in the seclusion of their offices. The unification of Europe must not be solely a matter for the political, elites or groups of technocrats: it should be the concern of all citizens"—

of Europe. Those words are important, and as politicians we should always remember that enlargement is not about what we want, but about what the people of Europe want.

In echoing those fine words, I believe that the enlargement process offers us a monumental challenge and a huge opportunity. It gives us the chance to create a European continent built on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. It also gives us a chance to create a peaceful and prosperous Europe. Let us ensure that we grasp that opportunity.

9.50 am

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I praise the spirit in which the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) moved his address. He recognised the number of problems relating to the successful integration of applicant countries into the European Union. Part of my case is that if the EU moves too quickly with its agenda of more centralised power and an ambition to cover an ever-wider number of policy areas in greater detail, the task of applicant countries will become more difficult.

During the EU's development there has always been tension over whether it should open its doors more widely to countries that are properly part of the continent of Europe, or whether a limited number of countries should rapidly press on with centralisation to create a type of grand federal Germany at EU level. That tension is seen today: on one hand we have a convention under way that is trying to create a constitution for the European fifteen; on the other, there are the detailed and difficult negotiations of several applicant countries, which have been sketched by the hon. Member for Caerphilly. Those would dearly love stronger links with our democracies and our prosperous trading system in the west, but they are finding the hurdles of the current 15 difficult to leap, let alone the hurdles that integrationists are keen to put in their way.

I remember being moved at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s when the Berlin wall came down and many brave people led peaceful, but decisive revolutions for freedom, enterprise and democracy in eastern European countries. At the time, I was privileged to be a Minister of the Crown, and went on several journeys to welcome peoples and their interim Governments into the community of European democracies. The first thing that touched me then was that, on more than one occasion when I was travelling in an ambassadorial car that was flying the United Kingdom flag, people saluted or even kissed the flag because they were so impressed that this country had stood against Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s, and against communism in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. They loathed those systems, as I do, because they both eclipse freedom, damage prosperity and make the lives of people who wish to have independence of thought and movement a misery.

I was impressed by the first impulses of those countries as they began to grasp the heady atmosphere of freedom. They wanted two things before anything else: the restoration of their national flags because for so long they had not liked being under the Soviet colours; and, however small the countries, the restoration of their old national currency, because that was seen as a symbol of more control over one's destiny. Small countries decided that the rouble monetary union was not a good idea for them, and that they would rather have control over their own independent monetary system as an expression of their national sovereignty. I urge Her Majesty's Government to understand those feelings. I am keen that we should extend the European family and community ever more widely.

Mr. Hopkins: Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that when other member states join the European Union, they will be less willing to join the single currency because they would want to retain their own currencies as a symbol of their modern freedoms?

Mr. Redwood: If one consulted their people, many would remember the very deep and strong feelings that they had some 10 years ago when they grasped their freedom from the Soviet empire. I am suggesting that our Government—above all others in the current 15—should be sympathetic to that and understand that the single currency is becoming a barrier to the successful conclusion of a wider union rather than an open invitation. After all, the Government welcome the single currency in principle, and believe that it is a good idea.

We have suffered under, or enjoyed, this Government for five years and they are still unable to pop the question to the British people because they understand how unpopular the idea of the single currency is in Britain. Many people deeply understand that controlling the currency is not just a symbol—it is not just about keeping the monarch or Head of State on the coin of the realm—but something very real concerning democratic political power. It gives current and future Ministers the opportunity to control interest rates and have an influence on borrowing or the exchange rate, and therefore to influence imports and exports. That control and influence would be lost if our currency were taken away.

[Mr. Redwood]

If the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) will forgive me, I do not wish to get diverted into a debate on the euro. The debate is about European enlargement, and the euro is one of many hurdles that the European Union is placing in the way of the applicant countries. The hon. Member for Caerphilly said, quite rightly, that there were questions to be resolved concerning agricultural policy, and possible movement of capital and people. I share his vision of agricultural policy getting away from subsidy and over-provision that causes considerable expense to the taxpayer. Indeed, if I can believe the Government's policy statements, it is one that they share. Unfortunately, the Government are unable to deliver it given the current configuration of the European Union.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly should understand that we cannot leave the common agricultural policy on one side. The CAP is the biggest, most important and most expensive EU policy. That leads one to question how many more of those centralised policies we want, given the infernal mess that the EU has made in recent years of many parts of the agricultural industry in Britain and on the continent. The CAP is expensive to the taxpayer and to the consumer. That is a remarkable contribution of bad luck—we pay twice. People pay more in the shops and as taxpayers, and the policy is not very good for British farmers either.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I am not an advocate of the common agricultural policy in its present form. However, does the right hon. Gentleman at least recognise that changes are taking place in the European Union? For example, a year ago there was a change of agriculture ministry in Germany, which made a significant difference in pushing the reform debate forward. Does the right hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that the rural development part of the CAP is growing? We must ensure that it grows at the expense of the traditional part. Rather than being defeatist about the matter—not to say that the right hon. Gentleman is—and saying that we cannot secure change, we should be part of the great momentum for change that exists.

Mr. Redwood: I am suggesting that we should be more forceful and persuasive because change is much needed. I welcome any changes on the continent that move in the right direction, but as the right hon. Lady conceded in her intervention, it is relatively easy to set up another subsidy scheme on top of the scheme we already have, which is not working. It is far more difficult to tackle the underlying problem: a subsidy scheme for farming based on wrong propositions, which conspires to be bad for taxpayers, consumers and farmers in a relatively advanced agricultural society like the United Kingdom, whatever its impact might be elsewhere.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the CAP were fundamentally reformed to make it less intrusive on the taxpayer and on countries in Europe, that would open the door for even further enlargement and put a light at the end of the tunnel for countries like Turkey? That would add to the great benefit of Europe about which the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) spoke—that is, to spread security and stability across Europe, which is what it should all be about.

Mr. Redwood: I agree that the lower we can make the barriers, by reducing the cost and complexity of common policies at federal level, the easier it is to bring other countries in. My ideal would be a European Union of independent national democracies co-operating together. That is a good alternative model, which the UK should advance at the constitutional convention. It is wrong for us to give credence to the idea that tame proposals are likely to emerge from that convention; that the aim is not the creation of a superstate. We all know that the agenda is to create an EU-type state, modelled along German constitutional lines. The lines might be perfectly democratic, but it will be a superstate. We should say that Europe is not ready for that—it is not suitable for all its different peoples, nations and traditions— and that we shall get on better together if each country has room for its own national aspirations and forms of democratic expression.

It is crazy that the people of the countries that we seek to invite into our midst risked and gave so much to recreate their old nations some 10 years ago, yet we now expect them to take on an enormous amount of central power in Brussels, designed by countries at different levels of development and with different attitudes. The tension that occurs in enlargement negotiations is always resolved in the EU by going for more centralisation. The centralisers, or federalists, always say that if more participating countries are brought in, that will slow the thing down. Therefore, they say, we must at the same time take more central powers to avoid such slowing down. Indeed, they often aspire to speed it up.

What are they trying to accelerate? What are they trying to prevent from slowing? They are trying to stop the deceleration of the great legislative machine—the centralising machine that trundles on day by day. I have sympathy with those who wish to slow down or stop that machine. There must come a point where there is enough European law. My constituents do not wake up in the morning and write to me saying, "We feel that we need more European laws. Please prod the Government into getting more," whereas I often receive letters from people who say, "We do not want a European law on this or that. We want to trade with our partners in Europe and to be friends with them; we want to see whether we can reach agreement on mighty matters relating to foreign policy or the environment, but the last thing that we want is a legislative machine churning out hundreds of directives and regulations."

The centralisers always say that we need more laws in order to complete the social or environmental area or the single market, to have a common foreign policy or to prepare for a single army. They fear that the admission of different countries such as Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic would get in the way of the pursuit of their agenda of more laws and more central control, with more trappings and more power going to the superstate in the making. I should like the British Government to say that this enlargement should be different. We should say that we joined a common market—the British people voted for that and British Governments past and present have been supporters of

the minimum level of law needed to create a common commercial and trading area to spread prosperity through trade, but I do not see why the British Government should sign up to extending European government power into so many more corners. If we were a strong and clear voice for a genuine Europe of nations, in which we did together those things that everyone agreed needed doing without constantly pressurising countries and peoples into accepting laws that they did not want and which they had voted against, we would stand for something good and true, which could advance, rather than set back, the cause of European integration.

That brings me naturally to the curious case of the treaty of Nice. The British Government have consistently argued, often in a partisan spirit, that the treaty of Nice contains the minimum that is necessary to complete the arrangements for the applicant countries, but anyone of independent mind who reads the treaty can see that it is mainly concerned with giving more central power to European institutions. It is about removing vetos that we currently enjoy and replacing them with qualified majority voting. It is about creating a series of new common policies, some of which are set out in the recent Government document, "Realising Europe's potential: Economic Reform in Europe", and there are parallel measures for the common foreign policy and the common military policy that is being evolved.

The treaty of Nice is more about centralising than about enlargement. Of course, some items in the treaty are necessary for enlargement. It is necessary to rebalance votes and determine the numbers of Commissioners—I do not disagree with that; it is a necessary part of enlargement—but because the treaty goes so much wider and includes chunks of centralising agenda, it hit the buffers when it was put to a vote in Ireland. Who would have thought that Ireland would object to such a treaty when Ireland has been a great beneficiary of subsidies and trade with the European Union, which one would have thought would overwhelm any demerits that Irish people might see in the scheme? However, the Nice treaty was so centralising and claustrophobic that the Irish decided that they could not live with it. I hope that member states will learn from that lesson and understand that free peoples and democracies are likely to respond "No" to such a centralising treaty. The British Government would not dare to put the treaty of Nice before the British people because they know that we would run a rattling good campaign against it—making the points that I have made, that the treaty is about not only enlargement but centralising and grabbing power—and that we would win.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Given what the right hon. Gentleman says about this Government, why was the Maastricht treaty never put to the British people?

Mr. Redwood: I would have liked it to be. As the hon. Gentleman may remember, I resigned from the then Government over several issues, including the handling of the single currency and the Maastricht treaty, which I wanted to be put before the British people. However, I was very pleased that we obtained an opt-out from the main point of the Maastricht treaty—joining the single currency—an opt-out which I am delighted this Government are still using and, I suspect, will continue to use for the rest of their life. That abated the problem, but there is no opt-out from the Nice treaty, so the Government do not have the excuse that the Conservative Government had in the case of Maastricht.

The Government should understand that the people of western Europe—and, I suspect, the peoples of eastern Europe—now desperately need a voice in the powerful councils that meet behind closed doors in Brussels and other leading centres to say that they do not want more centralised power, but want their national democracies to be respected. We think that we can get on better with each other if we are allowed a little freedom and some looseness, rather than having everything controlled centrally.

The Minister may like to comment on how he sees the negotiations on agriculture going, because he must concede that, far from settling all the important issues that must be resolved before enlargement, the Nice treaty leaves out the most important issues: the handling of agriculture and of the budget. We need to know how much enlargement will cost existing members. What are we prepared to pay for it? We all want to enlarge the Union, but we need to know whether the own resources ceiling will be increased and whether there will be big tax increases for people in Britain, France and Germany. If there is not a big tax increase to pay for enlargement, we need to know which elements of the budget will be cut. As soon as we bring new and poorer members into the Community, they will naturally—on the basis of proportionality and population—receive more than their fair share of money for agriculture, transport and infrastructure projects from the social fund. That will mean less money for the western countries. While that may be perfectly fair, I would like to see the numbers.

I would far rather achieve enlargement by amending the budget than by a big tax increase. I do not think that a big tax increase for the western European peoples would be a good idea at the moment. There may be more to be said about that tomorrow, once the tax-raising Chancellor has disclosed his domestic requirements. If, on top of domestic requirements, we are to face a big requirement for enlargement, we should at least know the numbers and have an opportunity to debate such an important matter.

Will the Minister use the opportunity for renegotiation that enlargement offers to sort out fishing? There are some sensible words on fishing in the Government's latest document. However, the British fishing industry is being destroyed. The common fisheries policy is another example of a centralised common policy that does not work for Britain. Now that everything has to be renegotiated because we are considering proper enlargement, can we please dig in and get some common sense and a better deal for our fishermen?

The Minister may also like to comment on the Government's recent statement that one of the European Union's main aims at the moment is to

"reach an agreement on the tax package as a whole as soon as possible and no later than by the end of 2002."

[Mr. Redwood]

Will the Minister tell us what that package is likely to comprise? We are now well advanced into 2002. Are the negotiations well advanced? How many more new taxes will emanate from the European Union and how much control of our tax policy is envisaged under the new tax proposals? Those matters will make it even more difficult for the applicant countries, because they will now learn that they are joining a club that has not only very centralised agriculture, fishing and social policies but substantial ambitions to transfer some of the powers of taxation from national democratic assemblies to the centre, the federal core, which may or may not become more democratic.

Will the British Government on this occasion speak the truth and speak out for a Europe of nations where we respect each other's differences? Will they speak out for a Community in which we do things together where we wish to do so and are able to reach voluntary agreement? Will they speak out against a more centralised Community? Will they speak out against a Community that wishes to tax us more and involve us less? Will they speak out against a Community that thinks that the treaty of Nice is the answer to enlargement, when the real answer is sorting out difficulties such as the budget and the common agricultural policy?

Will the Government speak out for a Community that believes that democracy, freedom and enterprise can best be spread by making more decisions locally than centrally and by encouraging the brave, democratic forces in the eastern European countries, rather than trying to take powers away from them and give them to bureaucrats at the centre? Above all, will they take on board the message of the Irish referendum and be prepared to face the British people on the issue by putting the resulting package to a sensible referendum test?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I remind right hon. and hon. Members that it is the custom in Westminster Hall to start the three final speeches 30 minutes before the end of the debate. As you will see, there are 17 minutes left and four Members seeking to catch my eye, so I hope that hon. Members will bear in mind the lack of time in terms of their own delivery and when considering whether to accept interventions.

10.13 am

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I take note of your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing this debate. I also congratulate him on choosing this subject and on the way in which he introduced it, with which I strongly agreed.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) mentioned the tremendous exhilaration and hope that we all felt when the Berlin wall fell at the end of the 1980s and wonderful, undreamed-of changes took place across our continent. We have moved on from those days, of course, and in many respects we now face problems rather than opportunities. That is particularly true now that we are in the most difficult phase of the enlargement negotiations, but the hope and optimism that we all experienced at the end of the 1980s should give us a sense of purpose as we approach the issue.

I could not quite tell from the contribution by the right hon. Member for Wokingham whether he was in favour of enlargement; he certainly emphasised all the problems. Although it is right to be realistic about them, we must maintain a sense of purpose and a commitment to enlargement, which practically everyone across our continent is in favour of.

Although enlargement is a complex issue, good progress is being made. The European Commission is making good progress through its structured approach of breaking down the policy issues into different chapters. Several applicant countries have also made good progress, despite the huge legislative programmes and administrative burdens that they have had to adopt to meet the enlargement criteria. We should congratulate them and recognise the progress that they have made, but we should also ensure that they properly tackle issues on which further progress is needed. There have been welcome changes in their approaches to nationality and minority issues, although their records are not perfect, and one or two countries still need to make progress. None the less, the overall balance sheet is increasingly positive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly rightly referred to issues that are likely to influence public debate in applicant countries and EU member states. If enlargement is to be successfully completed, there must be a positive outcome in member states and applicant countries, which are trying to show their populations that EU membership is a positive move. That is particularly true of countries that hold referendums.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly raised some tricky issues. On immigration, he was right to stress that people on the whole want to live and work in their countries of origin. We should recognise that previous enlargements have successfully ensured that that has happened. When Spain, Portugal and Greece joined the EU, many people used emotive language to express their fears about waves of immigration into existing EU member states. In fact, the opposite has happened, and it has been good to see those countries make economic progress and become increasingly able to provide satisfying living and working conditions for their people and to welcome people from other member states and elsewhere.

My hon. Friend was right and honest to say that there are worries about structural funds, particularly among present recipients. In negotiations on the issue in 1999 in Berlin, however, the Government achieved a good settlement for Europe and the United Kingdom. That resulted in good transitional arrangements and good settlements for objectives 1 and 2. People in Ireland have had difficulty with that, , but we must be realistic about the fact that entitlement to funds cannot remain exactly the same as countries rise up the prosperity league—that is the honest approach. However, I would not be happy if enlargement meant that no structural funds remained for existing member states. Michel Barnier, the European Commissioner for regional policy, said that

the EU's regional policy is an important sign of solidarity with many regions in existing member states with structural problems. It is extremely beneficial for the European Union and its member states to have an active regional policy and help in that process. I have seen the benefits of that in my own part of the United Kingdom, the north-east of England.

Agriculture has been mentioned, but, given your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not discuss it in great detail. I merely express the hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will work with other Governments to ensure that the rural development funds available for applicant countries are used more effectively than they have been up to now. Rural development is the way forward for the common agricultural policy, and it is important that we make better use of those funds, here and now.

I refer to a remark made by the right hon. Member for Wokingham. He seems to regard the convention on the future of Europe as a centralising plot, whereas it is much more complex than that. Rightly, it includes representatives from all the Governments, from national Parliaments, the European Parliament and from the kaleidoscope of political parties that make up the European Union. *[Interruption.]* I am being reminded that some members of the convention take a critical view of the existence of the European Union itself. I see no reason why the convention should not consider areas that are over-regulated in the European Union.

The agricultural policy is one area in which greater flexibility is needed for countries and for regions within countries, and in which there has been too much centralising. However, it is unjustified to approach the convention with the fear and dread implicit in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. I am glad that the candidate countries are associated with that convention process, as they will be able to play their part in the reform process.

Finally, I cannot believe that the applicant countries are interested in creating a European superstate. They value their newly-won freedom and independence too much for that, and they know that they are entering an association in which they can play their full part, so they would not want to be subjugated by some superstate based in Brussels.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal once again for brief contributions, otherwise some hon. Members will not be able to speak.

10.23 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I shall be as brief as possible. I congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing the debate.

I welcome the enlargement of the European Union. When I was a student at the London University School of Slavonic and East European Studies, it would have seemed incredible that some of the countries now applying could be in such a position. Some of them were not even independent countries. The advances made in democracy in those countries amaze me, and anything that we can do to help preserve those democracies will be welcome.

I am not an expert on agricultural policy, but I take the view that the inexorable move to industrialisation of agriculture, caused in part by the common agricultural policy, has resulted in the deterioration of the environment in many countries. That has happened in the United Kingdom, western Europe and Hungary, which I often visit, and it may well be happening in Poland, too. We must be careful of that as we progress towards enlargement.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said, the danger of enlargement is that if we are not careful we shall fall between two stools: either it will become too easy to join the EU, in which case it will become a meaningless organisation; or the EU will become too restrictive and centralised, in which case it will become an exclusive club. The peoples of those countries and their Governments see membership as a positive move not only for economic reasons but to preserve and strengthen their relatively recently found democracy.

It will become important for small states—some of which are already applicant countries and others of which, such as Macedonia, will hopefully apply much further down the line—to be members of the EU if they are to exist as states. I also hope that Yugoslavia—it may well be the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro—will apply in a relatively short time. I hope that the Minister will tell me that the Government will support Yugoslavia's application to join the Council of Europe. I have studied Yugoslavia and have spent much time there. One of the problems in Yugoslavia, which was after all a federation, was that it was too centralised. Old rivalries and hatreds ran very deep, and it might be necessary for that region to be encompassed in the EU to solve some of those difficult problems.

Those countries must not regard EU membership as a panacea, otherwise people will be disappointed when some of their dreams do not become reality, and disappointment will become resentment. As my right hon. Friend said, we must recognise that there is a strong feeling of nationhood and independence in those countries. We must work together to make sure that we preserve that feeling of independence.

10.27 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Three minutes is insufficient time in which to do this subject justice. I have some interests to declare: my father-in-law, who was a member of the Polish air force, flew with the Royal Air Force during the second world war. I strongly believe that this country owes a huge debt of honour to him and his fellow veterans. I also want to tell hon. Members that his uncle was President of the Polish Government-in-exile.

I do not declare those interests lightly, and I speak as a member of the all-party Polish group, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) is also a member. Along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), we visited Poland in January. The changes that I saw in Poland compared with my previous visit 10 years ago with an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation showed how determined that country is that EU enlargement will go ahead. We have heard a great deal this morning about historical background, such as the

[Ms Joan Walley]

Berlin wall and people's experiences when Stalin annexed part of Poland. I want to remind hon. Members of the words of Winston Churchill, who on 1 October 1939 said:

"The soul of Poland is indestructible and she will rise again like a rock, which may for a spell be submerged in a tidal wave, but which remains a rock."

On EU enlargement, we must do what we can to address the outstanding concerns on the chapters that have not yet been completed, particularly in relation to Poland's accession. I was impressed by the progress that has been made in respect of the chapters that have been closed.

We have heard a great deal about agriculture, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to take into account the wealth of information, not least that supplied by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West, who was formerly a Minister with responsibility for agriculture. We need to use all information, expertise and specialisation—especially environmental specialisation—to make sure that a twin-track approach is taken in reforming the CAP while ensuring that it will be relevant to Poland.

I was heartened to see that great progress has been made in respect of the chapter on the judicial system. Poland has increased capacity, so those concerns no longer exist. I hope that we can secure a resolution on that matter, so that Poland can take part in the European elections in 2004. If all goes to plan, Poland will be a fully fledged member of the European Union and will take its place alongside other Governments. I think that Poland will be a particular friend of the United Kingdom. We must work closely with fellow EU members, via all the twinning arrangements, to take account of Polish interests and ensure that our vision of European enlargement makes practical sense in terms of delivery in the United Kingdom and Poland.

10.30 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been a very important debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on securing it. As others have remarked, he made a genuinely upbeat presentation of the benefits and importance of enlargement, which I endorse.

We have heard the usual wide-ranging set of opinions about the meaning of enlargement. We all seem to agree that it is a good thing, even if our analyses of what it means for the European Union vary significantly. The Liberal Democrats have been strong supporters of the process of enlargement for a long time. We recognise the historic role of the European Union in advancing security, democracy and prosperity throughout a part of the world that has characterised most of its modern existence by fighting bloody wars. It has lived through many forms of government, with too many parts of it living under regimes that are other than democratic for a long time. As the cold war fades from memory, it is important not to lose sight of the progress that has been made.

The hon. Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) highlighted the Polish example. I cannot claim such close connections to that country. However, 20 years ago while I was still at school and Poland was under military rule, I recall campaigning on behalf of the Solidarity trade union, wondering whether Lech Walesa would ever be in a position to challenge General Jaruzelski. It is incredible that in a relatively short time, Poland has become a democracy. It no longer poses a security threat in its wider association with the Warsaw Pact countries, and its economy is much improved. I believe that European Union membership will strengthen and enhance those trends not just for Poland, but for many other applicant countries.

Enlargement is important for longstanding members of the European Union, such as this country. The negotiations cannot be taken for granted. As with everything in Europe, the process of the negotiations has been slow and, at times, painful. Undoubtedly, more pain will be experienced. In recent weeks, the Minister has been responding to parliamentary questions, explaining how the different chapters of the negotiations have been successfully concluded. However, we appreciate that the timetable is pretty unforgiving, and many issues have yet to be resolved. Before we get to that point, there is the small matter of the ratification of the treaty of Nice. The conclusion of that process is fundamental to the success of enlargement, but we cannot ignore the fact that last June's Irish referendum result represents a major stumbling block to the process. European Union leaders confidently stated after the referendum result that the enlargement process was irreversible, but it is important that we hear from the Minister today how he anticipates the Irish can be persuaded to reverse that decision. There is an election campaign in the Republic, and he may pray that in aid for not meddling in another country's affairs, although we know that he is a brave Minister who often pushes matters further than some of his colleagues want. Perhaps I can tempt him this morning to comment on that issue.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is a good democratic principle that if people vote no in a referendum, they must vote again, but if they vote yes the result is accepted? Does he recognise that as being democratic?—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Moore: As the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said, it is for the Irish to decide how they want to proceed, but I suspect that that helps his argument for independence in Scotland, so I shall not push it too far.

If the Irish reject the treaty a second, third, fourth or fifth time, there will be a serious problem. We know that it is technically possible to get around enlargement, but what will happen if ratification is not forthcoming? The difficult issues in the Nice treaty will be academic for applicant countries if negotiations are not concluded. A number of issues affect individual countries and the whole European Union generally. Three broad categories of eligibility criteria cover politics, the economy and administration.

With the exception of Turkey, candidate countries have passed the political test, but they have demonstrated mixed success with their economies and administration of judicial capability. Political eligibility is sometimes taken for granted, but we must not

overlook issues that are causing concern to the enlargement debate. It would be helpful to the House to understand the Government's current view on the situation in Cyprus, the prospects for resolution of the long-standing and difficult dispute between the Turks and the main island of Cyprus, whether there is any prospect of a resolution and, if not, what procedures will follow for Cyprus. Likewise, in the Czech Republic the Benes decrees have caused concern to surrounding countries. There has been an inconsistency in the enlargement Commissioner's view of whether that is crucial to its entry, and it would be helpful to understand the Government's position on that.

The economic position in each country varies, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the economic opportunities are at the heart of the appeal of EU membership. I shall touch on a couple of issues that have been raised in this debate.

Agriculture was the focus of earlier contributions and there is no doubt that the common agricultural policy is a key focus for all negotiations. We are in the early stage of those negotiations and the gloss may be wearing off for some applicant countries. Great concern has been expressed in recent months about the way in which they might be integrated into the CAP, the nature and time scale of entitlement to subsidies and the period preceding their eligibility for full membership. My view is that an unreformed CAP is damaging and unsustainable for existing member states and those who seek to join. A mid-term review of the CAP is under way, neatly seeking to dodge the French, if not the German, elections this year, which will be fundamental to the conclusion of negotiations with candidate countries. Again, it would be useful to understand the Government's attitude to that. They have not earned a great deal of credibility among Britain's farmers in recent years for their commitment to agriculture and for what they seek to do about it. It is important that we understand their attitude to the agricultural policy.

Will the countries concerned be second-class citizens in the CAP? Does the Minister see any danger that the nature of the negotiations might delay those countries' anticipated involvement in them?

Mr. Hopkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moore: No, because I can speak for only one more minute, or I will be in trouble.

On regional funds, I echo the point made by the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). Unless we look seriously at how British regions will be affected after enlargement, there will be much difficulty in selling that proposal to the UK.

I hope that the Minister can give us some positive signs of progress on the important issue of EU enlargement.

10.40 am

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on initiating the debate. He has a very considerable knowledge of, and interest in, European Union enlargement.

Enlargement is not only about economic benefits or politics; it is a moral obligation. For years, the European nations east of Stettin and Trieste were excluded from the freedom and prosperity of the west. Thanks to the west's victory in the cold war, through the firm leadership of such people as my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher and the American Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, and through the bravery of such people as Lech Walesa and Václav Havel, eastern Europe is now free.

The Conservative party feels its obligation towards accession with particular strength because of its experience in government at that time. I echo the sentiments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on that. I pay tribute to previous Ministers and Foreign Secretaries who did everything possible to ensure that the peoples of Europe knew that Britain was their friend in those difficult times. That has greatly redounded to Britain's credit. I freely acknowledge that this Government have carried on that process, but I have been personally touched by the gratitude expressed to me by so many diplomats, politicians and others from the accession countries who have acknowledged the special role that we played. They know of our continuing, passionate but practical commitment to the enlargement process.

We can all be well satisfied that in this country, unlike in some member states, there is virtually no opposition to enlargement. Of course, we can expect enlargement to impact on the British economy. Because of the lower wages typical of many candidate countries, there can be little doubt that some sectors of the British economy will face stiffer competition after enlargement. We are all interested to hear from the Minister what steps the Government are taking to ensure that British business and the British public are prepared for the impact of enlargement, despite the transitional arrangements in place. I do not believe that the British public are as well informed about enlargement as they should be. I look forward to hearing how the Government will help prepare the country for that development.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand and forgive me if I do not take any interventions.

Let me turn to some of the obstacles to enlargement. Does the Minister agree that it is essential that the broad outlines of common agricultural policy reform be agreed before 2004? We cannot afford for that failed, costly system to carry on as it is, never quite at the top of the EU's priorities. Unreformed, we know that the CAP will be an unsustainable burden on our budgets as European enlargement unfolds.

No one wants the accession of the candidate countries to be hindered by the mess that current member states have made of the CAP. None the less, the problem must be resolved, and soon, if the great task of enlargement is to succeed. To that end, can the Minister explicitly assure us that reform will be under way by 2004? Does he agree that the Commission's phase-in proposals can be no more than a holding line? I appreciate that CAP reform should not become a central negotiating issue for enlargement, but the Government must recognise the dangers inherent in lack of reform in the longer term.

[Mr. Spring]

Several hon. Members have discussed structural funds. Here, too, the Commission is proposing only a temporary solution for dealing with the problems that enlargement throws up for EU subsidies. Without reform, expenditure on structural operations will increase from about 32,000 billion euros to more than 68,000 billion euros by 2010 because of enlargement. I hope that the Minister agrees that we cannot afford such growth in expenditure. What are the Government doing about that particular aspect of enlargement? We look forward to the Minister's comments. He expressed his interest in the matter last month in European Standing Committee B, but we have heard little about it from the Government.

We expect a third report from the European Commission early next year. What do the Government desire to see in the report? We need a reformed system of structural funding that is fair to existing member states and to those in the accession process. There must be no second-class members of the European Union.

The Minister will reiterate the charge that, by opposing the Nice treaty, the Conservative party is against enlargement. We warned when the treaty was made that hastening integration rather than preparing the EU for enlargement was not helpful to the candidate countries, and I believe that we have been proved entirely right. The Irish may ratify the treaty, but there is no guarantee that they will. Given the importance of enlargement, what will happen if the Irish again reject it? It would be intolerable if enlargement were held up yet further because of a lack of a plan B. I assure the Minister of our unqualified support for provisions that are genuinely necessary for enlargement, such as the redistribution of votes in the Council of Ministers.

The imminence of enlargement brings our attention to what may lie beyond. What are the European Union's potential limits? Do we foresee a day when Belarus and the Ukraine, or countries such as Russia and Georgia, have closer links to the EU? When the matter was brought up in European Standing Committee B last month, the Minister declined to discuss it, but the issue is becoming more and more important. Clearly, there will have to be closer engagements with neighbouring countries as the EU expands eastwards. We should take as an example the positive and constructive discussions on 9 April at Weimar between Germany and Russia about Kaliningrad.

I wish to mention the issue of the accession application of Cyprus. It is one of the best prepared of the candidate countries, but there is an unhealed split between the island's two communities. We hope that discussions between the leaders of those communities will bear fruit. The split should not be a barrier to the country's entry into the European Union. We welcome Turkey's intentions to become a member of the EU and call on it to use its influence to help construct a process that will solve the problem of Cyprus divided. An end to the tragic conflict would be another most welcome by-product of the enlargement process and must be a priority for Britain because of our historical and present links with the island, because it is a fellow member of the Commonwealth, and because of the importance of the Greek and Turkish communities in the United Kingdom. We also very much welcome the accession of Malta, another valued Commonwealth member, to the EU.

The process of embracing the countries of central and eastern Europe into the European family of democratic nations has been long and difficult, but I hope and believe that we are almost there. The architecture of an enlarged European Union is hugely important, but that is an argument for another day.

10.49 am

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) made a very good speech. I agreed with most of it, but he will not be surprised to hear that I did not agree with his comments on the Nice treaty.

This year, 2002, is the year of enlargement, and I welcome the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) in holding this debate. As he said, it is one of the great issues of our time. He was the distinguished leader of the European parliamentary Labour party when he was an MEP, and he has done much work with Bulgaria, which is a candidate nation. I agree that it is ahead of Romania on its track to European Union membership—it has already closed 14 chapters. We hope that such progress will be encouraged.

I welcome the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). I had the privilege to meet her father-in-law, who was a distinguished wartime pilot in the battle against the Nazis. She spoke eloquently about Poland's application, which we strongly support. Under the new Polish Government, the country has made much progress and has closed 22 chapters. We hope that that will accelerate.

On the question about Ireland from the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), I remind him that at last month's Barcelona summit the Irish asked for a statement during the Seville summit in June that would address the concerns that were raised by many at the Irish referendum, specifically confirming that the Nice treaty does not affect Irish neutrality. I am confident that such assurances can be given and that an opportunity will be paved for a fresh referendum should the Irish Government choose to call one. I hope that they do, because Ireland must ratify the Nice treaty for it to come into force.

I acknowledge the work that my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) has done with Belgium. She has done valuable liaison work with the Belgian Government and the Belgian political system. I also acknowledge the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) who does similarly valuable work with Romania and Slovakia, two accession countries that we want in the European Union.

We want the European Union to conclude accession negotiations with as many countries as are ready by the end of this year, which is in eight months. That will be the culmination of many years of hard work by this Government, and—above all—by candidate countries that have transformed their economies and societies in the aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin wall. They

have been waiting in the queue to join the EU for more than a decade; now the EU must act decisively to bring them in. To do otherwise would imperil the credibility of Europe in the eyes of the candidates and the world.

I agree with the hon. Member for West Suffolk on the question of CAP reform. Its quick reform is imperative, and it will not bear the weight of enlargement without it.

The Government have been a champion of enlargement and I acknowledge that the Conservatives in government were far more constructive than they have been in opposition—I freely acknowledge that they moved enlargement forward. However, negotiations with the first candidates began under our Government during the British presidency in 1998. To remain on target, candidates must keep up with their reforms, not only by introducing new laws and systems required for membership, but by making them work on the ground. We need to know that our citizens' rights will be protected by the police forces, and upheld by the judiciaries, of new member states. The food circulating in the wider single market—the largest single market in the world—must be safe for our citizens, and border controls must be effective. Candidates have made huge strides in those areas.

We have bilateral action plans with each candidate country that will finance projects designed to support the accession process. Under the EU's twinning programme, British experts have been involved with more than 100 projects, and many of them have been seconded to work alongside their counterparts in candidate countries to help implement European legislation and standards for border management, the environment and tackling corruption and crime.

Enlargement is good for Britain and for Europe. We are doing a favour not just for the candidate countries but for ourselves. As my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly argued so eloquently, enlargement builds peace and stability in our continent. In preparation for European membership, candidate countries have had to build good neighbourly relations and respect for their minorities, from Russian minorities in the Baltic states to Roma minorities in central Europe. Their performance in such areas is monitored closely. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West said, there is considerable progress as a result of the succession momentum.

Last week, I saw for myself in Cyprus how the prospect of enlargement is encouraging both sides to try to mend historic divisions. The hon. Members for West Suffolk and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale asked about progress. There is progress. I said to Mr. Denktash that he must get more closely involved in the detail of the negotiations, rather than just in the meetings—at which we welcome his presence—because that is his best opportunity to get a deal for the Turkish minority on the island that protects their security and their interests. Equally, when I met President Clerides and Foreign Minister Kasoulides, I said that it is important for the Government of Cyprus to continue to make progress on the negotiations and to come up with constructive ideas. They are doing so. We want a united Cyprus to come into the European Union. It would be damaging for all concerned if that were not the case.

The prospect of enlargement has helped to resolve causes of tension and conflict. It has created stable, democratic partners for the future. It costs European citizens far less financially, politically and socially to help a neighbour country to make the transition to democracy in a market economy than it does to rebuild it after conflict. One need only consider the contrast between a candidate country such as Slovenia and Milosevic's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, both parts of the former Yugoslavia, to recognise that truth.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) invited me to comment on the prospects of Serbia and Montenegro for EU membership. We see them as potential candidates. I hope that that will accelerate modernisation and democratisation in that part of the world.

Enlargement will enhance prosperity. Every enlargement has given a boost to EU economies, including Britain's. This one will boost our economy by about £1.75 billion, or some £100 for each British household. That is a great opportunity for us. British exports to central Europe increased by 19 per cent. between 1999 and 2000 in anticipation of enlargement, and by as much as 25 per cent. to the Czech Republic and Hungary. It is estimated that enlargement will create 300,000 jobs across the EU, including thousands in Britain, as companies take advantage of trade opportunities.

Enlargement will enhance co-operation, helping us to tackle problems that do not recognise borders, such as pollution, drug smuggling and people trafficking. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West was right. The same fears were expressed about the accession of Spain and Portugal. In fact, the reverse was the case. People went back to Spain and Portugal as those countries gained prosperity through membership of Europe.

Industry in the candidate countries is starting to implement EU environmental standards, improving the air that we breathe and the water in Europe's rivers and seas. The beaches in Cyprus, which attracted some 1.5 million UK tourists last year, will have to meet EU standards for cleanliness and safety.

The candidates are not just our partners of tomorrow. They are already our partners today. We co-operate with many of them on the European convention, in respect of which I represent the Government, to shape the European Union of tomorrow. Having found their own sovereignty, they are in no rush to lose it. Like us, they want to keep decision making at national level wherever it is best to do so.

I welcome the contribution of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). He is an under-used talent on the Conservative Benches. However, it is important that we dismiss his idea that enlargement will create a grand federal Germany. It will not be anything like that. We are building a European Union of freely co-operating, independent nation states. That is the Government's vision and the vision of all the candidate countries that have recently gained their national independence, free from the Soviet yoke of oppression. They are in no rush to give up that independence, and we share their vision.

[Peter Hain]

We look forward to all the candidate countries joining us in a Europe of full employment and social justice, a Europe that can master the threats to our environment, a Europe of stability and prosperity, peace and security, that guarantees food safety and consumer protection, a Europe of human rights and independent nation states, not a federal superstate, a Europe of the people, for the people, by the people, in which every candidate can take its place proudly as an equal among equals.

Teacher Recruitment

11 am

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this debate, especially as I made three or four applications before I was successful. My reason for initiating it relates specifically to a constituent, Mr. Christopher Read, who teaches at the Hewett high school in Norwich, the largest school in Norfolk, which has 1,800 pupils and about 115 full-time equivalent teaching staff. It was not until I had been successful in my application for a debate and started to talk to colleagues about the subject that I became aware of how widespread the problem faced by my constituent is. I shall start with the particulars of his case, and then move on to discuss the more general themes that it illustrates.

Mr. Christopher Read, who lives in my constituency and works in the city of Norwich, is a qualified electronic design engineer. He worked for some 30 years for a local engineering firm, and has an impressive curriculum vitae. For example, he designed electronic control systems for Trident nuclear submarines. He also designed the electronic vane control systems for the Heysham and Torness nuclear power stations, as well as working on projects for clients such as the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Air Force, British Aerospace, British Steel, British Coal, BP, ICI and the former Government Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Read was made redundant from his engineering firm some time ago and decided that before the end of his career, he would like finally to do what he had always wanted to do at some point—go into teaching. We have all seen the advertisements that the Government have sprayed liberally over every medium known to man, including newspapers and cinema, asking people to go into the teaching profession. He responded to that call and, having a background in physics, he was particularly suited to help meet the shortage of teachers in maths and science subjects. The only problem was that because he had an HND, not a degree, he could not be taken on as a fully qualified teacher, but would have to work within the school environment towards fully qualified teacher status.

An additional problem was that because Mr. Read took his HND in 1968, it is not regarded by the Open university, with which he would need to study to gain the required number of points to obtain full teacher status, as attracting the same number of points as a more recent HND. Apparently, that is because before 1971 the HND was not modular—one had to learn everything and sit the exam at the end of the course—so it is said that there is no sensible way of comparing the old and the new HND. I may not be alone in thinking that that may be a point in favour of the old HND, and that it required more intellectual accomplishment than the new modular HND.

Indeed, in a widely quoted book, "Class War: The State of British Education", Chris Woodhead mentions the subject of modularity on pages 14 and 15. He says:

"The move to 'modularity' is a second, highly significant development. Nowadays many, if not most, GCE and A-level syllabuses are divided up into modules, or units, of work. The candidate is tested on each module once it has been completed.

Headteachers worry about the impact this has on teaching and learning and extra-curricular activities. Most feel that the introduction of the AS examination has reduced the sixth form to a treadmill that allows no time for anything other than preparation for the next wretched assessment. Many worry that a student who is unhappy with the grade he has achieved in a particular module can take the assessment again in the hope of achieving a better mark. Mr. Timms needs to tell us whether he thinks this new facility has made public examinations more or less intellectually challenging".

The Department told me last Thursday that Mr. Timms, the Minister for School Standards, would reply to this debate, but as he cannot be with us, I hope that the Minister for Young People and Learning, who is here in his stead, will answer my question. I am sure that young people are delighted that he represents them. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, do they know that he does? Can he tell us whether the introduction of modularity is an advance in creating an intellectual challenge?

My constituent is being discriminated against for the simple reason that he took a course and completed an HND before the introduction of modularity. In his case that has a particular effect, as he is 55 now—he was 54 when he began teaching. As a result of his HND not being valued as it should be and as a more recent HND would be, it will take him three to four years, rather than the 12 to 18 months that it would otherwise take him, to gain an honours degree equivalent and then the additional qualified teacher status—which would take him only two or three months, because of his extra experience. Mr. Read will be 58 or 59 by the time he achieves qualified teacher status. In the interim, not only will he be paid less than a fully qualified teacher—although I imagine that his greater experience allows him to impart more to physics students than some younger teachers can—but his job will not be secure because his "instructor" status means that he does not have a permanent contract.

The statutory instrument that deals with the matter is the Education (Teachers' Qualifications and Health Standards) (England) Regulations 1999. Paragraph 3 is about

"Instructors with special qualifications or experience".

I should have thought that being trusted by the nation to design electronic components and control systems for Trident nuclear submarines qualified Mr. Read under that heading. The paragraph says:

"This paragraph shall apply in the case of an unqualified teacher appointed, or proposed to be appointed, to give instruction in any art or skill or in any subject or group of subjects . . . the teaching of which requires special qualifications or experience if, at the time of his appointment . . . the local education authority . . . are satisfied as to his qualifications or, as the case may be, experience; and . . . no suitable qualified teacher, graduate teacher or registered teacher is available for appointment . . . Such a teacher may be employed at a school to give such instruction as aforesaid, subject to paragraph (3), for such period as no suitable qualified teacher, graduate teacher or registered teacher is available for appointment or to give the instruction."

The effect of that is that the school is not empowered to give him a permanent full-time contract as a teacher, and was recently obliged to advertise his post. Mr. Read had to apply for his own job, despite being trusted by the school and the head teacher and providing a valuable service to the students. Five people applied for the job in addition to Mr. Read, one of whom was interviewed. Mr. Read was also interviewed and, I am pleased to say, was successful in being awarded his own job.

Hon. Members may find that laughable, and it is rather extraordinary. The Government have a stated commitment to encourage more people to go into the teaching profession. Indeed, when one opens the broadsheet newspapers or goes to the cinema one cannot fail to see their advertisements, which show glowing pictures of people saying how much they owe to their teachers, and ask whether those in the audience have ever thought of going into teaching. In the light of all that, we should consider the ludicrous situation in which Mr. Read and others find themselves.

Mr. Read's head teacher at the Hewett school, Mr. Christopher Wade, says that there is much hype about the graduate teacher programme, through which a graduate without a teaching qualification can train on the job. He says, however, that in fact it is hype about nothing, because it is virtually impossible to obtain the required funding, unless it is for English or maths, and also in an education action zone. There are only 235 fully funded places across the country. He goes on to say:

"You can do it if the school funds it itself"—

and that his school is doing that with two of its teachers—

"But if there were teachers out there we wouldn't be doing it. We are not primarily a training establishment."

None the less, many schools have been turned into training establishments, paying out of their own budgets to train the teachers they need.

As a result of securing this debate and talking to colleagues about it, I became aware that the problem was not confined to my constituency. A colleague mentioned a case to me—I have not had an opportunity to speak to the individual involved, so I will not identify him. The case concerned a 49-year-old retired police officer who wanted to be a teacher, preferably in a junior school.

The local education authority concerned sent a letter to all parents asking for help from people wishing to enter the profession. The man duly contacted them in the hope that he would be able to join the registered training scheme for those who do not have a degree but have attained a good educational standard. He was informed that the RTS exists in name only—no school in the LEA concerned has taken on a teacher under the scheme because it is too expensive.

The Government have the system in place to solve the teaching shortage, at least in part, but they are unwilling to finance it. They must either pay up or shut up. As an aside, the individual concerned said:

"From what I've seen the possession of a degree doesn't necessarily make a good teacher—some experience of life would be more useful to those that have only gone from school to university and then back to school again."

One cannot help thinking that a 49-year-old police officer would have a lot to contribute to a classroom, especially as the first requirement in any classroom is the maintenance of discipline, without which there is no possibility of learning.

Another hon. Member mentioned to me another constituent, to whom I have spoken. This lady does not wish to be identified in case it should hinder her future prospects of employment. She is a qualified teacher with 17 years of classroom experience. It is my understanding, based on what she said at Education

[Mr. Richard Bacon]

Question Time, that the Secretary of State, too, had 17 years' teaching experience when she took her career break to go into politics.

The lady whom I have mentioned took a career break to have a family, then, in answer to the nation's call for more teachers, applied and was told that she had to have recent classroom experience. She pointed out that she was a fully qualified teacher with many years of experience but, as she says:

"I seem to be in an impossible situation. I am disqualified from even applying for the work that I would like to do, because my qualifications and experience are unacceptable, yet I cannot fulfil their requirements for registration without having worked."

There are many other examples. I shall quote that of Mr. Stuart Ballantyne, the head teacher of Diss high school, in my constituency. Diss high school is one of the best comprehensive schools in the country. It has been named twice by the chief inspector of schools in his annual report as one of the top 60 schools in the country. Mr. Ballantyne received an expression of interest from a police officer with years of experience and a master's degree in biology. I am pleased to say that that person is teaching at the school. However, he had to be given an enormous amount of reassurance by the headteacher because of the temporary nature of the contract under which Mr. Ballantyne was forced to employ him.

Mr. Ballantyne nearly lost the services of this individual on a number of occasions because he was so fed up with the runaround that he was getting from the Teacher Training Agency. According to Mr. Ballantyne, the forms that he has to fill in for teachers seeking qualified status are 26 pages long, and even after he has gone to the trouble of completing them, officials from the Teacher Training Agency telephone him and ask for information that has already been provided. He says that the service is neither impressive nor slick, and is not what one would expect.

Mr. Wade, at the Hewett school in Norwich, told me that coping with teacher job applications more or less required the attention of a full-time senior member of staff—someone who should, of course, be preparing and teaching classes. Mr. Ballantyne told me about a female modern languages graduate who had been working at a school in a clerical capacity for seven years. She had thought for some time about becoming a teacher because of her gift with modern languages and her degree. With the school's encouragement, she applied for the requisite programme, but the Teacher Training Agency turned her down flat, with no adequate explanation, despite the fact that the school had come to know her well over several years and wanted to take her on.

The Government talk about autonomy and about trusting schools and professionals. Paragraph 1.6 of the White Paper "Schools—achieving success" lists the secondary education reforms that the Government are dedicated to achieving. They include:

"Giving successful schools the freedom they need to excel and innovate."

Paragraph 5.17 makes a similar point:

"Where schools are successful, well-led and have a record of school improvement, we want to free them from those conditions and regulatory requirements which they tell us stand in the way of yet higher standards and further innovation."

The Secretary of State makes the point again in a pamphlet published by the Social Market Foundation called "Professionalism and Trust—the future of teachers and teaching". When I first came across the Social Market Foundation, it was run by a friend of mine, who was a good Conservative, but things have moved on, and it now publishes pamphlets by Labour Cabinet Ministers. In the foreword, the Secretary of State says that the pamphlet

"signals a new era of trust in our professionals on the part of Government."

She goes on to say:

"Recruitment and most especially retention remain a real concern."

I was prompted to take an interest in this issue partly by a front-page article in *The Guardian* on 28 August 2001, which appeared under the headline "Teacher shortage worst ever". I then read the chief inspector's report when it was published on 5 February 2002, and it alluded to serious problems in the recruitment and retention of teachers. The single biggest problem is not recruitment but retention. Many people want to go into teaching.

I have read the recent study published by the Centre for Education and Employment Research, and I am grateful to the National Union of Teachers for supplying it. This study, entitled, "Teachers Leaving", whose authors are Smithers and Robinson, says that teachers go into the profession overwhelmingly because of the prospect of "intrinsic satisfactions". It states:

"The most important reason, accounting for about a third of all responses, was 'working with children/young people'. This was particularly the case for primary teachers who gave this as a reason. About half the secondary teachers did so. Some teachers expanded the point as 'the pleasure of seeing children learn', 'wanting to do something useful', or 'wanting to make a difference'."

In other words, people enter the profession with a strong sense of vocation. Love of the subject—the desire to convey knowledge and the excitement and pleasure of teaching the subject to young people—came second.

Yet people do not stay. The study noted:

"About 12 per cent. of those admitted to PGCE courses, or reaching the final year of BEd courses, do not successfully complete. But this pales beside an inexplicable post-training wastage of over 30 per cent. Of every 100 final year students, 40 do not make it to the classroom. With the initial teacher training budget currently standing at £245 million this represents an annual loss of £100 million."

I have spoken to the National Audit Office about that shockingly huge figure. Like me, my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) is a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and I am sure that he will be as interested as I am in understanding how the Government can spend so much money on training teachers who do not stay in the profession.

That raises the question of why teachers are not staying in the profession once they have entered it. The Smithers and Robinson study identifies that among secondary teachers the most frequently given reasons for leaving were work load, 57.8 per cent., pupil behaviour, 45.1 per cent. and Government initiatives, 37.2 per cent. It is interesting that salary is not mentioned in the first three. It is included in the survey—it is fourth, with 24 per cent.—but it is clear that money

is not the main motivating issue. Issues such as work load, pupil behaviour and Government initiatives are far more important.

I am again grateful to the NUT, which supplied with me a copy of a study by the Warwick institute of education, which quotes a teacher who said:

"I have the right to work without being abused—in industry it wouldn't be accepted, yet day after day it's now just 'part of the job'".

I was recently sent a poster by the Norfolk Mental Healthcare NHS trust. It is running a campaign called "NHS zero tolerance", saying:

"Staff working in the NHS do so to care for others. They do not go to work to be victims of violence or threatening behaviour."

Where are the Government schemes for the education system, highlighting the fact that teachers go to work to teach, not to be the victims of violent or threatening behaviour?

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): My hon. Friend may be interested to know that when I tried to ascertain the figures for teachers who have been assaulted either inside or outside the classroom, I was told that those figures are not collected. What does he think about that?

Mr. Bacon: It shocks me. It seems to me that there is no possibility of doing something about a problem unless one measures its scale. On the other hand, if I were speaking for the Government, which fortunately I am not, I would probably say that the numbers are so scary that it is best not to collect them, because they might frighten the horses, and even fewer people would be encouraged to go into the teaching.

The recruitment and retention of teachers is a serious problem, and I have identified pupil behaviour as the single biggest problem. The current state of discipline in schools is a direct result of the policy, which the Government promoted for several years, of having targets for exclusions. It meant that fewer difficult children were excluded from schools, and as a result discipline problems increased. I am pleased to say that the Government have recognised that that policy was flawed and have reversed it. Until they take the question of discipline in schools seriously and make it clear to teachers that they are backing them, rather than pupils who are violent or disruptive, there is no serious hope of improvement. That is a sine qua non for an improved situation.

Secondly, the amount of bureaucracy, paperwork and Government initiatives must be reduced. The Government say that such paperwork is necessary. At a recent Education Question Time, I think I heard the Secretary of State say that less paper was not the answer. That shocked me, and I have also heard my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) quote a similar line from her in a recent speech. I am sure that my ears were not deceiving me. If the Government do not believe that the answer must include reducing the amount of paper and trusting teachers more, they have a long way to go before they have any chance of restoring the education system. If there were ever a time to be creative in appointing teachers, it is now. From what I have seen, and according to the teachers to whom I have talked, the Government do not seem to take that problem seriously enough.

There is one further issue that I feel that I must mention: spending. Yesterday I was flicking through last Friday's *Hansard,* and more or less by chance came across a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about whether she would

"list the (a) title, (b) subject and (c) associated funding of each (i) project, (ii) scheme, (iii) initiative and (iv) policy announced by the Department for Education and Employment since 1997".

The Minister for Young People and Learning, who is here today, took it upon himself to answer the question for the Secretary of State. His answer was:

"Information is not held in the format requested"—

that will not surprise my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall)—

"and generating it would incur disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 160W.]

It did not seem to me to be that odd to ask about the costs of each project, scheme, initiative and policy run by the Government. Without an accurate record of what is being spent and what it is being spent on, it does not seem very likely that education can be successfully managed.

I have been flicking through the appropriations accounts for the Department for 1999–2000, the most recent figures available, and some of the detail will assist my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford a little, although perhaps not quite as much as he would like. On page 8, under the headings "Class 1, Vote 1" and "Central government's own expenditure", an item is given as:

"Ensuring that all young people reach 16 with the skills, attitudes and personal qualities that will give them a secure foundation for lifelong learning, work and citizenship in a rapidly changing world".

The cost of that is given as £83.625 million. However, from the second column, one can see that the Government actually spent only £64.336 million on it.

On the next page, the item of expenditure given involves:

"Developing in everyone a commitment to lifelong learning, so as to enhance their lives, improve their employability in a changing labour market and create the skills that our economy and employers need".

That was to have cost £340 million, but the Government spent only £312.967 million. And so it goes on. Mr. Syms, my hon. Friend the Member for Poole, asked about the total underspend in the Department for Education and Skills. Those figures might be one reason why the total underspend in education spending overall, both capital and current, for the most recent available year, 2000–01, was £1,454 billion.

There is degenerating discipline in schools and pupil behaviour is cited as one of the single most important reasons for teachers leaving the profession, because of the Government's flawed policy on exclusions. The Government continue to bombard teachers with paperwork, despite huge evidence that they want to be left to get on with the job and be trusted to do so—one only has to go round one's constituency and talk to teachers, as I have, to find that out. Experienced people coming in from the outside—such as people who have designed electronic control systems for nuclear submarines or who have worked for 20 years as police officers, dealing with more dangerous behaviour than

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[Mr. Bacon]

one would ever hope to find in a classroom—are stymied at every turn before they are allowed to get on with the business.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I apologise for not intervening on the hon. Gentleman earlier when he was talking about Mr. Read and the Hewett school in Norfolk, but as he has returned to that subject again in winding up his speech, will he say what the Conservative party's policy is for solving the problem that he has rightly identified? It is a very real problem, but what is the solution? Is it to allow anyone to join the teaching profession simply because they have good skills and abilities? Would that qualify David Beckham, for example, to become a PE teacher?

Mr. Bacon: I certainly hope that someone who is probably one of the most valuable footballers in the world would be qualified to be a PE teacher—subject to his foot being healed, for which we are all, of course, praying. I would have thought that any school where he were a PE teacher, in either the maintained or the independent sector, would have substantially higher applications as a result.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's more serious and general point, plainly one does not want to take simply anyone off the street—but the danger is that we have almost been in that position. Another facet of the issue is that so many higher education institutions are now keen to get Government funding that they are offering education degrees in the hope of attracting students who might not have made it on to any other degree course.

In a recent conversation that I had with a head teacher in my constituency, I asked where he was getting his teacher applications from. He said that he was lucky if he got a decent number to select from, and that when candidates come through the door, he, like other heads in a similar position, is more or less obliged to insist on watching them teach a lesson. That is because it is no longer possible to establish on the basis of the recommendation and reference that comes from the institution attended—in many cases, an institution of which one has not heard—that someone has undertaken a reputable teacher training programme and can be relied on, either as a teaching practice candidate or as a full-time employee.

The situation has got much worse. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) is right to say that it requires much thought. Taking people from industry and other backgrounds, such as the police service, is not the only answer. However, that is almost certainly part of the answer. People with much experience of life have a lot to impart. My personal view is that people should not seek to become teachers, even if they have a vocation for it, until they are in their late 20s. I worked as a teacher for seven months, which I did not do until I was 29. I worked in East Berlin, teaching East German factory workers just after the Berlin wall came down. I am sure that I was better at doing that in my late 20s than I would have been at 21, just out of university.

Part of the answer is finding people from other backgrounds, but we should also ensure that people who have a vocation for teaching and obtain a teacher training qualification actually then choose to go into teaching, because they see it as an attractive profession rather than one from which they are scared off because they are likely to be attacked, abused or have low professional status.

Teaching is one of the most important professions in this country. It should be one of the first careers that bright graduates from the best universities should consider. That is not the case at the moment. The Government's present policies mean that it is not likely to be the case, either, and it is about time they woke up to the seriousness of the situation and started to do something about it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. It might be helpful if I offer hon. Members two small pieces of advice. First, it is a common convention in the House to refer to fellow Members by their constituency rather than by their first or family name, unless a Member is occupying a Chair. Secondly, we shall commence the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the end of the debate, so we have 28 minutes left for speeches from the Floor. I ask hon. Members to bear that in mind both when making their own contributions and when seeking to intervene.

11.32 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) made several valid points. However, he party-politicised his arguments too much, which took away some of their force. It is ridiculous to argue that the problem of classroom discipline can be resolved simply by recognising its scale. We know that there are problems of classroom discipline, and they need to be dealt with institution by institution, not by some longitudinal study of this country. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman made several important points, which I hope that the Minister will take on board.

There are problems in teacher training and recruitment, and I would like to illustrate how they relate to inner-city areas such as my own, which is sometimes described as a challenging area, in which it is difficult to teach. It would not be adequate for us to recruit people with no aptitude for the vocation of teaching, however skilled they may be in other areas. That is not a good basis for the imparting of education to young people. I grew up in a generation when, because of shortages, many people had come into teaching, particularly in specialist subjects, with no formal teaching qualification whatever. They may have been excellent physicists, engineers or whatever, but they were useless as teachers. We need to say that loudly and clearly. We want teachers who are competent, as well as those with the requisite skills.

Schools in my area have queried the nature of the current training process. I ask my hon. Friends to take on board the fact that there is still a strong feeling that teachers coming out of the training process are not properly trained to go into the classroom environment. It is a common observation that the present training process leaves them without practical preparation to take on the role even of probationary teacher. They do

not have proper experience of the classroom environment, particularly in inner-city areas where there are difficulties with classroom discipline and behaviour.

I have been told that those people do not have an adequate background in the Government's strategies—for example, they do not have proper knowledge of the literacy and numeracy strategies. In some subjects that are sometimes thought of as the ephemera of education, but are not—such as gymnastics, PE and dance—new teachers have sometimes not had proper access to how those subjects fit in in schools. If such problems arise for those with BEd degrees, they arise even more for those who take the PGCE route because the length of their training is so much shorter. Newly qualified teachers face problems when they come into the classroom.

Everyone agrees that intensive mentoring is necessary for newly qualified teachers, but that is resource-intensive. Mentoring requires the resources of other trained and skilled staff. Probationary teachers already incur resource costs because they normally have non-contact time of half a day a week, so schools must consider carefully the prospect of employing newly qualified teachers.

However, most of the teachers and school managers to whom I have spoken say that newly qualified teachers have many advantages, particularly in inner-city areas. A newly qualified teacher who is properly mentored becomes a better teacher in such schools than teachers who come in from different kinds of schools with different expertise, and receive mentoring at a later stage of their career. The point that is made consistently is that mentoring must be provided by people with experience of a difficult school environment. There is no point in mentoring being "academic", or based on different experience. It must be relevant to inner-city schools.

My next point concerns newly qualified teachers who do not continue to teach, but disappear from schools after a couple of years. Retention of staff is a problem in inner-city areas and perhaps elsewhere. Teachers who find job satisfaction in inner-city schools can also find job satisfaction in schools in leafy lanes. The head teacher of a very good inner-city school told me that a quarter of the staff in her school were planning to leave and were looking for something more compatible with their lifestyle in the suburbs.

There is an overall problem of teacher shortage in inner cities. Jobs in such areas are more challenging, and the behaviour in schools there makes them much more difficult, so it is more difficult to recruit and retain teachers. Such schools are generally grateful for initiatives such as the school achievement awards, which are a signal to all those working there that their efforts are improving the quality of education.

Education is improving in inner cities. Opposition Members have failed to accept the fact that there was no golden era under Conservative Governments. The quality of education in inner-city areas has risen significantly because of some of the Government's policies. The school achievement awards are welcomed because they recognise the contribution of different people to the raising of standards. However, we should also consider retention allowances or city allowances for schools in hard-pressed areas. There used to be a social priority allowance, which allowed schools in social priority areas to retain teachers by providing incentives for them to stay on.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): One point that the hon. Gentleman has made is wrong: not only inner-city schools but rural schools have a retention problem. My constituency, which is deeply rural, also has problems with teacher retention. They are not comparable with those of the inner city, but they are none the less real. When the hon. Gentleman refers to his constituency, he should bear in mind the fact that retaining teachers in rural areas, too, is a serious problem, although of a different nature.

Mr. Lloyd: I am not saying that there are no retention problems elsewhere. We would be very stupid to pit teacher shortages in one area against those in another. We must recognise where the problems exist. As an inner-city MP, I have a responsibility to the schools and young people that I represent to point out the retention problems that relate to certain well defined features—but that is not to deny that problems exist elsewhere.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk referred to a group of people whom we should encourage back into education—those who have experience of different walks of life. They should feel that they have something to offer, and enter teacher training.

I hope that the Minister will also consider another problem that crops up among my constituents: the benefits system deems people to have taken student loans. For somebody with a family, and a partner who is already working, loans have an impact on how they can use the benefit system. I know of families whose whole finances are derailed because it is deemed that they have access to, or take advantage of, the student loan system. We should not pile on extra disadvantages by adding a financial disincentive for those who want to re-enter the world of work and contribute to teaching where their experience will be relevant. I hope that the Minister will take on board those issues, both in the city of Manchester and elsewhere.

11.42 am

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on securing the debate. We serve together on the Public Accounts Committee and see many examples of Government waste. Later, I shall move on to the waste in the Department for Education and Skills budget and the way in which the Department tries to recruit and retain teachers.

My hon. Friend began with the example of his constituent—the man who worked on the electronic control systems for Trident nuclear submarines—who was trusted with our nation's defences, but not with teaching our nation's children. That is a powerful, if anecdotal, illustration of the problems that many public servants find on re-entering public service. I know of a nurse who had a similar experience. She worked for several years and then took time off to have a family. When she tried to rejoin the nursing profession in my county, which is short of nurses, she found that she would be forced to requalify and go through a year's training.

[Mr. George Osborne]

As my hon. Friend said, that experience suggests at least one explanation for the chronic shortage of teachers and nurses; another is the despair felt by many in the teaching profession. Politicians talk about teacher morale, but when one visits schools in one's constituency, one finds a sense of despair. National Union of Teachers press releases and comments from the Conservative Opposition do not create that. Teachers are deluged by red tape, Whitehall directives and Government initiatives, which are substitutes for substantive Government policy. Within minutes of walking through any school's door, one is told about the latest Government initiative, piece of red tape or forms that teachers are required to fill out. The performance-related pay scam is a classic example: anyone who jumped all the hurdles and filled out the paperwork got the pay. Head teachers spent days completing various Government forms. The only performance being measured was whether they could fill all the forms in, which is, I suppose, what teachers need to do these days.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) touched on the problems with classroom discipline. They have not emerged in the past couple of years, but are of long standing. It is definitely the case that teachers feel that they are being second-guessed and that their authority is being undermined. The problem has been made worse by unnecessary exclusion targets, which have encouraged certain behaviour in schools. I recollect a recent newspaper story about a head teacher who expelled two children for drug dealing. The local authority put them back in the school. We all know how a classroom works and how children can sense whether teachers have authority. I imagine that there is a serious discipline problem in that school, to which pupils were returned after being expelled.

Public servants in all public services are alternately bullied then praised by Ministers, including the Prime Minister. The crisis in teacher morale is unprecedented, and the problems of education are spelled out in the extraordinary book by Chris Woodhead, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk and which I have had the pleasure of reading.

To the Department for Education and Skills and, perhaps, some teachers, Chris Woodhead is now public enemy No. 1, but one should not forget that a few years ago, in 1997, he was a great hero of the incoming Labour Government. They reappointed him, he sat next to the Prime Minister and he was held up by new Labour as a totem of how serious it was about improving school standards. Now he has come back to bite the Government with his extraordinary book, which is subtitled, "The Book Every Parent Should Read". Certainly, every Minister in the Department for Education and Skills should read it. Perhaps the Minister will tell us his thoughts.

The current state of affairs developed under a Government who said that "education, education, education" was their priority. I know that the Government's priorities change every year—it was transport, now it is health—but they began by saying that education was the priority. The Minister will tell us that more money is going into education to recruit more teachers and refer to the various targets that the Government have set, but I expect that the Department will not do as well as some others in tomorrow's Budget, partly because of its extraordinary underspend, although we must wait and see. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk touched on that point towards the end of his remarks, and I hope that the Minister discusses it.

Yesterday, Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies treated Conservative Members to an excellent presentation on the Budget. Labour Members have the same opportunity today, I believe. According to Andrew Dilnot, the total Government underspend in 2000–01 was £6.2 billion. As my hon. Friend said, that is the last year for which we have figures. In other words, the Government did not spend £6.2 billion that was allocated to them. The Department for Education and Skills underspend was £1.4 billion, which is a quarter of the total and the largest sum for any Department.

Labour Members cheered when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced all the extra money in the Budget a couple of years ago, but they did not realise that the Department was not going to spend it. I believe that the underspend amounts to about 7.6 per cent. of the departmental budget. That is what Andrew Dilnot said, and he is generally right about such matters. According to "The IFS Green Budget 2002":

> "Underspends in these areas of education, transport and health will make it more difficult for the government to succeed in delivering significant improvements in these services".

One reason suggested by the IFS for the underspend—a reason that certainly makes sense to me—is that the Government are finding it almost impossible to recruit the teachers for whom money is available. It is not the money that is lacking; it is Government education policy.

11.49 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Given the earlier remarks from the Chair, I shall obviously take careful note of the time. The debate has enabled a useful airing of issues and I congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on the first part of his important speech. It introduced many issues and failure to address them would represent a lost opportunity.

I must comment on the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's speech and on that of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). I taught for 10 years and then spent 10 years in teacher training, facing year after year of cuts in teaching staff and resources, so I do not enjoy being lectured about the problems involved with having more money to spend. Was morale better then? I visit my schools regularly, and I do not think so. The morale of the teaching force is affected by many issues, some of which have been mentioned, and the fact that my area is at or near full employment—people can easily move in and out of the teaching profession—makes a dramatic difference to recruitment and retention.

I entered teaching on the basis that I would be a 40-year time-server. I hope that that is not a derogatory term. For many who entered teaching with me, that was the nature of the job. One entered it as a vocation; it was for life. That is not the case any more, and we must reflect on that when considering how to recruit and retain staff. We must take account of the fact that people move in and out of teaching much more frequently.

I take little notice of the bouquets being thrown to the former Office for Standards in Education chief inspector. Some Labour Members were more than unhappy when he was reappointed and tried to persuade our colleagues that the sooner he went the better. He was not an outstanding success in the classroom. There is a view that one should appoint those who have seen the other side of a job, because their insight will inform their decision making, but, with the benefit of hindsight, I do not think that his tenure was the great period that some, let alone he like to pretend it was.

I want to touch on issues unearthed by the debate, which we need to examine in more detail. Changes in our society have, understandably, affected teaching as they have affected all other aspects of life. The most important is that the majority of people now enter teaching as mature students. The balance between younger and older entrants changed in the 1980s and it has continued to shift dramatically towards mature people for some time. We must recognise that people enter with experience—that is a good thing, as previous speakers have acknowledged—and consider carefully how to help those people to enter the profession and how to retain them.

I am pleased that we have considered retention, because we must recognise that we have to make the job worth while. People must be rewarded and, whether we like performance-related pay or not, more money is going into teachers' pay packets. However, we must also make the job one in which people see a career path. We are recruiting many more teacher assistants, and a jolly good thing too. I hope that some of them become the teachers of tomorrow.

We must ensure that assistants can make the transition from entering the classroom to do one job to using their skills to advance to another, if people realise that they would make good teachers. That will involve a period outside the classroom, and I am sure that we can think about that carefully. I denounce the derogatory comments about people who are now entering classrooms. They are not a "mums' army" or people who are taken in off the streets. They are dedicated people who can bring an awful lot to the job that they do now, and to the jobs that they may go on to do.

I want to discuss recruitment and how to deal with a diversified intake. I am pleased to see the Minister in his place because, among other things, he has responsibility for the 14-to-19 curriculum. Although we are bringing the age of vocationism forward, we should realise that not everybody wants to pursue a purely academic curriculum. That obviously backwashes into who should be recruited into teaching. As someone involved in teacher training and who specialised in business education, I know that some teachers were very undervalued, perhaps because they had worked in an office or as typists. They took all their experience into teaching, but were never paid appropriately for the job that they did.

As we start to allow different ways to enter teaching, and other jobs, we should ensure that everyone is properly rewarded. We do not want to dilute standards, but we should consider the structures to ensure that such people have access points. My experience is that some of the best entrants to secondary education came through the old two-year BA course, which was sometimes still referred to as a two-year BEd course. They came with a rich diversity of experience, and they had the necessary teaching qualifications. It may have been hard for them to make the transition, but they brought richness to the classroom. We must encourage that and build on it.

The fact that teaching is an ageing profession brings its own pressures. Some classrooms are heavily skewed and the retirement of a number of staff at the same time may cause difficulties, so we should always try to achieve a balance of ages. I have always warned of the dangers of early retirement—not that I begrudge it, as friends and, indeed, relatives have taken early retirement. Nevertheless, the ongoing cost has an impact and we must grapple with that problem at some stage, just as we are trying to grapple with the problems of the police pension scheme.

On the next issue—maths and English requirements—I do not say that we should wash them away, but some who wish to teach have not acquired either English or maths. I know that equivalence is involved, but I ask the Government to look at that question again—not to get rid of it, but to consider whether it bars some people who would otherwise make good teachers. We must consider other ways of letting them enter the profession and ensuring that English and maths skills are brought up to an appropriate level.

Subject relevance is important, and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made it clear that those who come with the best academic records are not necessarily the best teachers. Although people can choose from a diversity of degrees, they may have to narrow their subject and even specialise. That will not make them any worse as teachers. They must prove capable in their subjects, but for heaven's sake let us realise that the world has moved on. The quality of teaching is paramount, but that does not mean that we should dilute the subject content for secondary school teachers. For primary schools, first and foremost is the ability to teach, and subject knowledge comes second. That may be slightly different for secondary schools.

We have something to be proud of in our schools. The Government have raised teacher numbers—not quickly enough perhaps, although that is partly due to economic success in other areas—but there is no substitute for quality and we must continue to build it in, especially in training. There is a bias towards on-the-job training. Although I do not deny that that is the sensible way forward, good teaching is not only about doing the job.

That is recognised not only in teacher training, but in the ongoing training that takes teachers out of the classroom and allows them to build their subject knowledge and other skills, which in turn enable them to handle some of the difficult issues that have been alluded to. As one who did the job for a long time, I do not deny that such problems exist, but I do not think that they have got worse. They sometimes appear to have done so, however, and they must be grappled with, which means that the Government must get it right and members of the teaching profession must support each other.

11.59 am

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): This has been an interesting debate, and I hope that when the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke about time-serving, he was not referring to my 34 years in the profession. I can assure him that people get less for murder.

[Mr. Phil Willis]

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) spoke, as ever, with enormous common sense. The problems that face us in our classrooms did not arrive overnight and it will take a lot of time to address and work through them. He mentioned an aspect of Government policy towards teacher recruitment and retention that causes me great sadness—we are failing to get our inspirational teachers to the areas where they are most needed. None of the parties has a solution to that problem, but we must find one if children are not to be denied access.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) should buy another book besides Chris Woodhead's diatribe against his former employers and the world in general. I have no doubt that he could found his own organisation if he wanted to. If the hon. Gentleman talked sensibly to the teachers in schools in his constituency, he would find out that Chris Woodhead, with his regime, did more to undermine morale, turn teachers from our schools and send them packing than any other individual in the history of education—except John Patten.

The introduction to the debate provided by the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), particularly on people without regular qualifications gaining access to the teaching profession, is an important contribution. He deserves credit for raising it on behalf of not only his constituents, but a significant number of other Members' constituents. However, he spoilt his speech by attacking the trainee teachers emerging from our training establishments.

My experience in meeting newly qualified teachers all over the country is that they are the most dedicated, highly qualified and motivated group of entrants that I have ever seen. In the 1980s, and during the 20 years that I was a head, I would have died for the opportunity to recruit some of the people who are entering the profession now. There are not as many as we would like—I accept that point—but please do not denigrate our training establishments and training schools, because superb work is being done.

Like most Conservative Members, those present suffer from selective memory syndrome and fail to recognise that all those problems existed, but none was tackled, in the 18 years under the Tories. The greatest disservice that the Tory Administration did to education was having no policy for teacher recruitment and retention. Their main policy was to put the economy in recession, which they did very successfully between 1991 and 1994. That was the only period in which the number of people applying for teacher placements increased significantly, which is rather sad.

The previous Administration's second policy, which the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) introduced in 1996, was to stop early retirements. The hon. Member for Stroud might not have got his—he looks far too young for that scheme—but I was eligible in 1996–97. If I had not been downgraded and come to the House of Commons, I would probably have taken advantage of the scheme before the right hon. Lady could stop me.

Every year from 1979 to 1997, when the Conservatives left office, with the exception of the three years from 1991 to 1994, the training targets were missed. In key subjects such as mathematics, even in the years after the recession in the early 1990s, the number of people entering teaching fell by 33.4 per cent. I am grateful that the hon. Member for South Norfolk now reads some of the National Union of Teachers' excellent literature.

Those problems were disguised in that period, during which there was a massive increase in the number of students, particularly in secondary schools. Numbers rose from 7.5 million to 7.9 million in one year before the Conservatives left office, and teacher shortages were disguised by a massive increase in class sizes. We should not return to that situation, and I compliment the Government on recognising the problem and at least trying to make progress.

Mr. George Osborne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I prefer not to, as I want to use my remaining time to complete my remarks.

We knew about the problem, because in 1996 Sir Malcolm Thornton, the Chairman of the Education Committee, wrote a good report on teacher shortages and retention. The Minister for Lifelong Learning, as the Chairman of the Select Committee in 1997 when new Labour came to power, published a back-to-back report on the subject. Both reports pointed to the fact that we needed solutions desperately. Sadly, Labour's record in office is absolutely lamentable in that respect.

The Minister will no doubt say that the number of teachers has risen dramatically during that period in office—to 457,890 in January 2001—and that it will rise again this year. He would be right to do so, but I hope that, as he is a very honest young man, which is appropriate for his brief, he will admit that the number of full-time teachers has barely changed. In secondary schools, the number of teachers has risen by little more than 2,000 during Labour's time in office, despite an increase in pupil numbers of more than 190,000. To accommodate that number of students in secondary schools, using the Government's ratio of 1:17, requires another 11,188 teachers. That statistic shows the discrepancy between what has been achieved and what is needed.

The Government are fiddling around the edges. The idea that one can simply introduce classroom assistants to supervise classes and the belief that that is a recognised policy for dealing with the situation are ludicrous. The hon. Member for Stroud is right to say that classroom assistants do an invaluable job—indeed, I compliment the Minister and his Government on targeting an extra 20,000 places in our schools—but they are not substitute teachers. Recently completed research from Europe, the Social Market Foundation and the Institute for Public Policy Research states that most classroom assistants do not want to be teachers. They do not want to face full classes of youngsters, so we should knock that idea on its head.

The Government have given us a plethora of silly little initiatives, such as fast track. An enormous amount of money—£4.3 million—was invested in that project in its first year, but it recruited only 111 people to training. Eleven of those have gone and of the 100 who remain, at a cost of £43,000 per entrant, at least 10 are not going

into teaching at all. Some are taking up jobs in the private sector. Before the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) intervenes, I should say that they are entitled to do so, but fast track has been a huge flop. Recruiting a person costs £17.68 through the graduate teacher registry scheme, but £43,000 through the Government's fast-track scheme. That is nonsense, but it happens over and over again.

Work load, initiative overload and Government directives are central to teacher retention. Unless the Government carry out research to find out how many teachers are required over the next 10 years, we shall continue to fail. We have constantly asked them to conclude the curriculum and staffing survey, but they refused to do so in 2000 and have refused to do so since. We asked Baroness Ashton in another place why that is, and she told us that there are not enough bureaucrats. I rest my case.

12.10 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I begin by congratulating not my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), but the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who kept perfectly to time. That is probably a first, and we are all grateful to him. I should also congratulate my hon. Friend on securing an excellent and important debate, during which we have heard good and useful contributions.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) spoke about the problems of the inner cities, and we fully accept his point. To start on a note of harmony, my party must get to grips with those problems and have a convincing policy to tackle them. Indeed, all parties must recognise them.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke about Tory cuts, but if he is fair, he will accept that there were no education cuts under Conservative Governments. In the same way, I am prepared to accept that more money has been available under the current Government. However, my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) alluded to the genuine problem of failure to spend the education budget, which is largely due to the failure to recruit.

One issue that has not been dealt with, perhaps because of time pressure, is the consequence for other countries of the Government's panic response to the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. The attempt to fill teacher vacancies from countries such as South Africa, New Zealand and Jamaica has been referred to as plundering the world's schools.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said that, in his experience, the newly qualified teachers appearing in our schools today are the most dedicated entrants to teaching he has ever seen. That begs the question, what is going wrong when a cohort of dedicated, committed and predominantly young people going into schools translates to record numbers leaving the profession for a variety of reasons?

My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk sought the debate not least to air his concerns about his constituent, Mr. Christopher Read. Mr. Read is obviously an impressive man with a strong CV, and we should be delighted that he wants go into teaching, as I am sure the Minister will confirm.

My hon. Friend threw down an important challenge to the Department in terms of dealing with this problem. Mr. Read is not alone, and the hon. Member for Stroud referred to examples that we all come across—people who want to teach history or drama, but who are precluded from doing so by the lack of a maths O-level or GCSE. He asked the Minister to consider the way forward, and I concur that the Government have an important challenge to meet. People with an enormous amount to contribute in our schools cannot do so.

If we try to get an impression of the scale of the problems in our schools, we find that the number of teachers without qualified teacher status has grown steadily. A response to a written question that I tabled last October confirms that the number of teachers who do not have such status has risen from 2,940 in 1997 to 5,620 this year, although the Department was unable to say how that figure is constituted. Nor could it say how many people are on the graduate teacher programme, how many are on the registered teacher programme, how many are licensed teachers or how many trained overseas. If it does not know how that body of people in our schools is constituted, it is difficult to see how it will find solutions to the problems identified this morning.

We have a serious crisis. There is an exodus of teachers from the profession as well as a flight of qualified teachers from our schools and from normal, contracted, permanent full-time status to supply teaching. Some supply teachers provide an excellent standard of education but some, of course, do not. There is an accelerating trend of teachers teaching outside their subject, and a vast number of qualified teachers are choosing not to teach. Last year's figures for supply teachers in one local education authority area, Luton, show that more than 20 per cent. of full-time teachers were supply teachers. As Ofsted reported this year:

> "Nevertheless, the percentage of unsatisfactory or poor lessons taught by temporary supply teachers is significantly higher than the figure for qualified teachers with more than one year's teaching experience. The figure is twice as high for primary schools and four times as high for secondary schools."

So, real problems result from the situation that the Government have allowed to develop. I am sure that we all accept, intuitively, that that is also a problem for children, who all too often encounter a succession of different teachers, one day after another, or one week after another, and are unable to develop a relationship with their own class teacher.

There is a crisis in teacher recruitment. The Ofsted report says:

> "There are real problems in recruiting teachers and in retaining them, and these problems have got worse over the past two years."

Recruitment and retention of primary school staff is

> "no longer just an inner city issue, but is beginning to affect schools in all regions and all kinds of locations . . . More teachers are being asked to teach outside their specialism."

We see the number of vacancies rising, as well as the number of teachers who are not teaching.

I return to the question of why teachers leave. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton referred to disciplinary problems. A recent National Union of Teachers report found that 45.1 per cent. of teachers leaving the profession cited pupil behaviour as the reason—a worrying statistic that underlines the

[Mr. Graham Brady]

problem of discipline in the classroom. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) referred to the Department's failure to get a grip on what is happening in schools. That is underlined by the response—perhaps failure to respond is more accurate—to a written question that I recently put to the Minister for School Standards, asking how many teachers in maintained schools have been victims of serious assaults by pupils or parents in the past five years. The Minister replied:

"My Department does not collect this information" —[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 195W.]

For the Department not to know how many assaults have been carried out, when 45 per cent. of teachers leaving the profession cite classroom behaviour as the reason, is a matter of huge concern.

Of course, many teachers leave through ordinary retirement or early retirement on health or other grounds. The number of those taking early retirement has fallen dramatically as the natural result of the changes to the early retirement rules, but the number leaving for other reasons has risen steadily in each of the past four years from 18,000 to 23, 000 to 24,000 to more than 26,000 in the last year for which I have figures.

The Government face huge challenges if they are to tackle those problems in our schools. They must stem the exodus of teachers from the profession and tackle the disciplinary problems in our classrooms. They must back up the supposed conversion on the road to Damascus that Ministers experienced when they recently reviewed the failed policy to reduce exclusions.

The Government must get to grips with the problem of the huge non-teaching work load—the weight of bureaucracy and paperwork—being piled on teachers. They are storing up new problems for themselves in the need, which they recognise, to train more teachers in vocational specialisms and for more language teachers. They know that they have those problems to deal with but, according to recent replies that I have received from Ministers, have no idea how to tackle them.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): There is a consensus on both sides of the House that the quality and number of teachers is central to any common objective of achieving the highest possible standards of education in this country. This debate is central to that objective, and we must pay tribute, as always in such debates, to the work of teachers at the chalk face throughout the country who are making a real difference to our young people's life chances and opportunities. It is important to start from that perspective.

There have been several interesting contributions. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on securing the debate. He raised important issues, and in particular the case of his constituent. We can understand that gentleman's frustration and feeling that the situation is not working as it should. On the other hand, I thought that the hon. Gentleman's contribution was completely spoiled by his politicisation of the debate, and by an almost complete absence of memory concerning the history of why we have got to this stage with teacher recruitment and retention.

It is interesting that the Conservative party always scoffs at the title "Minister for Young People"; I can assure Conservative Members that young people do not do so. They see it as an important representation of the fact that the Government are determined to re-engage with young people in a whole variety of policy areas. Those of us who care about the future of democracy should welcome that re-engagement between politicians, or the political process, and young people.

In the context of the debate, it is right to achieve an appropriate balance between a minimum threshold framework and the need to recruit the maximum number of teachers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said, this must be about quality as well as quantity. It is not good enough simply to rush to recruit as many teachers as possible and sacrifice quality in the process. The analogy that the hon. Member for South Norfolk made was interesting. He suggested that because a retired police officer sought to become a teacher, he would inevitably be good at maintaining classroom discipline. I was going to use the David Beckham example as an analogy—although as a Manchester City fan, that would have made life difficult for me—but I have found a better one. It is a bit like saying that the underperformance of boys would be corrected if we had Britney Spears or Kylie Minogue teaching in our classrooms.

Some of our former political colleagues, whom we can all remember, have CVs that show that they were extremely distinguished—but would we want them to teach our children, just because they had a distinguished record in public life? No, we would not. That is not a reflection on the gentleman on whose behalf the hon. Member for South Norfolk raised the issue. I can see, not only from his CV but because he is already actively filling the role of a teaching instructor—a role in which he is valued and to which he has been reappointed—that he is making a contribution to the education system, and I pay tribute to that. However, there must be parameters—a framework in which to determine quality.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk said that schools were increasingly becoming training institutions. I must say to him that all good schools are constantly training, and that we want them to train not only new teachers but experienced teachers, classroom assistants and learning mentors, too, to ensure that our young people have access to the best possible quality education. I would also say to the hon. Gentleman—he did not refer to this in his contribution—that his own local education authority received more than £0.5 million from the recruitment and retention fund in 2001–02 and is due to receive more than £1 million over the next twelve months.

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: Much as I would like to give way to the hon. Gentleman, I do not have the time. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) raised several important issues concerning inner cities, such as low aspirations, the lack of opportunities for young

people in those communities, and the behaviour and discipline problems with which teachers have to deal. He talked about the special nature of teaching in the inner cities, and the special challenges there. I am sure that he would agree that the additional support through education action zones, excellence in cities, and the influx of learning mentors—all warmly welcomed—is making a significant difference to the quality of education in those inner-city schools. We have done a lot, but I acknowledge that there is a tremendous amount left to do.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) paid great tribute to the former chief inspector of schools. Even if one thinks, as I do, that that person was a necessary evil rather than simply evil, as some hon. Members think, one cannot say that he did much for teacher morale. I have never met a teacher who has had anything positive to say about the rhetoric that he used about education and teaching—and it was not always the policies introduced or the work of Ofsted itself that they criticised. The general flavour of the chief inspector's comments about the state of the teaching profession in this country did a tremendous amount to undermine teaching morale, even if he was a necessary evil.

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: No, I am sorry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud raised several important points. He welcomed the Government's commitment to restructure the teaching profession. While ensuring that there are more adults, such as classroom assistants, learning mentors, Connexions personal advisers and teachers, in the classroom, in the interests of young people we must also ensure that the balance of contribution is right from each of those professionals—and, indeed, that they are all professionals. My hon. Friend raised some important points about our determination to raise the status and esteem of vocational education. No Government have been able to crack that nut in the past, and it is an important challenge that we must face up to on a consensual basis.

I did not agree with all of what the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said, particularly the bit about the Government. However, I did agree with him on one point, which is linked with what the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) said. The reason for the current difficulties is, to a large extent, the fact that there has been no long-term planning in our education system for personnel and staffing needs. Since we came to power we have introduced a whole range of powers to tackle that problem. One may disagree with the measures, but from day one we have acknowledged the need to encourage more people to get into the teaching profession, and to do something about teaching retention.

In a whole range of public service areas, the crime of the party that was in government before was that there was no long-term planning, no investment, and no strategic approach whatever. It is not just in teaching that there is a serious shortage of skills or workers. There are shortages across the public services, because this country has not planned on a long-term basis, and during those years we did not invest in public services.

All the evidence suggests that we must address serious issues: for example, behaviour and discipline in secondary schools. That is one of the reasons why the Government have prioritised tackling the performance of secondary schools in this term of office, and in direct relation to that, discipline and behaviour matters, such as learning support units, pupil referral units and Connexions personal advisers. The idea that discipline and behaviour is a problem in our schools because of the Government's policy on exclusion is nonsense. It is due to complex social, community and family problems that have scarred children's performance for years.

During the 18 years of Tory Government there was a greater division in our society than ever before and social problems increased, which is one reason for some of the behaviour and discipline problems in schools today. We are determined to support teachers because we are not prepared to accept unacceptable behaviour, and we believe that parents should have greater responsibility in supporting teachers in that context. However, we are not prepared to take the blame for the fact that young people who grew up during the Thatcher years are now behaving badly.

Selby Coalfield

12.30 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): My task today is to outline my view of the future of the Selby coalfield. To do so sensibly, I must examine the context of both British Government and European policy.

The coal industry in general and Selby in particular have had a real friend in this Labour Government. Time and again since 1997, when questions have been asked about the future of the Selby coalfield and the industry in general, the Government have responded with policy initiatives. The coal lobby has always had to argue its case hard with Ministers, who have never been slow to challenge our assumptions robustly, but that is as it should be. The demand has always been for fairness, not favours.

The argument that British coal has a significant role in the energy mix, not least so that the nation does not become completely dependent on imported gas, has won the day. It was this Government who gave the industry a vital breathing space by imposing a temporary moratorium on new gas-fired power stations while the electricity trading market, which was rigged against coal-fired power stations, was reformed. It was this Government who introduced a scheme of coal operating aid, which expires in July this year and has paid out more than £140 million to the coal industry—I understand that the figure will be £170 million when the scheme expires—and more than £40 million to Selby. There can be little doubt that without that aid Selby would now be closed. It was also this Government who steadily addressed the legacy of issues of basic justice in the coalfields, notably by introducing the largest ever industrial compensation scheme in the world to provide assistance to miners affected by vibration white finger and chest disease.

The Selby project is the largest deep coal mining project ever undertaken in the world. It covers about 110 square miles in the Vale of York and when it was developed in the 1980s productivity was five times that of the national average for United Kingdom mines. It took 20 years to plan and bring the complex into production. The project included the sinking of 10 shafts and driving some 124 miles of underground roadways at a cost of about £1.3 billion. The shaft sinking and access drifts had to pass through heavily watered ground, involving major ground treatment at different horizons and in different conditions. The mining engineers involved produced innovative solutions to those problems—solutions that had never been seen before but have since been copied all over the world.

The Selby mining complex is an example of a highly technological, flexible, modern industry. It is an example of which new Labour should be proud, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to visit it.

All the coal produced at the original five mines—Wistow, Riccall, Stillingfleet, Whitemoor and North Selby—is brought to the surface at one point, Gascoigne Wood, from where it is prepared and dispatched to Drax, Eggborough and other major power stations in the region. Its direct work force, supplemented by contractors, totals more than 2,500, making a major contribution to the local economy in rates, wages and the provision of goods and services. Last year, wages, salaries and related costs were more than £100 million.

Wistow was the first of the five mines to begin production in 1983. At its peak in 1993–94, the Selby complex produced 12 million tonnes of coal a year and was the jewel in the crown of the coal industry. Output and productivity records were set as the complex harvested coal from the single Barnsley seam that it was authorised to work. As *The Times* commented only last month,

"unlike so many big British industrial and infrastructure projects in the second half of the last century, including the Vale of Belvoir coalfield, Selby fulfilled its promise and became one of the world's most productive coal mines".

However, in the face of increasing geological disturbances, some reserves had to be discounted and production began to tail off in the mid-1990s. Whitemoor and North Selby mines merged with their close neighbours Stillingfleet and Riccall to concentrate mining activities in areas with more favourable geology and fewer uncertainties.

By the millennium year, annual output, which five years earlier had been 11.4 million tonnes, was down to 4.4 million tonnes. That was also the output for 2001, by which time the Selby complex had produced 110 million tonnes of coal since production first began. Reducing output and falling coal prices have turned the once-profitable Selby mine into a heavy loss-maker. If UK Coal received the same value for its coal as the previous owners, British Coal, it would receive more than £40 per tonne, which would be about half the cost of mining 1 tonne of coal in Germany. However, UK coal prices are now less than £30 per tonne. As a result, the Selby complex lost more than £35 million last year, bringing losses in the past three years to £93 million.

On Thursday 7 March, I met the chief executive of UK Coal, Gordon McPhie, at the House of Commons. I received much the same briefing as union officials in Selby had received from UK Coal management some days earlier. UK Coal does not see the Selby complex being economically viable beyond 2005 at the latest. At about that time, Wistow mine will be exhausted. It would be possible to access some new reserves from Riccall and Stillingfleet, but the huge costs of maintaining Gascoigne Wood, which was designed for five mines rather than two, would mean increasing losses. Wistow coal is essential to the composition of the overall mixture offered to Drax, and Gordon McPhie could not rule out closure taking place much earlier than 2005.

Over the following weekend I pondered what to do. There are still millions of tonnes of coal left to mine at Selby, but with high standing charges and increasing geological risks, unit costs increase as output diminishes. More than 2,500 miners and contractors and their families are currently living with desperate uncertainty, and they expect the worst. Many of them told me that they fear a closure announcement within weeks, with a closure date of autumn 2003. That would mean that the industry's relatively generous redundancy terms would no longer apply, as UK Coal has guaranteed them only until March 2003.

Men who have rejected redundancy offers, in some cases on three or four occasions, in order to keep working in the industry, would lose their jobs with only

the minimum state redundancy terms to fall back on. An early closure announcement would bring chaos to the Selby coalfield. Electricians and engineers, whose skills are crucial to managing the complex, would bail out and secure alternative employment as soon as they could, and the complex would shut itself. The legacy would be one of bitterness and hardship, and Selby's economy would have to brace itself for an abrupt and devastating blow to its very foundations.

I had further telephone conversations with UK Coal in which I stressed that it was imperative that the coalfield stays open until at least 2005. It agreed to submit a further application for a subsidy to the Government to enable that to happen. On Monday 18 March, Gordon McPhie wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry asking for a meeting to discuss a package of closure aid for the Selby coalfield. He said that the company needed to come to a decision on how it proposed to operate the Selby coalfield in the next three months; the first of those three months is nearly up.

I have agreed to back the principle of closure aid, although I want the Coal Authority to undertake an independent analysis of whether 2005 is the economically viable limit for the Selby coalfield. Closure aid is an important weapon in the French, German and Spanish Governments' armouries to provide assistance to coalfield communities. It is allowed under the existing coal and steel treaty, which expires in July, and will be an important part of any new coal aid regime. We should embrace it and not shun it, not least because of its flexibility and practicality.

Devastated former mining communities do not exist in the rest of the European Union as they do in Wales, Scotland, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire, which is largely because of closure aid. As *The Times* business leader recently put it:

"it is more civilised to run operations down in an orderly way over the next three years so that miners and other workers can be retrained and new employment can be attracted into the area. By smoothing the process and avoiding the disruptive shocks that have so damaged many mining towns and villages what is gentler might also prove cheaper in the long run for taxpayers".

Or, as the *Yorkshire Post* put it:

"The Government could sit on its hands and do nothing to avert the unfolding economic and human calamity. But Tony Blair whose maiden speech eloquently chronicled the devastation that pit closures can have on tightly knit communities knows that it is the role of Government to help to manage the decline of traditional industries in a way that minimises suffering and gives workers the chance to respond to new opportunities. It is for this reason that he should listen to those who are now asking him to provide so called 'closure assistance' to the miners of Selby. Such assistance which other Europeans make regular use of . . . would be used to allow Selby the time it needs to adjust to life after coal."

As far as I am aware, UK Coal has not yet had a reply from the Secretary of State. Indeed, a brief perusal of the press seems to indicate that she needs to be convinced of the case for further state aid to the coal industry, perhaps more than other Ministers do. It is time that serious discussions started between Department of Trade and Industry officials and UK Coal in preparation for such a meeting. Mr. McPhie's letter makes no mention of the precise cost of any closure aid scheme. The costs and benefits need to be fully explored, and the Government, whom I support, owe it to the miners and the community of Selby to start the discussions.

In the rest of the European Union, redundancy payments are an essential element of closure aid. The miners in Selby who have worked in the industry from pre-privatisation days are still entitled to a relatively generous redundancy scheme, worth £900 for each year worked, with a cap of £27,000. The scheme was inherited by RJB Mining, now UK Coal, and was subject to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 until 1998. The company has guaranteed to honour the redundancy package but only until March 2003. It would cost the Government just short of £40 million in closure aid to guarantee the redundancy payments.

The average age of a Selby miner is 44. Many have refused redundancy on several occasions to keep working in the coalfield. After a lifetime of undertaking what is still a physically demanding, back-breaking job, some are of an age that they are unlikely to work again once the mine is closed. However, for younger miners, resources will be needed for a closure aid package to fund the most ambitious retraining scheme ever seen after closure of a British coalfield.

We need time to make such a project effective. The Selby bypass is due to be completed by Christmas 2003. It will open up a huge amount of development land at the edge of Selby town with the potential for creation of a large number of jobs. On behalf of Selby district, I plead with my Government to give us time to bring those jobs on stream before the coalfield closes. If we had until at least 2005, perhaps we could avoid the despair, family breakdowns, hardship and suicides that have been a feature of other pit closures. Every miner must be offered a personal interview to examine the options for the future and then be assisted to seize that future. Every expert I have consulted tells me that it will take two or three years for such a project to be effective. If Selby mine closes abruptly, we will be left with a sticking plaster of regeneration and retraining money that cannot cover the gaping wound in the local economy.

As part of a comprehensive closure aid package, the Government should be prepared to consider further subsidies to UK Coal itself. As the complex moves towards closure, it may be that the current losses will diminish as development costs decline. Moreover, if a closure aid package is agreed, it is likely that morale will improve and productivity will increase. Clearly, the Department should carefully scrutinise UK Coal's projections, but it must get around a table to do so.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry forcefully asks why the Government should pick up the tab for closure aid. What is different about the coal industry or Selby? Just because it is good enough for Jospin and for Schröder, why should new Labour get involved? Such robust questions deserve robust answers. There is a joke—sort of—going around the pits in Selby. I overheard it in a local pub recently and felt a deep sadness. "What is the difference between Mrs. Thatcher and Patricia Hewitt? At least when Mrs. Thatcher closed the pits she made sure the men got their redundancy money." At that point, I stoutly defended the Secretary of State's honour, saying that that was a premature judgment, but the joke may be a salutary warning to us. How the Labour Government respond to UK Coal's request for closure aid for Selby will have a resonance across Labour's Yorkshire heartlands. I am

[Mr. John Grogan]

grateful to my Yorkshire colleagues for being here to support me on the day of a one-line Whip. If our values mean anything, we cannot pass by on the other side of the road. We must close Britain's largest remaining coalfield in a way that gives our movement pride—in a better way than occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

Why should Selby be the first British coalfield to receive closure aid? None has ever asked before. For me, it is a credit to the local community that it is prepared to face up to its future. It has always been apparent that when Selby closed, because of its size, Government help would be needed to honour the redundancy payments.

Moreover, we have noticed in Selby that the Secretary of State is quite prepared to finance generous redundancy payments for postmasters and postmistresses. If we say no as a Government, and say that it is all the company's fault, what good will all the regeneration in the world be to a 55-year-old miner whom I know, who has worked most days of his working life down the pit, and tells me that there has never been a day when he has not dreaded it, despite the camaraderie of good mates? What shall I tell him when I say that he cannot have the redundancy of £27,000 that he has counted on and that, unlike his manager, he will have to wait until he is 60 to claim a pension? The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry needs to provide me with a better answer than that he should apply for a computer training course and write a letter of complaint to UK Coal.

The Government must ensure that ordinary miners get a full pension at 50, if made redundant, as the pit deputies and the management currently do. At the time of privatisation, in order to try and keep the management on board, the Tories ensured that the British Coal staff and supervisors' pension scheme was more generous than the miners' pension scheme. It is simply unjust that if the Selby complex or the Prince of Wales colliery shuts, management get a full pension at 50, but the miners who labour at the coal face do not.

If a Selby miner can leave the industry with guaranteed redundancy terms and a full pension at 50, it will be with dignity. He will continue to be able to spend in local shops and the local economy and consider his options for the future. If he is thrown out of work next year with no additional redundancy or pension rights, many families will suffer badly. It will not just be mining families who feel the pinch, as turnover in local shops and pubs declines sharply and with little warning. The cost to the pension fund of making this change has been estimated by the actuary to be £99 million. The Government incidentally are currently receiving about £200 million each year in surplus from the miners' pension scheme—enough by itself to fund a closure aid package and to give a full pension at 50 if made redundant.

I have spoken today largely about closure aid, but as secretary of the all-party group on coalfield communities I am equally passionate about the need for investment aid. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that the Government are arguing in Europe that for the first time it should be possible to provide finance to help open up new seams and faces rather than simply to cover losses. Such investment aid would provide jobs at other mines for some men from Selby.

It is worth noting that, according to the European draft regulations, all Governments must say by October 2002 which mines will be given what type of aid between now and 2010. All closure aid must expire by 2007. The Government's stance that they will consider whether to give further aid to the industry at the appropriate time will not carry credibility much longer. They need to get involved and engage with the issues pit by pit. That is why I have written to both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer seeking meetings with coalfield MPs. That is why the all-party group will be organising a seminar in May in the Commons on the future of coal, and why a delegation of Selby miners and the wider Selby community will be coming to the House of Commons.

Our first challenge as a coal mining group was to persuade our own communities to face up to the future: to campaign for both investment aid where possible, and closure aid where necessary, in order to achieve a sustainable industry. Our next challenge is to persuade the Government to change their policy. Dylan Thomas famously wrote:

> "Do not go gentle into that good night.
>
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

In Selby, I hope that there is enough rage and righteous anger to persuade the Government to change their mind. Before the current children of miners in Selby's primary schools are fully grown, mining will have ceased. The proud memory of the craft and toil that went into making this huge project a success will long linger. The memories of the strike will linger, too, as will the many contributions of miners and their families to our community and our civic life. The current leader, chairman and vice-chairman of Selby district council work in the mines, or did so in the past. I hope that a final memory that will linger will be the way in which it all ended—not in chaos, despair and hardship but with dignity, planning, courage and foresight.

12.48 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I associate myself totally with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), who speaks with passion and knowledge about the industry and is a distinguished advocate for his constituency. There is anger in communities that were devastated by Thatcher and the Tories, and have still not recovered. I represent villages that have never recovered from the pit closures, and that the present Government have barely touched yet in terms of regeneration. Those villages now face further job losses. My constituency still encompasses many miners who work in the Selby complex, and I estimate that about £75 million a year in wages is paid into the Yorkshire coalfield from Selby alone. The prospect that the Government would tolerate early closure and the sterilisation of resources is too horrendous to contemplate, yet rumours come from the Secretary of State's office that she intends to allow it to happen.

I am angry, as are the communities that I represent, that a Labour Government should betray the party's historic mission to regenerate those communities and to protect coal reserves. It will cause devastating political damage. I warn the Minister as gently as I can that the anger will spill over not only into the Chamber—I shall express my anger on every available opportunity should

the Government proceed down that course—but into the streets. Demonstrations will take place the like of which we thought we had seen the last of when we saw the end of the Tories. I shall join those demonstrations—I believe that other hon. Members will, too—and damage will be done to the Government in the heartlands. I do not wish to see such damage, but it would be self-inflicted if the Government proceed as rumour suggests.

I associate myself entirely with my hon. Friend's comments on pensions for manual workers and miners. It is a question not only of coal closures but of justice. It is not right that white-collar workers who have never worked down a pit should be able to retire at 50 on a full pension, but that manual workers who have worked for 30-odd years should not be similarly entitled. I ask the Minister, in all justice, to consider that issue.

12.51 pm

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this debate. It has been an interesting one, although it was slightly curious in adopting a somewhat different tone from that which I had expected. I point out to the wider audience that it is somewhat unusual in that my hon. Friends the Members for Selby and for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) have already taken 21 minutes, which leaves me only nine minutes to reply. However, I shall do my best within those limitations.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby was good enough to acknowledge, no one can seriously question the Government's commitment to the coal industry. We introduced reforms to the electricity market that were designed to correct some of the distortions that were, among other things, penalising coal. To help the United Kingdom coal industry over particular short-term structural and market problems, we introduced the coal operating aid scheme. As has been said, approximately £140 million has been paid out under that scheme so far. Selby has been a major beneficiary, with £23 million in the first tranche of aid and another £20 million in the second.

When UK Coal applied for subsidy under the scheme, it appeared that Selby had a viable future without aid beyond July 2002. On that basis, it satisfied the scheme criteria to comply with European rules on coal state aid. In the light of expert mining advice, Selby was judged to have a realistic prospect of a viable future without aid.

The chief executive of UK Coal wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 18 March requesting a meeting to discuss, among other things, the possibility of the Government supporting a closure aid package. We have replied agreeing to such a meeting. As has already been suggested, however, it is fair to say we shall have a lot more to discuss at that meeting than closure aid. That letter was the only formal approach made to us by UK Coal—we were given a few days' warning that the letter was coming, but it is the only indication that we have had that the company is carrying out a review, which is expected to be completed within three months.

That, formally, is the position as far as the Government are concerned. We have put in £43 million of aid under the scheme, and we have now been told in a letter of 18 March that UK Coal is reviewing the future of Selby, and a meeting will be held. The Secretary of State and I will be happy to participate, and we shall presumably hear more then about the thinking of Selby's owners.

The case for operating aid under the scheme that is now drawing to a close was that it would create a future for pits such as Selby, which had clear longer-term prospects of profitability and viability. My hon. Friends have referred to closure aid, but that raises very different issues. It is claimed that it could soften the blow for the Selby area by allowing a phased reduction in jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby said, it would be the first time that such an approach had been taken, and we would obviously have to ask many major questions before going down that road.

Would closure aid really be the most cost-effective way of dealing with the issue, if and when it arises? We should note that the benefits would go primarily to the company, not to those who suffer the redundancies. There must also be a read-across from Selby to other pits where the same questions will arise for geological reasons that are beyond the control of any of us. There is also the valid point that closure aid gives companies a direct incentive to shut down mines, so the very subsidy that is designed to help the industry and those who work in it could bring about its demise earlier than might otherwise have been the case, and we must take account of that when considering the arguments for such aid. None the less, I understand my hon. Friends' attachment to closure aid at this juncture, and I shall be happy to hold further discussions to hear the case for it—assuming that the context set out in the letter of 18 March remains the same when UK Coal comes back to us.

There has been widespread support for the idea of investment aid, and I can confirm that we are continuing to negotiate in Brussels to put in place a framework for possible national subsidy schemes after July 2002. Our aim is to secure an outcome that gives us the flexibility to put in place arrangements if they become necessary in specific cases. It is not certain that we will succeed in the EU in securing provisions for the payment of investment aid. Just as some countries are very much attached to different kinds of subsidy schemes, others are very much opposed to investment aid. However, we are pursuing the ability to pay investment aid when the current scheme expires. If we are successful, we can expect it to be limited to a proportion—perhaps 20 per cent.—of the investment costs associated with a project. Even if we are able to pay such aid, further work will need to be undertaken to ascertain the circumstances in which it might be applicable.

There are many issues on which I would like to comment, but let me briefly say something about cleaner coal technology. As my hon. Friends will be well aware, the Government believe that the future of coal is very much tied up with the movement towards cleaner coal. A review that ran parallel to the energy review considered the issue and concluded that the case for building a demonstration plant was weak, but that funding and support for specific technologies that are retrofittable to existing plant may be appropriate. It will be for those interested in demonstrating such technologies to make their case to the cleaner coal technology programme. We are also investigating

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

several important geological, engineering, economic and legal issues around carbon dioxide capture and storage to ensure that it is a feasible option.

To summarise, as matters stand, we have had one letter from UK Coal. We gave the firm £43 million in subsidy under the present scheme in the belief that that would give it a viable long-term future. If the situation has changed, UK Coal will doubtless inform us, and we shall take discussions from there. Frankly, however, some of my hon. Friends' statements about the Government's attitude to the coal industry and some of the direr warnings that I have heard are utterly incompatible with the Government's record. I hope that in the future we may be able to proceed on a more measured basis to achieve what we presumably all want—the best possible future for coalfield communities.

For reasons that have nothing to do with the Government, and in spite of the aid that they have given to the deep coal mining industry, other difficulties may arise as the context changes. Let us proceed on the basis of what is best for the industry and the communities, bearing it in mind, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby said, that few of the pits would still be there if it were not for the scheme introduced by the Government. If—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. Time is up.

Borehamwood Care Village

1 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to raise the subject of Borehamwood Care Village, the future of which has been a source of great concern for my constituents. The Minister is already aware to some extent of that concern through correspondence with me, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to meet her with a group of representatives from the home, including residents and family members. By coincidence, that meeting will take place later this afternoon, so what I say now is something of a preview.

Borehamwood Care Village is an important care setting for almost 100 elderly people in my constituency. It offers 40 residential places and 39 nursing bed places, as well as places for 16 close care tenants. It is a modern facility that was opened only 10 years ago, as I know, having opened part of it when I became the Member of Parliament for Hertsmere. It was opened as a modern facility offering continuity of care for people who, as they got older, were looking for stability more than anything else.

I should make it clear that the residents and the family members have no complaints about the fabric of the care village, nor about the quality of the care that they receive from staff. Indeed, I pay tribute, on their behalf, to the care and dedication of the staff, who have been as concerned as anyone about its prospects.

Just before Christmas last year, the residents and staff received the startling news that the home's proprietor, Assured Care Centres, was planning to close it. The company intended to sell the site to developers Bryant Homes for residential property development. That caused the gravest concern to the residents, their families and the wider community in Borehamwood and Hertfordshire, who all joined in a campaign to save the home.

In many ways, the name of the campaign tells us what we need to bear in mind. It is called STOP: Save the Old People—the action group working to save Borehamwood Care Village. The campaign has been vigorous, imaginative and well justified. It began with a packed public meeting in the Hertsmere civic offices, which was attended by a wide variety of people, including family members, councillors from both the borough and the county councils, representatives of the local churches and civic dignitaries, including the mayor of Borehamwood. The meeting was very well supported, reflecting the amount of interest in the matter in Borehamwood.

The campaign later held a march through Borehamwood, which was also very well supported and drew tremendous support from the people of the town. It was moving to see shoppers and shop workers coming out to give their support to the march. The people threw their full weight behind the campaign to save the facility.

There followed a widely publicised visit to Downing street by a delegation of residents and family members, who took with them a petition containing thousands of names of Hertfordshire residents. That delegation included Miss Rose Cottle, who is 102 and a remarkable old lady, and who is present for the debate, along with

other representatives from the STOP campaign. Following the impact of that visit, both ACC, the proprietors of the home, and Bryant Homes, the would-be purchasers, showed a desire to draw back from their proposals and made public statements to that effect.

Before turning to those statements, I pay tribute to all those who have played a part in the STOP campaign, including Mr. Bryan Mayson, its chairman, who is also present today, Councillor Martin Heyward, the mayor of Borehamwood, Rose Cottle and the other elderly residents of the Borehamwood Care Village, all of whom contributed remarkably to the campaign.

I should like to report that this story has a happy ending in that the home's future has become assured, but we are not quite at that point. Several issues need to be resolved, which I shall highlight through the debate. On 26 March, Bryant Homes wrote to Mr. Bryan Mayson, the chairman of STOP, stating:

"We have asked Assured Care Centres to release Bryant from the contractual agreement relating to the site of Borehamwood Care Village, and are currently in negotiation with them."

Bryant says that it cannot withdraw the planning application because of contractual arrangements that require the firm to consult the planning department of Hertsmere borough council.

Assured Care Centres, the proprietor, says that it accepts Bryant's offer to withdraw, but must observe legal requirements. The company says that it is discussing the sale of the care village with other parties who would retain it for its present use, which is what we all want to happen. We want Borehamwood Care Village to continue in its present state and to provide much-needed residential and nursing care.

I have no wish to pry into the legal arrangements of Bryant Homes and ACC, although I note that they are both expressing the same intention—one saying that it wants to be released from having to sell the property and the other saying that it wants to withdraw from buying it. It would be helpful if they could both make it clear that they have no plans at all for the sale of the site or any part of it for residential development and want to withdraw altogether from their original proposals. It would be helpful, too, if the issue of the planning application could be resolved as soon as possible, because, notwithstanding what they have said, the application remains extant and is still with Hertsmere borough council. It is clearly in the interests of the residents of the home, when they are being reassured about their future, that that planning application should be withdrawn and that ACC should go on to discuss the future of the home with other would-be purchasers who want to continue its present use, providing residential and nursing care.

What is happening in Borehamwood is part of a wider picture of what is happening in Hertfordshire and the rest of the country, in relation to nursing and residential care. The Minister may be familiar with the survey by Laing and Buisson, which reported that there had been a substantial loss of long-term care places since 1996. The loss of some 50,000 residential care places stands in contrast to the needs of an increasingly ageing population. Nursing home bed losses have been particularly serious, with 22,000 nursing care beds lost since 1998.

Hertfordshire represents no exception to that worrying picture. Nursing home beds have been lost, and the losses are continuing. The most recent market analysis by Hertfordshire county council states that 103 nursing home beds were lost in Hertfordshire between April and November 2001 alone—November being when the most recent survey was concluded. Hertfordshire could ill afford the further, substantial, loss of 39 beds in Borehamwood.

The corollary of nursing home bed losses is the problem of delayed discharges from hospitals and the difficulties that flow from that. The Minister may be familiar with the surveys and statistics relating to delayed discharges. Her own Department suggested towards the end of last year that, at any one time, 6,000 beds in NHS hospitals are occupied by people whose discharge has been delayed. Whatever the figures, it is clearly a serious problem, and leads to other problems, such as cancelled operations and longer waiting lists.

Those problems have been evident locally, as I witnessed on NHS day in February, when I visited Potters Bar community hospital, a facility valued for its care. I was told that 12 out of the 45 beds were occupied by patients who would not have needed a hospital bed if one in an appropriate care setting had been available. That is confirmed by Hertfordshire county council, which said:

"The high occupancy rates within Hertfordshire homes mean that it is increasingly difficult to find affordable care home vacancies for elderly people whether those people are awaiting discharge from hospital or the community."

Earlier this year, the Government announced £200 million of additional spending to deal with the problem of bed blocking, about £3 million of which will come to Hertfordshire. However, spending money will not solve the problem if nursing home beds continue to be lost. On the steps of Downing street, Rose Cottle drew attention to the connection between the loss of nursing home places and the wider problems in the health service. As she put it:

"What's the point of clogging up hospitals with people like me?"

On this, as on so many other things, Rose and the residents of Borehamwood Care Village are the voice of common sense. We can ill afford the loss of such nursing and residential care places. Such a loss would be a tragedy for the very elderly people there—people who have entered that care facility on the basis that it will give them stability and reassurance in the later stages of their lives—and for their families. It would also have a serious effect on the wider community and on the health service, bringing problems of which we are only too well aware today.

We owe it to Rose Cottle and the wonderful elderly people like her to keep open homes such as Borehamwood Care Village. That is my plea to the Minister. We need to keep such nursing home and residential care places available. We need to safeguard the future of the Borehamwood Care Village, and to have the proposals and planning application for residential development there withdrawn. It must be transferred into hands that will keep it open as a much-needed residential and nursing care facility, offering high-quality care to people who deserve no less.

1.13 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on having secured a debate on a subject that is important and significant to his constituents. I, like many others, have been impressed by the vigorous campaign run by STOP, and moved by the eloquence and dignity displayed by Miss Cottle throughout a period of undoubted distress for both her and her fellow residents of Borehamwood Care Village, and I am looking forward to our meeting this afternoon, when we shall be able to consider the background to the issue in more detail.

Nothwithstanding the hon. Gentleman's concerns, I am pleased that the residents' position now seems to be much more secure and there seems to be more certainty that they will be able to remain in their present care home. It seems that, in this case, good sense has prevailed. I understand that several organisations are willing to purchase the home as a going concern, which will provide some important certainty and continuity for those living there. He made some important points about issues that must be resolved elsewhere, regarding the position of ACC and Bryant, as well as the planning applications. I am sure that those points will have been heard and hope that they will be acted on.

We appreciate that the independent care home sector is facing a number of challenges at present. The Government are very aware that the closure of any care home causes considerable anxiety and disruption to its residents. I want to touch on the wider context and the particular actions being taken to ensure that, in Hertfordshire, it is possible to provide the range of provision and capacity necessary for older people to have security, stability and independence.

Many care homes are private businesses, and as such, each must take its own decision about how to conduct itself, including whether to close. However, when it comes to the standard of care provided in a care home, the Government have an important role. The new regulatory system introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 provides stronger powers to monitor the financial viability of homes and contains requirements for residents to have contracts that specify their rights. I am concerned that any decision to close a home should be handled as sensitively and appropriately as possible. Councils and care home owners must work together to ensure that closures take place in a planned way, with maximum notice being given. Although it seems unlikely to happen in this case, in the event of a home being forced to close, the council should reassess the needs of those residents for which it has responsibility and arrange an alternative placement or service promptly and with as little distress to the residents and their families as possible. Even where people are funding themselves, councils should be able to offer advice on arranging alternative accommodation.

Mr. Clappison: Does the Minister agree that, however good the regulatory provisions are, and whatever other arrangements are made, it is desirable to keep very elderly people in the same home whenever possible, and to avoid moving them at that stage of their lives?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, which is why I hope that, in this case, there will be the continuity that he outlined. I was just trying to point out that when homes have to close, it is crucial that the process is handled sensitively and appropriately.

Both today and on other occasions, attention has been drawn to the issue of funding and the ability of local authorities to meet the fees that are necessary to maintain capacity. There have been substantial increases in the level of funding provided for local authority social services departments in recent years. Since 1996–97, the overall level of funding for social services increased by just over 20.4 per cent. in real terms. That equates to an average real-terms increase of 3.1 per cent. per annum. However, we recognise that more is needed, and we are considering the future funding needs of social services as part of the current spending review, the results of which will be announced later this year. Hertfordshire county council has received above-average increases in its personal social services standard spending assessment allocation in each of the past two years. In 2002–03, its allocation increased by 5.7 per cent., compared with a national average increase of 4.9 per cent. That was on top of an increase of 7.6 per cent for 2001–02, compared with a national average increase of 4.7 per cent.

Last autumn, the Government further recognised the need to maintain and develop capacity in the care sector and to ensure that delayed discharges from hospital were reduced—a problem that the hon. Gentleman highlighted—by allocating not, as he suggested, £200 million, but an additional £300 million to local authorities. Hertfordshire county council is one of the authorities targeted for extra money from that £300 million. It received £1.7 million for the last financial year and will receive an additional £3.6 million this year.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health recognise that it is crucial that local authorities, in their commissioning of services, maintain the fee levels necessary to ensure continuity in the capacity necessary to provide our older people with the care that they need. We accept that local authorities need the resources. I welcome the fact that Hertfordshire has been able to use some of the additional £5.3 million to increase residential and nursing home fees above the inflation rate for 2002-03, and has undertaken to review the pricing structure in 2003–04.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that that extra investment has produced an important result: Hertfordshire has met its target for reducing delayed discharges—a planned reduction of 25 per cent.—since last September. I recognise his concern that the whole system—the health service and the care system—should work together. The fact is that the extra investment and the reforms and new capacity have brought important results.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's repetition of the Laing and Buisson figure of 50,000 care beds being lost. That survey showed a net loss of about 19,000 care beds since 1996–97; the 50,000 figure takes no account of those that have opened or been extended. The most recent figures suggest that there are now more residential and nursing care places in Hertfordshire than there were in 1997. I realise, however, that it is an important matter. The demand for placements in the county has been rising over the same period, so I am

pleased that the county council is actively working with its partners in care commissioning and provision—the district councils, primary care trusts and the independent sector—and using the extra resources made available by the Government to maintain and stimulate the market across the whole spectrum of care.

A number of projects are under way to develop additional community services such as intermediate care and extra care. I shall give two examples. I understand that a 40-place extra care housing scheme is being developed in Borehamwood in partnership with a housing association and the district council. I was recently able to announce an additional £46 million investment into intermediate care over the next two years, including support for a 60-place intermediate care facility to be developed in partnership with South East Hertfordshire primary care trust and the independent sector.

Intermediate care, although clearly not fulfilling the same function as residential care, can provide a crucial bridge between hospital and home. It can ensure that older people are able to regain independence. Since the base line of 1999–2000, there has been provision for an additional 1,188 people to receive intermediate care services in the Hertfordshire health authority area. Hertfordshire also has in place plans to increase the number of intensive home care packages that can be offered to support people in their own homes.

It is the Government's policy to promote independence for older people wherever we can and to enable them to remain in their own homes whenever possible. The number of people receiving intensive domiciliary care is increasing—about 76,400 households benefited in England in 2001, an increase of 6 per cent. on the previous year—and we want to encourage that trend where it meets people's needs.

Clearly, some people are too frail or vulnerable even to be supported by an intensive domiciliary care package, and they will need residential accommodation. However, we must not get bogged down in judging the success of policy simply by the number of people in residential care and nursing homes. The policy of community care, which I know that the Conservative party supports and implemented when it was in government, is designed to ensure that people can live in their own homes with intensive support. We must also provide effective, high-quality residential accommodation where necessary—it is a matter of getting the balance right for each local community.

Mr. Clappison: Since the Minister is quoting a mass of statistics, may I draw to her attention Hertfordshire county council's claim that since 2000 the number of nursing home beds has gone down from 1,272 to 1,045? Does she agree that it makes no sense to lose modern, purpose-built facilities such as Borehamwood Care Village when the population is getting older and frailer?

Jacqui Smith: I accept, and have already said, that it is important to maintain the necessary capacity to provide stability for older people.

The care home sector can be assured that its services are very important and will continue to be needed in the future. Authorities need to do some long-term, sustainable planning. Short-termism is difficult for providers in the care home sector. It is important for commissioners and local authorities to have a strategy in place in order to provide care services for local people for years to come. That is why we established the strategic commissioning group, which I chair and which aims to give much greater direction to the commissioning of care services for adults—in particular, for older people.

We recently published an agreement between all the parties involved in the planning and delivery of care services in a document entitled "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care". That details the responsibilities and expectations of central and local government, providers and the NHS. It stresses the need for long-term contracts to ensure that there is planning in the system and that we do not end up with precipitate closures, such as that threatened for Borehamwood Care Village, which can have a very damaging effect on residents.

The document also seeks to push those involved to be a little more imaginative and to think of new ways of providing care that can help people to maximise their independence. I would like to underline the importance of that. It is time to move the policy on and to stop squabbling about how many nursing homes have or have not closed. All our efforts, and the extra resources made available by the Government, need to be concentrated on planning to deliver the services that older people want—not just the services traditionally provided—in the right amounts and at the right time.

I give the hon. Gentleman my commitment that the Government recognise the need to develop new capacity so that older people are able to maintain the independence that many of them have told us they need. I have given examples of how the additional investment in Hertfordshire is enabling that to happen. At the same time, we must recognise that what is crucial to the provision of services, whether it is from local authorities or the private and independent sectors, is the stability and certainty felt by older people. In conclusion, I join the hon. Gentleman in commending the campaign to safeguard the important provision of Borehamwood Care Village. I hope that a common-sense way can be found to ensure that residents receive the stability and continuity that we would all want for them.

Housebuilding Industry

1.30 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate on consumers' rights and the housebuilding industry. My request for a debate was stimulated by two examples that arose in my constituency, but that, after close examination, raised wider issues that deserved an airing in Parliament, and action from Government. I shall focus on issues for which the Westminster Parliament has responsibility. In Scotland, some issues raised by local concerns are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament, so I shall try not to overlap those two elements. No doubt, the Minister will pass on to our Scottish colleagues matters that fall outside our remit.

I shall provide details of the specific problems that have arisen in my constituency, and that have led me to table this debate. Both examples relate to new housing developments in my constituency. The first case is in the Granton mill development, which has been built by Wimpey Homes in Scotland, or a company associated with Wimpey Homes. The residents spoke for themselves when they wrote to me saying:

"The problem that the majority of us are experiencing is the lack of any drainage system on the estate. Our gardens, front and back are totally water-logged ... We have everything from gardens sinking, paving that has sunk, people unable to go into their back gardens because of the water that has gathered at their back doors, water lying against people's houses and stagnant water lying for weeks on end all over the gardens."

They have further complaints about the development that relate to driveways, roads that are too narrow, unfinished boundaries and various other external issues, which I do not have the time to go into.

The second local example arose from a complaint from a resident of the Sovereign court development. That development was constructed by Barratt, East Scotland, or a company associated with Barratt. A constituent complained about a defect that the builder would not put right because the building company said that it was not a construction defect. However, the property management company, which had been contracted by the builders to provide the maintenance, said that it would not repair it either, because it was a building defect—a clear Catch-22 situation in which wherever the purchaser turned she was told that the problem was no one's responsibility. Over the past few weeks, that instance has now been satisfactorily resolved. Nevertheless, it raises the issue of the relationship between the home buyer of new housing and the management company appointed by the developer, and between the home buyer and the developer. The issues may be different, but they have a similarity in that they deal with the position of the individual purchaser of new build housing in relation to the developer that has built it.

The purchaser of such housing is in a different position from someone who buys an existing property from its owner. In the latter case, there are two parties with roughly equal bargaining power, and the purchaser can see the house that he or she is buying. In the case of new build, the situation is different. The purchaser is an individual, but the vendor is normally a large organisation with financial resources many times greater than those of the individual purchaser, and with the ability to call on legal and other professional advice that the individual purchaser does not have. After occupying the new house, the individual is hardly in a position to move out should it turn out that they do not have the property for which they had bargained. It is a classic case of unequal bargaining power. As that is a case in which the consumer is in a much weaker bargaining position than the supplier, it is a prime candidate for the position of the consumer to be strengthened by legal intervention and/or voluntary codes of practice by the industry. In the limited time available, I want to suggest a number of ways in which the position of the consumer can be strengthened in what is for most people the most important purchase that they will ever make.

The industry's current voluntary schemes, which are designed to protect the rights of purchasers, need to be available to the consumer at a much earlier stage. In both the cases that I have described, the National House Building Council guarantee scheme, which is generally very good, was of no benefit to the consumers concerned, even in cases that at first sight would fall within it. In the first of my two examples, Granton mill, the developer did not dispute liability on many of the defects. Instead, it simply did not get round to dealing with many of the complaints. The current scheme ought to be strengthened to ensure that developers deal with complaints speedily, and if that does not happen that very delay should be a ground for compensation to the purchaser.

In the second case, Sovereign court, the delay in having the complaint dealt with led to another problem, which I want to highlight. Because of the delay in getting any action from either the builders of the property or the management company, the purchaser concerned eventually carried out the repairs herself. As she did not wait long enough to have the matter dealt with by the builders, however, it could no longer be dealt with under the NHBC scheme, even though she had made repeated complaints over a lengthy period. If that is correct, the NHBC scheme clearly has other shortcomings that need to be attended to. If the scheme cannot be changed as I have suggested, the Government need to consider other ways in which such changes can be made.

There needs to be a mechanism to give house purchasers an opportunity to obtain satisfaction when there are problems in areas that are not covered by the existing industry scheme provided by the National House Building Council. That issue was particularly important in the case of Granton mill. Most complaints in that development relate either to external works to properties that have, in the view of residents, been carried out incorrectly or not at all, or to work that needs to be carried out or completed in the public areas of a development, such as roads and other common areas. Neither of those types of problem seems to be covered by the current voluntary arrangements provided by the industry, but they should be. There needs to be a mechanism whereby complaints about such issues can be made to an independent body, and when they are not satisfactorily resolved, steps can be taken to ensure that they are dealt with or that compensation is paid to the purchasers affected.

Something needs to be done to redress the imbalance between the bargaining positions of the purchaser of a new house and the developer that sells it. The first of my

two cases is a very good example of that problem. The purchasers saw a show house, as the actual houses had not been built, which is a very common situation with new developments. When the purchasers moved into their houses, some of them discovered something unsatisfactory. In such circumstances, sometimes the only remedy for the purchaser is to refuse to proceed with the purchase. In many cases, such a remedy is of little use to potential purchasers because they have probably sold their old house, bought furniture and made all the arrangements to move in, in which case not proceeding with the purchase is not a real option. It might be said that the purchaser should deal with such problems by making detailed provisions in the contract to ensure that nothing is left unclear, but the nature of the bargain is that it is for a house that is unbuilt, and developers do not normally enter into negotiations over terms, which means that that is also not an option for the purchaser.

I know that that is a complex matter, especially in the Scottish context. Although consumer rights and sale of goods and services law is reserved to Westminster, property law is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. There is a real problem here that must be addressed. The purchasers of new houses need to have stronger rights when they buy property, and I ask the Minister to consider how that can be done.

The relationship between the purchaser of a new house and the property management company appointed by the developer must be investigated and clarified. I have described my concerns arising from the example of Sovereign court in my constituency, and add that those are not just my concerns. I note that the Scottish Executive's recent report "Issues in Improving Quality in Private Housing" states:

> "In some cases, owners may consider that the professional manager concerned has been imposed on them by the developer ... In these cases, there may be questions about whether the management agent is sufficiently independent or accountable to the owners ... Owners may also be concerned about the quality and cost of the management services provided."

That excerpt from paragraph 100 of the report says it better, perhaps, than I can.

I call today for investigation, and if necessary action, by the competition authorities, which come within the responsibility of Westminster, to ensure that such arrangements are fair to purchasers and do not tend to favour the interests of developers and the management companies that they appoint. A management company might have several contracts with the developer and therefore have an interest in maintaining good relationships with it beyond the interest of a particular instance in which a purchaser has complained.

To clarify the relationship between property management companies and new purchasers on one hand and builders on the other, I suggest that, first, such management companies should, after the initial period, be selected by the purchasers collectively and be fully accountable to them. Secondly, there must be complete transparency to the owners of a property about the charges levied and the expenses incurred by such management companies. Finally, there should be a system that allows property owners to raise complaints about such management companies and that also provides for ensuring compliance and awarding compensation when mediation fails. That scheme should, perhaps, be similar to the NHBC scheme, which, in my view, is very good as far as it goes.

I am aware that such policy areas are complex, and involve competition policy, a reserved matter, and property law, a devolved matter. However, they need to be tackled by the Government at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to raise this matter today. I ask the Minister to examine what I have said and consider what further action can be taken. Most immediately, will she take up with the industry bodies the matters that require changes and improvements to the relevant voluntary codes, and pass on to and discuss with her Scottish colleagues any matters arising from this particular case that she considers would be better dealt with by the Scottish Executive and Parliament?

I emphasise that the issues that I have raised are not just local issues, of concern to a few residents in my constituency, or of Scottish concern alone. There are numerous new developments in my constituency, as in many other parts of Edinburgh, in which similar issues have already arisen or will arise in the future. As I have said, the purchase of a new house is often the single biggest financial transaction undertaken by a consumer. First purchasers must have rights, and an ability to take advantage of those rights that reflects the importance of that transaction to them and their families. That is why I am glad to have had the opportunity to raise the matter here today, and why I hope that the Minister can give an idea of what action she can take in response to my concerns.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing the debate and on choosing a subject of real concern: consumer rights in the housebuilding industry. He focused in particular on the problems for people buying new houses.

My hon. Friend may be aware that in February 2002 the Housing Forum published its second national customer satisfaction survey, which highlights the standards of consumer care in the housing industry. It backs up some of the wider messages about customer care that the industry needs to take seriously and to which he referred.

To put my hon. Friend's concerns in a national context, the survey shows that new home buyers remain generally satisfied with the design, amenities and value for money of their homes, but that those positive aspects are countered by a much less favourable view of build quality and after-sales service, about which he was concerned. Figures show that nearly half of those who buy new homes are neutral or critical of the builder, one third are not satisfied with the after-sales service, and only 54 per cent. want another new home or one from the same developer. That is a measure of the concern that he drew from his constituency experience.

My hon. Friend raised local issues, but the survey shows that there is a nationwide need for better quality and after-sales service in the new homes sector.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

If he is prepared to write to me with more details of the cases that he cited, I shall ensure that they are taken up with the National House Building Council to discover whether lessons can be learned.

I want to examine some of the wider issues that my hon. Friend raised concerning new homes and consumer rights. The key to more consistent quality in the building of new homes lies with builders' quality management systems. The work of the Housing Forum is contributing and grew out of the "Rethinking Construction" initiative, which has been under the aegis of my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy since June last year. The forum is showing the way in which to improve quality in housebuilding through the dissemination of best practice. Warranty schemes such as the NHBC's Buildmark scheme also have an important role to play in helping builders to achieve better build quality. Those schemes should first and foremost help to prevent defects, but they should also help owners to reach a quick solution when defects come to light after handover.

Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions keep in close touch with the chairman and senior management of the NHBC. We encourage them in their objective of continuous improvement in the terms and operation of the Buildmark scheme. The NHBC has made useful changes in the coverage of its scheme over the past three years or so, including contaminated land cover and 10-year cover for double glazing failure.

My hon. Friend said that the NHBC scheme does not cover various external features. He also referred to management issues, and I shall deal with those later.In fact, the scheme standards include a section on drives, paths and landscaping, and the definition of "home" in the Buildmark agreement includes common parts for which an owner shares legal responsibility with other owners. The definition also includes shared paths, drives, garden areas and paved areas. That means that in some circumstances defects in such areas can be the subject of claims against the builder under the Buildmark scheme.

My hon. Friend also raised concerns about defects that come to light some time after the occupants move into their new house. Changes have been made to the rules of the NHBC scheme relating to disputes between owners and builders when defects come to light within two years of completion. Those changes provide for the NHBC to intervene at an earlier stage to undertake remedial work in place of the builder if the builder is slow to carry out repairs that have been recommended by the claims investigator.

My hon. Friend referred to delay by builders in carrying out remedial work. The current NHBC procedures should mean that delays will not arise if the repair work has been recommended by the NHBC following a dispute resolution process.

My Department has no specific locus in cases arising in Scotland, but I will ensure that the NHBC examines the specific cases to which my hon. Friend referred.

My hon. Friend called for Government intervention in problems of defects in new homes. I very much appreciate that buyers of new homes may experience distress and inconvenience if defects arise after handover. However, from my perspective at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, I prefer to give the industry an opportunity to take voluntary action. Its efforts, aided by the work of the Housing Forum and by schemes such as the NHBC's Buildmark, should lead to better consistency in build quality, better after-sales service and higher customer satisfaction levels. Obviously, we will look for evidence of that in future customer satisfaction surveys and in other ways.

My hon. Friend raised issues about the management of common parts and about some of the management schemes for external areas on housing estates. As he said, the law on property management is different in Scotland. However, in England and Wales, several remedies are available under existing legislation to people who buy properties under leasehold and who pay for the upkeep of common parts through service charges, including the right to ask a leasehold valuation tribunal for a determination of reasonableness of service charges, and the right to seek the appointment of a new manager if they feel that the existing one is providing a poor service. Service charges are payable only to the extent that they are legitimate and reasonable. That should provide assistance for some property owners in dealing with such issues.

An LVT will be able to consider whether the costs in question were reasonably incurred and whether the relevant services or works were of a reasonable standard. It will then determine what amount should be paid by the leaseholder. The Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, which applies to England and Wales, introduces several changes in respect of service charges, including widening the definition of service charges and simplifying and strengthening leaseholders' rights to be consulted on major works and long-term contracts.

The Bill also makes a significant change to the rights of leaseholders who are subject to an estate management scheme. Since estate management schemes were first permitted under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, Parliament has legislated to provide protection for tenants in respect of service charge payments. Leaseholders who pay service charges have rights and protections against unreasonable charges. The Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill will improve and extend the rights, and introduce comparable ones for administration charges made under a lease.

However, there are no similar provisions in respect of charges made under estate management schemes. At present, anyone who enfranchises and is subject to a scheme will move from having protection against unreasonable charges under their lease to having no protection against unreasonable charges under the scheme. The Bill will provide that charges under estate management schemes should only be payable to the extent that they are reasonable and that an LVT will have the power to determine the extent to which such charges are reasonable.

It is worth mentioning that some protection already exists for buyers with respect to property misdescriptions. Hon. Members may be aware that it is an offence for a property developer to misdescribe any of 33 matters relating to the sale of property that are listed in an order made under the Property

Misdescriptions Act 1991. As my hon. Friend may know, the Act also applies in Scotland. The matters include aspect, view, outlook or environment. If the surroundings of a new property are misdescribed in a brochure or on plans, for example, the property developer may be subject to prosecution under the 1991 Act by the local authority.

My hon. Friend discussed at some length the position of people who buy new properties. In some instances, properties may be bought off plan: in effect, unbuilt homes are sold. He gave examples of the problems that can occur in such cases. Buying off plan is a popular method of buying and selling new homes. It can have a number of advantages for the developer and the home buyer. It might help if I mention some of them. For the developer, the main advantage is that a buyer is lined up at an early stage, which helps to ensure that the transaction can be completed quickly on completion of the building work.

For the buyer, buying off plan can provide more choice—for example, over plot location, fittings and fixtures, and appliances where the house is being sold with a fitted kitchen. Buying off plan provides buyers with early certainty that the home will be sold to them, and not to someone else, when it is completed. As my hon. Friend may know, in England and Wales, there are problems of gazumping—the law in Scotland is different in that regard—and buying off plan allows breathing space for buyers to sell their present home.

Often there are problems of uncertainty for off plan home buyers. Such uncertainties will decrease as construction progresses, but in the early stages they can involve issues that are particularly important for a prospective buyer. For example, the developer may not be prepared to give a firm completion date, either because of the vagaries of the weather or because of reliance on the availability of construction materials and skilled craftsmen to get the work completed on schedule. Whether or not that is acceptable to a prospective buyer will depend on the extent of uncertain matters and the priorities of individual buyers. It is a question of trade-off between the advantage of early certainty that the home is theirs when built and the possibility that in the interim there may be changes to the development that could impact on their enjoyment of their new home.

Uncertainty can also feed into price. House values can change markedly between the time a home is reserved off plan and the time it is completed. Therefore, particularly during early stages of construction, the developer may be prepared to give only an indicative price to a buyer seeking to reserve a home, in exchange for a small, non-returnable deposit. Professional advice is particularly important in identifying potential obligations and liabilities that will pass to the buyer. Such obligations are not always apparent from the initial sales material.

One of the issues that will help in ensuring that property buyers have more rights will be our manifesto commitment to introduce a seller's pack, which will help in England and Wales. We will introduce the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of managing agents and expressed his concerns about how some of them operate. He might want to know that on 8 April my Department issued a consultation paper on improving the standard of residential leasehold management. Although the scope of the consultation is limited to England and Wales, he may well have some views on the matters contained in that document, which considers various options on how best to improve standards, including voluntary controls regulation. I would welcome the input of all hon. Members, and especially my hon. Friend.

We have no current plans to legislate specifically in England and Wales on the position for buyers of new homes, although there is the seller's pack that I mentioned. Most of the relevant legal framework in Scotland is different, and is a matter for the Scottish Parliament and Executive. I can assure my hon. Friend that my Department liaises closely with the Scottish Executive. We are open to the possible lessons that we can learn from each other in this area. We share a common objective, which is a better deal for buyers of new homes. I will ensure that his views and concerns are passed on to colleagues there.

The efforts of the industry, aided by the work of the Housing Forum and by schemes such as that of the National House Building Council, should lead to better consistency in building quality. We will be looking for this in future repeats of the Housing Forum customer satisfaction survey.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and raising this important issue, which has been raised previously in Westminster Hall. I believe that raising the profile and repeating the concerns is one of the measures that ensures that the industry is aware of the concerns of MPs and the public, and it is one of the ways in which MPs can realistically increase pressure and ensure that standards are improved for the benefit of their constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 April 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Dairy Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Angela Smith.]*

9.30 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): This is a welcome but rare opportunity to talk about agriculture. Since the election, farming and agriculture seem to have been almost obliterated from the parliamentary vocabulary. It is a good opportunity for those of us who represent rural Britain to put a few thoughts on to the record about the current state of the dairy industry.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there has been no full debate on agriculture in Government time since the Queen's speech and that on one of the days the debate was not about agriculture per se? Should that not be put right?

Mr. Heath: Absolutely. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that observation. I am doing my bit to put it right by initiating the debate.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heath: It may be over the top to give way before I have finished my opening remarks.

It is still desperately important for many of our constituents that we discuss the farming industry. We could be talking about almost any sector in the agricultural industry, as they are all facing difficulties. The arable sector is suffering especially at the moment, as I know from my constituents who are involved in various aspects of it. I want to concentrate on dairying, simply because in Somerset we have the finest dairy land in the country and therefore in the world. Views may differ from Cheshire and elsewhere, but I believe that Somerset wears the crown of the dairy industry.

We are engaged not only in farming. Processing is a key part of the local economy, and there are retailers throughout the country. It is important that we consider the industry as the round, as those sectors are interrelated. The key to the success of any part of the industry is the vitality of the whole, which I want to explore today.

I understand from the Minister's replies that he believes that dairy farmers' income is increasing—indeed, has doubled—and that the industry has a rosy future. The industry does not share that view. His belief is belied by the experience of almost everyone who is trying to make a living from dairy farming. In recent months, we have seen yet another reduction in the farmgate price of milk. That is having a devastating effect on the profitability of many farms. The price is now well below 22p per litre, which is a reasonable assessment of the cost of production. Seven authorities would reduce or increase that sum by a few pence.

The industry is still suffering the after-effects of BSE and last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The outlook is extremely bleak. The key is the producer price of milk. Unless we can achieve a sustainable farmgate price for milk, there will be a lack of investment in the industry and, sadly, many more people will decide that they can no longer continue the unequal struggle to maintain their living through dairying. There will be many losses in the industry.

The average producer price, which the National Farmers Union and others currently estimate at about 16.5p per litre, is simply unsustainable. We were saying that the price was unsustainable when it was higher. During the past year there have been attempts to do something about it, but they have not worked. With the seasonal fluctuations, we are in danger of approaching the all-time low of 14.6p per litre—the price in May 2000. If that happens, it will spell bad news for many producers.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Does not the hon. Gentleman find it supremely ironic that the farmer-producer milk price is dropping so significantly at a time when supermarket profits have risen so much? Tesco posted a £1.2 billion profit only recently. Will he take this opportunity to condemn the use of milk as a loss leader by supermarkets and urge the Government to address the problem, as the Prime Minister promised during one meeting with farmers when he said that the supermarkets had the farmers by the throats?

Mr. Heath: As the hon. Gentleman may have suspected, that is the underlying script of my speech. We must address the problem at the point of retail.

Some would argue that the processors have a case to answer too, but their position is much more complicated. They also operate in a competitive sector and are under price pressure from buyers. Although there has been some criticism of processors who have achieved volume sales at the expense of price, and that has had a knock-on effect on the primary producers, they are nevertheless working in an extremely competitive field. There is a variety of uses for raw milk, and the producers are competing with each other. The net result is an unsustainably low milk price at the farm gate.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): My hon. Friend has painted a vivid picture of an industry that is facing catastrophe. What is his prognosis for the dairy industry now that we have details about future pricing? Will he also comment on the fact that the spot price of milk was about 11p per litre at Christmas and is about 7p per litre now?

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend is right. The problem is that there is no light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Producers cannot see how the situation will improve within a time scale that would allow for sensible financial planning. The difficulties with downward competitive pressures on milk pricing are exacerbated by the bizarre fact that the sector is overproducing,

[Mr. Heath]

particularly in the organic sector. Indeed, the organic sector has possibly suffered most, because the premium has almost completely disappeared as a result of a flow of milk into the sector. Some producers have put in sterling efforts. The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) mentioned Yeo Valley recently. His remarks were perhaps misinterpreted, because Yeo Valley has done a sterling job in protecting the organic milk producers, as has the Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative, OMSCO. However, despite those efforts, it is clear that that is not the solution to the problems faced by many milk producers.

We need a clearly negotiated and policed, sustainable and stable price for milk. The Government will have to play their part and, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said, the Prime Minister promised as much when it was politically expedient for him to do so. He promised to take an active interest in the matter, but there is less evidence that that has happened.

With regard to the way in which the supermarkets appear as a bloc, I simply do not accept that milk is a sensible loss leader. In fact, I do not believe that the consumer buys milk on a price basis. I have talked to a great many of my constituents about this subject, and I do not believe that people go into supermarkets, look at the price of milk and decide that they will go to Sainsbury's this week rather than Tesco down the road on the basis of a penny more or less. People do not buy milk in that way, so why do we allow the dairy industry to be crucified by the way in which retailers structure their market? I believe that it achieves no tangible results in retailing, processing or primary production. That nonsense needs to be addressed.

Coupled with that, we need to be much more active in our marketing of locally produced milk and milk products, such as cheese and yoghurt, because those products happen to be superior to those available from elsewhere. I have always maintained that we are bad at marketing the brand—in our case, the west country and Somerset—for wholesome produce. There should be a clear duty in this respect on retailers and those who advise them. That brand should be much more visible.

Another problem that the Government need to address is the structure of the market, which is very complicated. Unsustainable assumptions are made about the internal monopoly in this country. In fact, we are competing not only with other European countries, but in the wider world market. It is a mistake to consider Britain in isolation, to put up barriers to the vertical integration in the industry that we wish to see, and not to encourage the co-operative ventures that should play a big part in the industry.

Why is there a lack of recognition of the fact that we work in an international market and that, currently, intervention is not beneficial to the United Kingdom industry? It benefits the shareholders rather than the producers. The Curry report recognises that self-evident fact in the dairy industry. Why are we not building on its recommendations?

My next question is about agrimonetary compensation—this is a well worn track. We saw the end of the traditional agrimonetary compensation system as of the end of 2001. However, the Government claimed £79 million for the dairy industry in 2001, and they have until the end of the month to make a subsequent claim, which may be worth about £51 million.

I understand the Government's problems with agrimonetary compensation in its current form and the difficulties occasioned by the Fontainebleau rebate. It has acted to the enormous detriment of the agricultural industry ever since it was signed. Whatever its merits in other respects, it has done a poor job of encouraging Government support for the agricultural industry. However, I ask the Minister to be clear about whether his Department intends to apply for that pull-down of European funds, because it comes at a time when the dairy industry desperately needs it.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that today offers a good opportunity for the Government to explain their approach to agrimonetary compensation, given that they have made payments and draw-downs of agrimonetary compensation in the past? Does he agree that this is a good opportunity for the Minister to explain the logic behind individual decisions? As we shall meet later today to hear the Chancellor's Budget, in which he is expected to announce a surplus for the current financial year on the Government's accounts, does my hon. Friend agree that it is a particularly good time to make a claim for agrimonetary compensation as it appears that the money is there in the UK's own accounts?

Mr. Heath: I agree with my hon. Friend on all those counts. It is not a huge amount of money in global terms, and I do not pretend that it would make a huge difference even to the industry, but it would provide some support at a time when the industry desperately needs it. For that reason alone it is worth claiming. I see no reason why the Government should not wish to use European funds, to which they have already contributed, to provide support for our industry in a way that other countries would have no compunction in doing.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): A constituent told me that agrimonetary compensation made up 50 per cent. of his profit for the whole year. While the hon. Gentleman was modest about what he felt it would achieve for dairy farmers, does he not agree that it is a tremendously important support to the people concerned in that industry?

Mr. Heath: It is important, but the fact that it represents 50 per cent. of the profits is testament to the poor profitability of the dairy industry. The amount of money involved is modest. Perhaps the Minister can tell me—although if he does it will break a pattern set by all the previous Ministers I have questioned on this subject—whether the Government have at any time tried to set up a replacement scheme within the UK for agrimonetary compensation. The reasons why we have an agrimonetary compensation scheme persist. Britain still has a currency that floats free of the euro. Although a green currency is no longer necessary for those countries within the eurozone and it is arguably not necessary for Sweden and Denmark, given that their

currencies are effectively pinned to the euro, it is necessary for British agriculture which has to contend with more extreme currency fluctuations.

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to talk about the exchange rate because the exchange rate between the pound and the euro is a problem for the whole of British agriculture. That problem besets the entire manufacturing industry. There are things that the Government could and should do. As many hon. Members know, I am not a great advocate of joining the euro, but I believe that there is a need to do something about the valuation between the pound and the euro to make our manufacturing industries, including agriculture, more competitive. The Government have neglected that issue over the last year or so and it needs to be addressed now if we are to have any hope of retaining a competitive aspect to our major industries.

While we are talking about overseas markets, we still have a great way to go to redevelop our overseas markets, including our European markets, which are important traditionally. There is a strong connection between our meat exports and the dairy industry. They are not divorced from one another. While we see the blatant protectionism that goes on in France, against any scientific or legal advice that the French Government could or should have been given, it is legitimate to ask whether the rules of the European Union do anything to ensure the free passage of trade and goods that the entire structure of the European Union was designed to promote. We need to address that as a matter of urgency.

Other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate and so I will try to make the remainder of my remarks brief. I mention in passing the difficulties that the industry in my part of the country is still experiencing from bovine tuberculosis. It is becoming a problem for many farms in the west country because of the threat of tuberculosis as a disease and because of its knock-on effect on the mobility of stock, its effect on markets and the difficulties of regulation. Those are the inevitable results of a recurrence of the disease in Somerset and the west country.

I am anxious that there is still no experimental evidence to connect bovine tuberculosis and badgers. The Krebs experiments were put on hold; they are no nearer to completion now than they were a year or so ago. As a result, we do not know whether the connection is substantiated. It is desperately important to have that evidence so that appropriate measures can be taken. Many farmers in my constituency urgently need to do something to eliminate tuberculosis, or they will continue to have great difficulties.

I have to strike a pessimistic, if not apocalyptic, note. I have never been more concerned about the future of farming in my county. There is little cause for optimism in most sectors, including the dairy sector, in the immediate future. Small and medium farms throughout the country, especially in my constituency, will continue to be lost. What have traditionally been called small farms are moving up. Figures for disposal sales show that it is not herds of up to 100 cattle that are being disposed of; herds of 200 or 300 are under the auctioneer's hammer. Profitability and investment are lacking, so people say, "Why are we sitting on this realisable asset when we are in a difficult job requiring great dedication, which does not provide any reward for us?" More and more people are fleeing the industry.

I am most anxious about the tenant farmers who have no capital, and no way out. The Government are remiss in not tackling the issue with retirement schemes that will allow people to leave the industry with dignity, to find a new role. People will continue to leave the industry simply because they do not have the opportunities that they would wish for. That begs the question about the structure of the rural economy and of land use. There is a limit to how many rich people from London can come down, buy farmhouses and keep a few ponies in the paddock. Something must happen to the land between those farmhouses, which is the most productive in the country, but I do not know how that will come about unless the Government and the industry deal with the matter urgently.

Huge changes are on the way; the common agricultural policy must be reformed and we are only at the beginning of the process. I was hoping for more progress, particularly in the dairy sector. However, what the agriculture Ministers could agree, the Heads of Government were able to shelve at an early opportunity. They need to return to the negotiating table to achieve much faster progress on the issue.

There must be a greater focus on farming, the dairy industry, the needs of farmers as primary producers, the processors and even the retailers—I am prepared to bring them in from the cold. Unless there is a structured approach to the entire industry to make it profitable again, primary producers will be lost, processors will have supply difficulties and retailers will have to rely on overseas imports. That will not be in the interests of our constituents, the national economy, or the retailers themselves.

9.54 am

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I start by criticising the Office of Fair Trading report on supermarkets. I recognise that supermarkets compete with one other, but the report does not recognise the power of the purchasing tail and its effect on the price of milk.

Will the Minister look further into the intervention price? I was informed that it stands at 16.3p per litre, but that the UK does not have enough processing power to turn the milk into milk powder, which would allow us to be intervened upon. I also draw the Minister's attention to the cost to the dairy farmer of the nitrate vulnerable zones, which the Ministry has seriously underestimated. I support the plea of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) for the second tranche of agrimonetary compensation, on which dairy farmers in my constituency depend. As I said in my intervention, although it makes up 50 per cent. of their income, it remains extremely low. I was informed that £8,000 is more accurate than the Government estimate of £32,000 as the average dairy farmer's annual earnings. The Government figure clearly does not apply in Herefordshire.

I shall refer to bovine tuberculosis, as Herefordshire is one of the test areas. Although the number of restricted herds is falling, the number awaiting tests has risen dramatically and the backlog continues to grow. The total is a horrendous figure, with about 27,000 herds

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

awaiting testing. This year alone, the Ministry is slaughtering up to 1,000 cattle a month, although last year the figures appeared to dip because of the foot and mouth crisis. Between 1 January and 28 February, 2,077 cattle were reported to have been slaughtered.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It might help the hon. Gentleman if I explained that as part of dealing with the backlog, we targeted the highest risk "hot spot" areas. It is not unusual to see a higher rate of incidence because the targeting is distorting the figures. I am not complacent and would not say that TB is not increasing, but I caution Members about drawing conclusions from the current figures, which do not provide a clear picture.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, but we must also bear in mind the number of cattle slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak, some of which may well have been TB reactors. I accept that the Minister would not know about that, but will he talk in his response about research into bovine tuberculosis? With herds being closed across the country because of foot and mouth, the disease may be spreading through wildlife. If wildlife is carrying it, we must face up to it. Badgers are a particular favourite of the Minister and are the most protected animals by law in the whole country, possibly even the world. However, we must face up to what is happening. As soon as a cow reacts, the farms are closed and cannot trade. They can continue to produce milk, but not buy or sell calves. That problem must be confronted because the number of farms being closed is rising dramatically. Some arguments suggest that it would be possible to continue to buy and sell calves that had not reacted.

TB costs about £7 million a year in direct compensation alone. The research bill is more than £21 million. The livelihoods of 27,000 farmers awaiting results are at stake. I hope that the Government's statistics, which prove that TB is threatening to snowball and that at least three herds a day are succumbing to the disease as hitherto free areas become infected, will persuade the Government to address the problem more effectively. There was no testing for bovine tuberculosis in 2001, but as the backlog of farms is growing, an injection of cash should be considered. This may be a great day to call for money to be spent on increasing the speed and number of tests. It adds insult to injury that a farmer, after his morning milking, is expected to test all day without extra support and then do his evening milking. The number of cows that need testing has now grown to such an extent that it is not feasible to expect a farmer to undertake testing by himself. I draw attention to a lovely quote from Eisenhower that was also used in Don Curry's report:

"Farming seems mighty easy when your plough is a pencil and you're a thousand miles away from the cornfield."

Given the statistics on bovine tuberculosis, that seems to be the case. I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind.

People are also at risk. There are about 40 cases a year of mycobacterium bovis—the bovine TB—in human beings. Obviously, most tuberculosis is caused by the other bacterium—mycobacterium tuberculosis. Bovine TB cases are rare and are usually found in people who have caught it abroad or in elderly people who had probably caught it from drinking unpasturised milk. Some cases may have occurred in people who work closely with infected animals. At this stage, however, there is no direct evidence that people have caught the disease in that way, but the risk to farmers and others in frequent close contact with cattle is well recognised.

The Krebs report said that the best prospect for the control of TB in the British herd is to develop a cattle vaccine. The focus for finding a decent, long-term solution must be in a vaccine that will not only prevent it from being caught by cattle, but prevent badgers—the prime suspects—from carrying it. When a virus appears in a closed herd, the badgers in their setts on that farm are not tested. They need to be tested quickly and effectively because the number of badgers that we see in Herefordshire by the side of the road is growing every day. Those badgers are diseased, too. If the Minister has a passion for those animals—I believe that he does—he owes it to them as much as to cattle to find a cure for the disease. Any increase in funding and research that will lead us to a vaccine would be more than welcome. It is essential that a vaccine is found.

The closed herd at Ocle Court in my constituency has recently suffered a bovine TB outbreak. The herd were home-grown fed and had no contact with other cattle. My constituent, Matthew Oliver, was left to watch and weep as his suckler cows were shot as tuberculosis reactors. Recently, Mr. Oliver told *Farmers Weekly*:

"I am definitely not anti-badger, but if cattle are not to disappear from some areas, we simply cannot afford to wait for the results of the badger trial . . . On farms where there are reactors, sample animals from badger setts must be trapped and tested. All animals in infected setts should be culled . . . Animal rights people will object, but they were not standing on the yard as my cows, six of them in late pregnancy, were destroyed."

That clear message should not be ignored. Mr. Oliver continued:

"We cannot go on taking knock after knock. My family has been here since 1880. I am the fourth generation and I have never wanted to do anything else but farm. But if we keep getting reactors I might decide to sell the land in small blocks to people from the cities . . . It is time for the Government to listen to cattle farmers and veterinary surgeons and have the courage to do whatever is necessary to halt the spread of a disease".

The problem has caused so much debate in Herefordshire that a former president of the British Veterinary Association, Francis Anthony, said:

"In Herefordshire we have cases of bovine tuberculosis coming out of our ears . . . It goes against every principle of disease control to cull one species and do nothing about a proven feral pool infection."

Reactors are now found on 70 per cent. of farms tested in Herefordshire. We cannot continue waiting for the results of the badger tests, yet have measures such as the Minister's Bill on animal health. There is a gross imbalance. If we are to take an aggressive and draconian approach to a future foot and mouth outbreak, as the Minister proposed, we should take the same approach to bovine tuberculosis, and deal especially with badgers.

I hope that the Minister will answer my questions and perhaps pledge, after today's Budget, to invest more for research on this extremely serious disease.

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): I call Mr. David Drew.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Beard. I know that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) has a genuine and sincere interest in these matters and that he will make a valuable contribution. However, he was five or six minutes late for the debate. As I am well known in my constituency for my lateness, I would appreciate a ruling on whether that is in order.

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): I shall take that into account.

10.4 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I apologise for my lateness. I was stuck on a train because I had an engagement in my constituency yesterday—I am sure that that has happened to us all. I apologise profusely to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who introduced the debate. He gave us an invaluable lesson on why we should discuss such issues in this Chamber. As I am the only Government Back Bencher present and it is important that we hear from such quarters, I hope that the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who quite rightly picked me up for my lateness, will give me the chance to speak. I shall keep my remarks brief to allow him the chance to contribute to the debate.

I share many of the worries expressed by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, although I missed his initial comments. The picture that he paints is gloomy, and no Labour Member would pretend otherwise. We face the double bind of pressure on prices and over-production. That has other consequences such as lower returns to farmers, and there is a clear indication that processors are not doing well either.

I declare an interest because I am about to achieve the biggest dairy in the country at Severnside, with which I am in regular contact. I have represented its point of view before and when it is seen as the bad guys—it is certainly not always the good guys—it argues that its price pressures are considerable because retailers force prices down. The supermarkets are regularly put in the frame. I shall not be an apologist for them because their recent performance before the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs left more questions unanswered than not about the way in which they saw the future of food and farming, although we gave them a hard time. We must be realistic. Milk and milk products are up against many other products, and the real price of food is at its lowest level for a generation. However, after taking subsidies into account, I argue that the price of food is not as low as some people would have us believe.

The future for organic milk is especially sad. As the Minister knows, I was able to act as a conduit to allow OMSCO—the Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative—to talk to the Government. It is unacceptable that organic milk is pumped into the mainstream supply. Something is wrong with the structures of both the organic milk market and the overall milk market while that occurs.

I take a slightly different position on where we should go from here. A debate is needed, although this Chamber is not the only place in which it will be heard. Like the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), I visited New Zealand with the Select Committee as part of our current major investigation on food and farming. One is struck by the contrast between our methods and those of the people of New Zealand in the 1980s. I shall not draw simplistic conclusions or pre-empt our report, but several points are worth making. New Zealand has chosen a different route from ours by using a pasture-led approach. If the proof is in the eating, that has merit. Although there is an argument that our climate and countryside is not as suitable as New Zealand's, it is fair to say that people who regularly visit our shores and give us advice are querulous about the degree to which we have gone along the subsidy-based, high-input and intensive farming route that we have used for dairying. They urge an alternative route, which the Select Committee will examine carefully.

I have alluded to subsidies. There are questions about not just the subsidy approach but the way in which it has become integral to the operation of the CAP. I am not saying that we can cut subsidies overnight. Everyone talks about getting rid of measures such as the milk quota, which is, in a sense, a form of control based on subsidy, but I am worried that the only answer that we come up with is more subsidy. Although the World Trade Organisation is calling for all countries to consider a different approach, we are, in all our negotiations about the CAP, loading ourselves with more of the same. We must break away from that system.

I am not a free marketer but a good old Labourite who will consider intervention when it is necessary and appropriate. However, the industry has been wrecked by the subsidy constraints that have been put upon it. That is true not just of this country but of the rest of Europe.

Mr. Heath: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's basic thesis, but does he agree that some of the countries that act as the great apostles of free trade and non-subsidy, such as the United States, subsidise their dairy industries to the eyeballs? That is particularly so in states such as Vermont, where farmers receive a great deal of money in state aid.

Mr. Drew: Those countries not only cheat covertly and overtly, but their farmers do some horrible things to their animals. Scientific understanding would shed some light on and expose some of the acts at which this country quite rightly takes umbrage, such as including bovine somatrophin in milk and hormones in beef. They are highly questionable practices. We should move towards a more subsidy-free regime, if that is not a contradiction in terms, but one which also demands high standards of hygiene and welfare.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is making some important points on the future of the industry. Does he agree that the role of the supermarkets will be vital in moving towards what he calls a less subsidy-dependent future, and in avoiding a knee-jerk injection of crisis funds into the dairy industry? He mentioned organic milk. Surely it is foolishness to pump organic

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

milk into mainstream milk when we are importing organic milk in significant quantities from countries such as Denmark. The Government must tackle the supermarkets and the market itself in order to move towards a less subsidy-dependent future.

Mr. Drew: I largely concur with the hon. Gentleman. I am a great believer in intervening in markets, but we must have consumers on our side. One problem is that, for various reasons, consumers are not buying enough fresh organic milk. We must consider how to market it, and how to bolster consumer demand.

We must restructure our interests. New Zealand did not lose as many farmers as was thought when it claimed to cut away subsidies. There is a question about the degree to which it did so, but from the evidence that we obtained it seems that it is as near to a subsidy-free regime as it can get. We must understand that loss of subsidy will imperil smaller farmers in the short term. We must consider how to restructure the industry fairly and reasonably. We cannot go on the way we are, and I think that that is what the hon. Members for Somerton and Frome and for Ceredigion were saying. We must consider the costs of undertaking a major reform. We must also take other parties—both in the European Union and the rest of the world—with us, and that will not be easy. Some countries make noises about market liberalism but do not necessarily practise it.

Undoubtedly there is market failure, and that causes its own problems when structures are palpably wrong. That is shown most clearly by the debacle of the way in which we restructured intervention arrangements by moving from the milk marketing board to Milk Marque and then to individual successor co-operatives, which now want to combine. We all knew what was wrong, but there was a failure to come up with suitable policies to deal with the problem.

As a member of a co-operative, I believe that we must learn from the successes of other countries and build a genuine co-operative arrangement between producers and processors, even if that means changing the monopoly arrangements. Supermarkets are virtually monopoly suppliers, yet people who contribute to the food chain are subject to pressures within not only this country, but the rest of Europe. We must re-examine those structures and ensure that we get the benefits of economies of scale, research and so forth, which can be achieved only by building new arrangements. That would do a lot of good because it would overcome some of the bitterness—there is no other way to describe it—between producers and processors, which has done immeasurable harm to the way in which the industry operates.

There is no parallel sector in which virtually every six months, processors go out to producers and try to persuade them that a price cut would be beneficial. The industry operates in that way. To pre-empt the eventual pricing, people are encouraged to take a price cut that is based on crazy currency arrangements and the fact that there is over-production at present, which is not always the case.

We must also protect smaller farmers and recognise that that can be achieved only by building new arrangements. As someone who has already had two Adjournment debates on the future of county farm estates that have the most vulnerable tenant farmers of all, I take no lessons on why they are the most vulnerable group. We must persuade tenant farmers of the benefits of new co-operative ways of working—sharing machinery, milking and input costs, which will require representatives and colleagues of those people asking them to look at new methods. That is hard, because the independence of the tenant farmer is probably stronger than that of any other group of farmer. They pride themselves on their independence, but that must be mitigated by all the reasons why smaller farmers will not survive, such as capital costs and the cost of land, stock and so forth. We must ensure that we get those people to work together to overcome some of the problems.

The debate can no longer be avoided. It must be taken forward on the back of the Curry commission, although it is separate and more urgent because dairy farmers are in an extremely vulnerable position. There is something special about milk and the way in which the sector operates that means we must do something radical and urgent. We must persuade people that the common agricultural policy is not working.

Bovine tuberculosis affects my constituency, as it does the constituencies of the hon. Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). Too many farms are closed. However, we cannot pretend that there are easy solutions. There is no scientific explanation for bovine tuberculosis, although it is subject to huge dollops of research money and a great deal of research is going on. The accusing finger is pointed at the wildlife vector, but let us not be fooled—other contributory factors have yet to be excluded, such as husbandry techniques, the genetic disposition of the herds affected and the locations involved.

The hon. Member for Leominster shakes his head, but if he were to talk to anyone who knows anything about the subject, they would share with him the problems. That is also true of the international scene. The hon. Gentleman calls for a cattle vaccine, as I have done many times, but it would involve the same problems as the foot and mouth vaccine. People question the practicalities and ethics of using vaccine. The best way forward would be to breed out tuberculosis, whether in cattle or in wildlife, which would not be easy. That would be the ultimate, and anything that we can do to achieve that is important.

This vital debate is all about how we rebuild an industry under enormous pressure. I urge everyone not to accept the same old compromises. We must be much more radical and ensure that the industry survives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. We have approximately 15 minutes before the winding-up speeches and four hon. Members wish to speak, so if they limit their remarks, they will all have an opportunity to speak.

10.19 am

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) for securing the debate. It is taking place at a critical time for the dairy industry. On a bright

and beautiful spring morning such as this one, dairy farmers should be on top form and looking forward to the summer, with their cows about to be turned out to grass. However, the mood in the dairy industry is one of despondency and despair.

I wish to reflect on the state of the dairy industry in Wales—and, in particular, in my constituency. Brecon and Radnorshire is the largest constituency in England and Wales and therefore, as one would expect, it is also the most agricultural. Unfortunately however, the number of dairy farmers in the area has declined to such an extent that the situation is now almost terminal. At the last count, there were fewer than 10 dairy farmers in Brecon, and probably only five or six in Radnorshire. At one time, there were many dairy farms in the Usk and Wye valleys and in the Radnor area, but almost all of them have now given up milk production. That has contributed to another problem: when such farmers give up milk production, they go into beef and sheepmeat production, and that puts even more pressure on those sectors, which are also always struggling.

I wish to mention the last person in my area who came to me to say that he was giving up milk production. Like the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), he went into milk production through the county council smallholding scheme, which enables people to enter farming with limited capital. However, with great determination, skill and commitment, people such as him could make a living. He raised a family, and sent his three children to college. He was able to do that because he had great skill in grassland management and the breeding of stock, and, more importantly, because he was prepared to put a huge amount of work and commitment into the business. However, he has now decided that he gets no return for that commitment and skill—and no return on his capital. Therefore, like so many other dairy farmers, especially tenant dairy farmers, who have little capital behind them, he is taking the opportunity to disperse his stock to farmers who have been taken out in the foot and mouth epidemic: he is cashing in his only capital asset to ensure that at least he has some money for his retirement.

Between 1989 and 1999, the number of dairy farms in Powys fell by 30 per cent. That trend has accelerated, due to the problem of pricing. We have already heard that the average price for milk this year is likely to be 16.5p per litre, when the break-even price is about 21p per litre—and 24p per litre, if one wishes to ensure that re-investment takes place. Evidence given to the Welsh Affairs Committee showed that the code of conduct that four out of the five major supermarkets signed up to has been toothless, with regard to ensuring that a fair price is given to producers. That problem must be looked at again.

The problem with the pricing of milk can be traced back to the abolition of the milk marketing board and, subsequently, the dissolution of Milk Marque. Farmers are now trying to put back into place some of the co-operative aspects of the organisation of their industry that Milk Marque established. The Welsh Affairs Committee has also heard evidence that the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission have been much harder on indigenous co-operatives than on foreign ones. Milk First gave us evidence that, when it purchased a cheesemaking plant in Aberaeron, it had to go through a rigorous regulatory process that cost it a lot in professional fees, whereas co-operatives based outside the country, such as on the continent, or in New Zealand, are able to operate in the United Kingdom without having to pay for and implement the same regulatory processes. That is, therefore, a real problem.

I turn finally to the agrimonetary compensatory allowance for which the Government can apply before 30 April. The Government have an opportunity to show that they understand the dairy industry's problems and can make a commitment to it. I understand that the average dairy farm, with about 80 cows producing 480,000 litres of milk, would receive about £1,700. In terms of the size and scale of the business, that is not a lot of money, as we have heard, but it is a lot in terms of the profit being made at the moment. It may be the difference between a business surviving and it going to the wall, and we call on the Government to act immediately.

10.25 am

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am grateful that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) secured the debate. As he rightly points out, it heightens the problems in Somerset, four of whose five Members of Parliament are present. The fifth is on his way back from other duties.

The hon. Member kindly alluded to organic farming in my constituency. In many ways, organic farming was seen as the great white hope. It was going to be the thing that boosted farming so that we could be more eco-friendly and eco-adjustable. However, in the past few months we have witnessed the wholesale collapse of the organic milk price, which has gone from 30p to 24p, and may go even lower. I suspect that the Minister will discuss how to foster an organic industry.

Yeo Valley Organic works throughout Somerset, in all our constituencies—Somerton and Frome, Taunton and Wells. It is this country's prime and biggest producer of organic yoghurt and cream. It is honouring its contracts. It still pays 33p a litre and subsidises organic producers with whom it has contracts. It does so for two reasons. First, it has contracts and wants to honour them. Secondly, it wants to maintain the quality and purity of the organic milk that it buys. It cannot afford not to be able to buy high-quality organics as that is its market.

The company is part of the Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative, which it helped set up in 1994. It knew about the possibility of over-supply because of the experience with wild boar, ostriches and the many other diversifications that crashed. It wanted to ensure the possibility of holding the market together and that the market did not collapse to that extent. The farmgate price in 1996, when OMSCO started, was 29.5p. It is now down to 24p. The company's contracts run for five years. It has extended them for a further two. Its commitment to its producers is total.

The other problem that we face is that the average dairy income is now £9,500. The agrimoney would work out at £1,700 per farmer. The problem is, therefore, on both sides. Organic producers such as Yeo Valley are trying to increase their coverage and buying power—indeed, they are trying to sell to this place, too; I notice that we do not have many organics here—in order to be able to put forward the case specifically for organics for the longer term.

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

Farmers are leaving organic farming because they can no longer afford it. They cannot afford the milk or the income that they receive from organic produce. Where, then, will we get the organic milk and, if I may go slightly further—I realise that we are discussing the dairy industry—the strawberries, for example, to put in the yoghurt?

Unless organisations such as Yeo Valley are specifically helped, the economics involved mean that they will be unable to continue to support farmers in the way that they do. They will do so if they can, but they will need direct help—organic subsidies or money from bodies such as the Environment Agency or the Countryside Agency.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): My hon. Friend mentioned the Countryside Agency. Is he aware of the report "Rural Proofing in 2001-02", which has just come out? Rural proofing is intended to ensure that the Government think rural. Is my hon. Friend aware that DEFRA has the worst record of all 11 Departments on the implementation of rural proofing? Although it has widely circulated a checklist, established a contact point and liaises regularly with the agency, it has not embedded rural proofing in its policy-making procedures, promotes neither proofing nor the checklist, has established no rural targets for monitoring and has not enhanced rural awareness.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I am not surprised in the slightest. I am interested to note that the Cabinet Office has managed to do better than DEFRA. One wonders how many gardens and farms there are in 10 Downing street.

Yeo Valley and other organisations are not cutting their prices; they are trying to stay where they are. I ask the Minister to see what he can do. Yeo Valley is a shining example of excellent practice in the dairy industry, and such organisations are going out on a limb to support the dairy industry. People such as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and I depend on such organisations to hold the farming industry together in counties such as Somerset.

10.31 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I am pleased to be called, given the extensive dairy industry in my constituency and in those of my hon. Friends the Members for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price).

I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing this debate. It is very timely, given that the National Farmers Union in Wales calculates that the industry there is in danger of losing up to £45 million due to the current price cuts. That danger was confirmed to me in recent discussions with dairy farmers in my constituency. One told me bluntly and briefly that milk production was high early in the season, price competition was fierce, prices were low and unstable, planning was difficult, investment was threatened and dairy farming incomes were under grave threat. He said that many local dairy farmers were considering their futures.

The pound and imports are high. I was told yesterday that last year 40 per cent. of our butter came from abroad. Some 385,000 tonnes of cheese were made in the United Kingdom, but 273,000 tonnes were imported. The industry faces competition from all parts of the world, and the liquid milk flows in.

I have discussed with local dairy farmers what options they have. Advised by successive Governments, they have invested and modernised, and herds are now larger and yields have increased beyond all recognition. Can dairy farms in my constituency grow bigger? A constituent recently told me that he had just about been able to bring up his family in the 1960s and 1970s with a herd of fewer than 30 animals, but that he could not do so now.

Can dairy farms in my constituency grow their way out of the present crisis? The industry in my constituency faces the pressure of increased prices when buying and renting land. Indeed, it seems that local prices often reflect not the economic value of the land, but its amenity value to people who are not solely or even mainly engaged in agriculture. That clearly limits the possibility of expansion for smaller holdings and any possible gains from economies of scale.

We have heard about the organic option, but if everyone turns organic, any price advantage will be lost. I recently bought some organic milk. The packaging said that it was organic in very large letters, but that it was produced in Denmark in rather smaller letters.

It is not only producers who are feeling the pressure. A successful farmer-owned co-operative in my constituency, Hufenfa De Arfon—South Caernarfon Creameries—has worked hard to carve out a niche at the quality end of the market, and it has had considerable success. It produces butter and liquid milk, and it supplies a well known, high-quality retail chain. It makes a very popular, high-quality cheese, Hen Sir, which is as good as one will get, but perhaps I am biased. It also makes Monterey Jack, a cheese made to an American recipe, and even succeeds in exporting it to America, along with its other products. This year, it won an export award. Hufenfa De Arfon has always been very good in paying its producers—among the top 25 per cent. and sometimes much better. However, even that highly successful and forward-looking venture feels pressure to reduce the price that it pays to its members, thereby reducing the vital money that it pumps into the local economy. If companies such as Hufenfa De Arfon, the very best, are feeling the pressure, what hope is there for the rest?

Dairy farmers in my constituency are well aware of price instability and the pressure on their industry. They know all about uncertainty and falling incomes, and many are considering their future. They know that they need a higher price for their milk. The National Farmers Union called for 22p per litre just to cover costs and 24p per litre to have a viable industry. Dairy farmers deserve a better, more secure future, and Welsh rural life cannot afford to lose them.

10.35 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on initiating the debate. As many hon. Members have suggested, there has been

much debate on the issue in our constituencies but not in the House. Our farmers have been constantly contacting us with their tales of woe, which have been amply expressed by several Members this morning. I shall not repeat what they said but add just a few more comments.

On the strength of sterling, whatever the arguments for going into or staying out of the euro, sectors of our industry will be permanently disadvantaged if we stay out. As the principal reason for not going in is likely to be the exchange rate, it will have an effect. If the Government are never going to apply for what is left of our agrimonetary compensation or introduce their own scheme, we need to know. Farmers need to know whether they will ever receive compensatory payment for the clear problem of the exchange risk, so that they can plan their businesses accordingly. Pleading on each individual occasion—I add my voice to the plea that the Government make application—is not the way that an essentially long-term industry wants to plan its business.

One of the things coming up next year, which was made clear by previous Ministers, is the review of quota in 2003. We have not heard much about the Government's position on that. Will they press for the rapid end of quota? Some people thought that it would happen in 2003; if not, when will it happen? If we could press our European Union partners to agree to an end to the milk quota system, which is a clear constraint on the development of an efficient and market-focused industry, there is little doubt that it would do a significant amount of good to the UK dairy industry.

Much has been said about supermarkets. The OFT found cause for an investigation, which was carried out by the Competition Commission. Many of us thought that it was a whitewash and a total waste of £20 million. The voluntary code that has been referred to is totally inadequate to regulate properly the whole of the industry chain. We must also remember that there have been some changes in the way in which consumers purchase milk and milk products. We all know that doorstep deliveries have declined significantly and, as a result, the prices have increased. As consumers shift to supermarkets, the price in the supermarket declines. It is an escalating situation, in which more and more milk is purchased by the supermarkets. Therefore, there is a clear competition issue, which was not grasped properly by the Competition Commission, which looked at excessive profits over the whole range of activities, rather than examining individual products.

There has been growth in new dairy products such as cheese, yoghurt, dairy desserts, fromage frais and so on. Foreign companies and imports have driven many of those developments. We must really try to organise ourselves to be much more competitive in that field, so that we process our milk into those value-added products and start to displace some of those imports. That is an important way in which we can support the dairy industry in the future.

On organic farming, many organic farmers have told me that, although they appreciate the Government's support at conversion, most European competitors continue to receive support post-conversion. That is extremely beneficial to them. Our organic farmers, once converted, are playing on an uneven field of competition because other organic farmers continue to receive support post-conversion.

I turn to bovine tuberculosis, which is a huge problem in Devon and Cornwall. The figures state that it more than doubled between 1995-2000. A Krebs trial is taking place in my constituency, and I understand all the problems of that. However, the feeling is that even at the end of the Krebs trials, which have been delayed because of foot and mouth, and the spending of £35 million, the findings will be inconclusive—yet we shall probably have seen a significant further rise in TB.

TB is going to be the next BSE or foot and mouth. It is a real and creeping problem. If we sit back and rely on the evidence of the Krebs trials to guide us on what to do, we could be sitting here in two or three years with the same dilemma, while more farmers are subjected to TB problems and more compensation is paid.

On animal movements, farmers are still extremely careful after foot and mouth, and there is the odd scare. However, the current animal movement restrictions are putting an increasing burden on their businesses. They want to know what the long term is to be. Are we going to keep the 21-day animal movement restriction, or is that a temporary measure? Will it be replaced by something else? Farmers need to know the longer-term Government policy in that area.

10.41 am

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Thank you, Mr. Beard; it is nice to see you in the Chair.

I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on his good fortune in securing this morning's debate. We have almost all been singing from the same hymn sheet, and I hope that that will send the Government a clear message about the unanimity of view on what is happening in the dairy industry at present, and how vital it is for the problems to be tackled.

The past year has brought dairy farmers varying fortunes, with the fluctuation of milk prices and the onslaught of foot and mouth, one consequence of which was to reduce significantly the UK breeding herd. However, we all remain concerned that the commitment shown by dairy farmers is not reflected in the prices that they receive for their produce. The dairy sector probably has to fund more capital investment, place more emphasis on animal health and assign more commitment to its work than most other sectors in the agricultural industry. It is an outrage that dairy farmers work longer than the average working week and yet take home less than the minimum wage.

At the beginning of 2001, higher prices led to a sense of confidence and an enlargement of scale in the dairy sector. Milk producers had previously seen a decline in incomes for almost three years. However, there has been a notable and ongoing decrease since the end of last year, continuing throughout this year and this month. The National Farmers Union estimates that the average producer price in April will be 16.5p per litre. If those trends continue, together with seasonality, producer prices may be further depressed, perhaps as far as the trough of prices in May 2000. That would be seriously bad news.

[Mrs. Ann Winterton]

Our milk producers receive the poorest prices in Europe, yet continue to abide by the highest health, safety and hygiene standards of all member states. The Milk Development Council announced on Monday that it intends to commission a survey to investigate why there is such a price difference between the UK and the rest of Europe.

Our dairy farming industry should not experience, and cannot stand, yet another prolonged period of uncertain and depressed prices. Some factors are uncontrollable. For example, world commodity prices have dropped, and the United Kingdom's milk production during the past few months has been greater than expected, which has led to increased competition and has pulled prices down.

As in every sector, UK dairymen remain disadvantaged by the value of sterling in comparison with the euro. This year, £97 million of agrimonetary compensation is available to the agriculture industry, although that is the maximum and the European Commission has yet to rule on the official sum. Approximately £51 million of that figure should be available to the dairy sector. When he replies to the debate, will the Minister indicate the Government's approach to agrimonetary compensation, and whether he recognises the part that that plays in sustaining dairy farmers' profitability?

It is crucial—this has been said several times—that milk prices are maintained at retail level, and that a fair and just proportion of the price is reflected in producer gain. At the time of the April 2001 retail increase, the National Farmers Union was inundated with calls from the public who sought assurance that price rises would mean more money for dairy farmers. Every call made it clear that there was no problem with paying a little extra for milk so long as that extra money was returned to dairy farmers. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) that I shall continue to buy Yeo Valley organic products, which I have done since I visited Yeo Valley when I served on the Select Committee on Agriculture. They are excellent products, and I was delighted to hear that the company is being honourable by continuing to honour contracts to its producers. Long may that continue.

However, all of that could prove of little comfort to producers. It remains clear that the allocation of the final retail price needs further investigation. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) that many believed that the conclusions of the report by the Office of Fair Trading were totally unsatisfactory. Other members of the food chain must recognise that farmers should receive a better and fairer share of the retail price.

The recent Curry report highlighted the need for farmer collaboration, and endorsed the findings of the milk taskforce report. I quote:

"We strongly believe in the potential of collaborative ventures for all farmers large and small. We encourage the competition authorities to consider the wider market context, particularly the consolidation of international suppliers, when looking at new or expanding collaborative ventures."

DEFRA has highlighted the contrast between UK farmer control of production and that in the rest of the world. It states that in 2001, the UK's largest milk group controlled a mere 16 per cent. of production, compared with Sweden's 61 per cent., New Zealand's 90 per cent. and Denmark's 92 per cent. The latter figure impacts strongly on the UK market, because Arla Foods is the company that uses that milk.

Farmers are already doing their utmost to help themselves through the prolonged crisis, but dairy co-operatives are another valid way forward. In some recent mergers, farmers' co-operatives have expressed the hope that they will be able significantly to cut administration and transport costs, and the objective to raise capital and invest in processing, which will allow members to benefit from the added margins between the farm and consumer. What is the Government's view on co-operatives raising money to invest further up the supply chain? Do they have a view on the restrictions and costs that must sometimes be met by those ventures? If those are to be encouraged, that problem should be considered.

Conservative Members are keen for an improvement in honesty in labelling, and would like to see all milk and milk products labelled with the country of origin and the system of production of all major ingredients. If milk is imported, we do not want that information in tiny figures at the bottom of the label. We must enable consumers to choose British milk and British dairy products, which they know that they can trust. Yesterday, I went to the launch of White and Wild, which is a new, high-quality premium product. It is organic milk that comes from farms that have a whole farm biodiversity plan, and it is being sold in about 60 supermarkets from next Wednesday. That is one way forward, and let us hope that the British public will buy that milk, and encourage that movement.

Along with the general decline in milk prices, bovine tuberculosis is a real threat and a constant worry for farmers. In its January 2001 report, the Agriculture Committee called for Government action on farmers' "growing sense of desperation" at the continued spread of the disease. TB testing has been delayed because of foot and mouth disease, but the provisional Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs statistics for the period between December 2000 and February 2001 show that 2,231 cattle were compulsorily slaughtered as reactors or contacts. As a result of foot and mouth, we cannot assess the situation from last year's statistics on TB reactors but the release of figures from the most recent batches of testing is imminent, and will prove extremely telling. I have no doubt that they will highlight the sheer extent of the desperation that the Government's strategy against TB is causing among farmers.

I have raised a few issues currently facing the industry. As always in this debate one has to gallop up to the final winning post, as it were, but I leave that for the Minister to do. I am trying to leave him sufficient time to do so. It is in everybody's interest in the United Kingdom that a sector as suited to the UK climate as dairy farming should continue and prosper. However, the Government appear prepared to see that asset squandered, and their lack of action seems almost a refusal to defend it or to instigate a recovery in a very fine sector of our agricultural industry.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): In the time left to me, I shall try and cover the range of points raised by hon. Members. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on raising the issue. Dairy farming is important in Somerset and the issues that he has raised are important nationally. I certainly agreed with much of what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and the hon. Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger), for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

It may be useful if I stress some of the things that the Government have been doing. Although many points have been very fair, I take exception to the last remark that the Government are not doing very much about the industry. The Prime Minister has been directly involved at all levels concerning agricultural issues. He was at the seminar of the Food and Farming Commission. He has taken a close interest in the action plan on organic farming, which I have been asked to chair. The first meeting was constructive and useful. The food chain centre is in the process of being set up, led by the Institute of Grocery Distribution. A code of practice has been introduced. Of course, if people feel that it is not delivering what it is meant to deliver, we will keep it under review. There is a mid-term review of the common agricultural policy. I can confirm that we are opposed to quotas—we believe that they should go.

One of the problems of the dairy industry is that the impact of the various support mechanisms and subsidies, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud said, is a complete mess. It works against the interests of the industry. We must make progress on the mid-term review. We are supporting co-operatives and collaborative marketing in a range of ways. I recently had a meeting with OMSCO. I have been to Yeo Valley, and I confirm that it is doing its best to assist the organic sector and its customers. OMSCO is acting in a principled way, and is a first-class organisation in respect of products and operations.

It might be useful if I set out some of the reasons for the problems faced by the dairy industry, and explain what we can and cannot do. I do not want to mislead hon. Members about the Government's role concerning market intervention. We concede that it is a difficult time for the dairy industry. I accept all the points that people have made. It recovered in 2000 and that continued into 2001, but since then prices have fallen back to what we accept is an unsustainable level. The latest figures show that the farmgate price of milk is around 18.33p per litre, and there is a danger that it may drop further.

It is of course unfortunate that that has happened in the wake of foot and mouth, when many farmers are beginning to restock and recover. The fall in prices has happened for a number of complex reasons. It is, however, certainly a result of strong UK supply combined with weak demand, especially on world markets. During foot and mouth, there were fears that the cull of dairy cattle would lead to shortages of milk, and some foolish claims were made about a likely drop in milk production. We at DEFRA said at the time that we were not concerned about milk production because we did not think that it would be a major problem. Although there was a brief dip in production, farmers reacted to higher prices and the threat of a quota superlevy by increasing their levels of production. Furthermore, although 160,000 dairy cows were culled during the outbreak, the June 2001 census shows that the number of dairy cows in the UK fell by only 80,000 because animals that might otherwise have entered the over-30-months scheme were kept on for additional lactation. Despite losses early in the quota year, production for 2001-02 has exceeded that of the previous year, and production levels in the past few months have been at their highest for more than 10 years. That is a classic market supply situation in relation to production and demand.

At the same time, the situation on the world markets could hardly be worse. Markets were already weak because of economic problems in some key importing countries such as Brazil, and they collapsed further in the wake of 11 September. That had a noticeable effect on exports of dairy products from the European Union. The uncompetitive effect of the common agricultural policy on unsubsidised world markets has led to retention on EU markets, which already have a structural surplus of products that would otherwise have been exported. The effect has been to depress the price of butter and skimmed milk powder, which is a point that has already been made, to intervention levels across the EU—an intervention level in the UK is the same as that anywhere else in the EU. As a consequence, some producers have switched from making those products to producing cheese, which in turn has depressed that particular market. The whole thing is a problem.

What can the Government do? I accept that that is a fair question, but we also have to accept—I do not want to mislead hon. Members or the industry—that we do not run a command and control economy, and the Government cannot intervene to set prices. Price setting and price negotiation is rightly a matter between producers and purchasers, and the Government have a limited role. Of course, we accept that the dairy sector is part of a highly structured, interventionist industry. Since we came to power, we have reduced dairy farmers' costs by waiving cattle passport charges, removing dairy hygiene charges and abolishing the weight limit on cattle entering the over-30-months scheme. Furthermore, since 1999 we have paid more than £100 million in agrimonetary compensation to dairy farmers, both in 2000, when prices were low, and last year when the sector faced the particular threat of foot and mouth.

We made it clear, however, that that support should be regarded as short-term, transitional aid, which is the current agrimonetary position. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome was fair about that because he mentioned the Fontainebleau agreement and understands what the problem is. The idea that there is a pot of EU cash for which we can apply is totally wrong. It is not there for us because it was negotiated away as part of the rebate agreement. All we can do is apply for the right to pay subsidy through agrimoney, which we have to find ourselves. The sector must

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

therefore compete not only with other priorities, but with other groups in the agriculture sector that have no such opportunities, such as the pig sector.

Mr. Breed: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have only two minutes left and I am struggling as it is.

Agrimonetary compensation is a short-term option, not a sustainable, long-term interventionist policy. That is why, incidentally, the previous Government not only opposed it in the Council of Ministers, but did not pay it in 1996, when they could have done so.

In the one minute left, I have to say that I recognise that there is a terrible problem with TB. Please do not think that the Krebs experiment is focusing just on the issue of badgers and cattle. We are also working on vaccines and management, and we will make an announcement about other measures in May, but we have taken many tough decisions to keep that experiment on track. It has not been knocked off course by foot and mouth. We believe that it will produce important information about combating the disease. We take the matter seriously. We are combating the disease and we will continue to work with the industry to try to reduce it and minimise its impact.

Sure Start Programmes

11 am

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I am delighted to have this opportunity of a debate on sure start programmes. It is not unusual for families to experience problems and finding ways to help them is vital if we are to develop a strong society. I want to begin by looking at the sorts of problems and difficulties that some families face.

Let us take a hypothetical example put together from some of the experiences that I have seen families face. It involves a young couple with a baby. The mother, a young woman in her early 20s, was brought up by her father following the death of her mother. The father, also in his early 20s, was brought up in a household where his father drank and he was more likely to get a clip round the ear than a kind word. He was already developing a drinking habit of his own and the arrival of a baby boy into the family brings its own stresses and strains.

Before the little boy is very old, the family comes to the attention of social services. There were a few unexplained bruises and an unhappy child. The health visitor becomes concerned about his well-being. A few weeks later, the mother, frightened for her baby's safety, contacts social services. She tells the social worker that on returning to the house she found the baby crying and distraught with bruising around his mouth. He was a difficult feeder and when he would not take his bottle, his father forced it into his mouth.

After a long period, the baby is taken into care and later adopted. A year later the couple, having begun to resolve some of their problems, approach social services saying that they want to have another baby but are worried that it would be taken into care. With help and support over a number of months, the couple have a baby who remains at home and thrives. Through contact with a number of agencies they have learned how to look after a child, what needs it has, what behaviour to expect at what age and how to love the child and encourage it to learn from an early age. How much better for all concerned if that young couple had been able to get the help, support and advice on child care from the start without feeling that they were failing by asking for help.

Many situations are not as stark or as tragic as that. The child who enters school never having been given a book to look at, not knowing how to hold a pencil, never having learned how to play with other children, is held back from the start. Parents who had bad experiences at school may feel unable to approach a school. Perhaps the child misses out on the benefits of playgroup or nursery. When the child goes to school, the lack of parental support—from fear and mistrust—create difficulties for her and soon she begins to feel as negative about education as her parents did.

Of course, it is wrong to say that help is not available to families. All children receive visits from health visitors and, where problems are identified, other support is usually found. Such support is often scarce, however, and help is often available only for the most severe problems. As I outlined in my hypothetical example, that is sometimes too late for a child and a family. Many families struggle for years to support their

children and it can often be much later when problems arise. Children who have failed to gain the basic skills of reading and writing will struggle in school. They are unable to take part fully in educational activities and so may become disruptive or withdrawn. As they get older, they may opt out of school altogether. That dislocation from education can also be at the root of offending by young people.

Significant research also indicates that strong emotional links in families help children to grow up with a sense of their own worth. A respect for their community starts with the feelings engendered in the family. Many of the complaints that hon. Members receive are about the problem of young people creating disruption in their community. All our communities will benefit if we can find a way to prevent that from an early age.

It is often difficult to change the behaviour of young people by the time the education welfare officer, social services or the youth offending team become involved. It is easy to feel that it is too late for the young person. The costs to society and the young person are often great: additional costs are involved in trying to assist the young person once the problems have arisen. Common sense tells us that to invest in the support of families when children are young will save money when dealing later with the problems of young people and adults. We have evidence from the prison population. Many prisoners have difficulty with basic reading and writing, come from broken homes or have been brought up in care. None of that information is new, nor is it especially difficult to understand. However, doing something about it has been another matter. I therefore applaud the introduction of sure start, which is providing extra money to some of our most deprived communities to give all children a good start in life.

The importance of investing in families early in life has been known for years. It has been impossible to divert resources from dealing with older young people to preventing the next generation from suffering the same problems. The Government have not only recognised that, but through sure start are investing the additional money needed to begin to break the cycle.

The first benefit of sure start programmes is the ability to begin to intervene at an early stage. However, there are several other benefits. Sure start programmes bring together a range of support for children. A holistic view of the needs of children and their families is at the heart of the approach. I welcome the fact that the sure start objectives include the social and emotional development of children, their health, their ability to learn, and the wider importance of strengthening families and communities.

Sure start programmes need to bring together professionals from all the relevant areas to help families in a holistic way. It is vital that health professionals work with educationalists, who need to work with professionals from social services. The importance of voluntary organisations already working in the area must also be recognised. Sure start recognises the importance of the local community. It also recognises the significance of locating its programmes in the local community. From the start, communities must be encouraged to see the programme as theirs, and one that seeks to meet needs that they, as well as others, have defined.

The recently submitted delivery plan for the Gleadless valley sure start programme in my constituency sets out those aims clearly:

"The programme will ... seek to combat poverty and unemployment, breaking the cycle of deprivation and giving the community confidence to engage in the regeneration of their area ... The programme has a strong emphasis on engaging with local people and empowering them to contribute in the development of local services."

The Woodthorpe estate in my constituency is another good example of how the programme is working in practice. A couple of weeks ago, I visited a group of young mothers who are developing their own support group called "Survivors". The group was originally brought together through the neighbourhood support fund, which is supported by another local community organisation. The young women found the group beneficial, providing the help and advice they needed and enabling them to support each other. Through the group meetings, they realised that they were not on their own; there were other young women in the area with the same problems.

When I visited them a few weeks ago, they told me that not only did they feel more confident as parents and as women but, for the first time, they were able to tell other people what they needed. They knew their estate, its problems and the solutions for young women like themselves. They had made contact with their local sure start scheme and could say what services and support they needed.

That is an excellent example of people in the community helping to develop sure start, and of initiatives that help them to work together. Often, pots of money are given to different projects without there being a clear, overall strategy. On their own, such projects may have little impact, but by joining up the work of two different projects a lasting difference can be made to the lives of young women and their community.

The key to joining up those initiatives was not policy makers or local authority officers but putting power in the hands of local communities. Communities do not think like departments, they do not have the boundaries of budgets, structures and hierarchies; they see the issues and the problems and they begin to find their own solutions.

Sure starts provide the means to build on existing services that are working in the community. In Sheffield, home start is part of the sure start programmes. Home-Start is a national body, which is organised at a local level, providing volunteer support by mothers to other mothers—in some places, by parents to other parents. As a social services manager, I had a key role some years ago, in developing a home start for the area in which I worked. Using the model of local volunteers who had experience of bringing up children under five, parents experiencing difficulties with their own under-fives were able to receive support. It is recognised that everyone with small children needs support, but it is not always readily available to every parent. The service did not have the stigma associated with other services for families with problems and that is an essential aim for sure start projects.

Another feature of that home start project, which was funded through city challenge money, was building up the skills of volunteers to take a more active role in their community in their own right. It was successful in that

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aim, with many volunteers building on the training that they received through home start to take on courses or paid employment. Some went on to be committee members for the local home start and for other community organisations. If sure start programmes are also able to achieve that, they will help children to have a better start in life and communities to become stronger and develop ways of meeting their own needs.

It is important that sure start is not linked only with voluntary organisations. One of the benefits is that Government and local government departments can work through programmes to meet their aims and targets. For example, in Sheffield, the health authority's strategy for improving oral health included co-ordinated initiatives with sure start, providing funding for children up to two years old to have feeding cups, toothbrushes and paste by giving packs to parents.

There are many other good examples of sure start programmes throughout the country—we will no doubt hear more about them this morning—where services are working together to break down barriers between health, education and social services to ensure that all families and children get the support that they need, as early as possible.

I especially welcome the essential evaluation process that is built into all sure start programmes. It will produce information about initiatives that work and where sure start really makes a difference to families and children. The information will ensure that we know that the money currently allocated to sure start is doing what it set out to do; there will be an extensive body of knowledge of the different ways in which sure start programmes have sought to meet the shared objectives. There will also be knowledge of good practice and, most importantly, we will build up information about what really works.

On that point, I want to put some issues to the Minister. Sure start has, rightly, been widely welcomed. Few people could disagree with its aim and objectives. The additional finance to develop the programmes has been welcomed with open arms, with areas bidding for many more programmes than the Government have been able to fund.

I have set out today why I believe that sure start should achieve its aims and objectives. If it proves to be an effective model, how will the Government ensure that the lessons that are learned can be used in other areas? It is unlikely that there will be funding for every area that wants sure start or we think might need it. However, every area already has agencies working with families: health visitors, social and educational services, and community and voluntary organisations. How can those existing services learn the lessons to achieve the aims of sure start, and of all of us, for the development of all young children? In short, how can the sure start approach become mainstream provision for the benefit of all children?

Sure start rightly tries to move our society away from the situation in which, from the day a child is born, we can look at their family and neighbourhood and have a good idea of what chance they have of succeeding in life. However, we do not want sure start to create further divisions or children living on a sure start-supported estate to have a better chance than those on a next-door estate that does not have such an initiative. The Government should be commended for developing the sure start programme, but I want it to make a difference to an even greater number of children. If that can be achieved, we will be on our way to giving more children real chances in life and to building stronger communities and society.

11.17 am

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on securing the debate and adding to the number of women Members of Parliament in south Yorkshire in the 2001 election. I am pleased to be able to take part today because I am on the board of the Denaby sure start programme, which now includes Conisbrough. When the Denaby sure start first began as a trailblazer project, we were just part of a local authority ward. We have now been extended to cover the whole of the ward and include Conisbrough, which raises new challenges.

My hon. Friend is right. The Government's priority is to recognise that Governments can play a supportive role at the earliest points in children's lives, not by nannying, but by meeting the needs of parents in the community. We must recognise that parents play the most important role in a child's life and that they need support as well.

I welcome today's debate and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my fellow board members, with whom I have shared the ups and downs in trying to get the project off the ground in the past few years. I congratulate our director Julie Warren, who has just gone on maternity leave, and wish good luck to Jane Stanley, who has just been appointed as deputy and will cover many of her duties. I congratulate all the sure start staff and the volunteers from the community who have put so much effort and support into making the project such a success, in particular with the parenting group that we have formed in our board.

Our board made the early decision that it would consist of a third each from statutory agencies, community representatives—of which I am one—and parents. That brings its own challenge in bringing people together from different backgrounds and ensuring that they all have an equal say and stake in decisions.

I am sure that the Minister would agree that now is a good time to raise questions, some of which she may not be able to answer when she sums up today. With the roll-out of more sure starts—Doncaster will shortly have five—it is an opportune moment for hon. Members to talk about their experiences and views, which might be helpful in these pioneering days to the ongoing development of this policy area.

I realise that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall just raise a few issues. First, funding is important. Sure start has a good funding basis on which to develop, but the reality is that other funding is in force in the communities where sure start is located. Conisbrough and Denaby, for example, have neighbourhood renewal, health action zone and housing management programmes, a town centre partnership, the Wellgate community project, the community composting network, the organic community farm and more.

Additionally, we have the crime and disorder partnership, which covers Doncaster, the early years child care development partnership and more. Those are all worthy projects and it is proper that the Government should fund them.

In several respects, however, those projects are dealing with the same issues as sure start, albeit with a different focus. One issue in common is the regeneration of communities, which is about social as well as economic regeneration. I represent a former mining constituency, as does the Minister, which has just one working pit today. Several generations have not worked down the mine and are not part of the old welfare network that the National Coal Board and the unions provided for the mining communities. Today, communities are grappling to find a new sense of social cohesion for the future. New jobs and skills for the future are an important part of that.

Many of the neighbourhoods in which sure start was piloted, is situated or will be coming on line soon have different pockets of funding without much cohesion: the issues need to be brought together. The Government, the Minister and other Ministers must recognise that we must encourage linkage between the different regeneration groups.

Jane Stanley, the deputy director of our sure start, found out by chance that a community group wanted to develop a training centre. Child care, education and training are, alongside health support and everything else, an important part of sure start's ethos. The truth is that poverty is at the root of the most vulnerable families' problems. Education was probably hit and miss for many families and the thought of going back into education holds its own challenges for many.

Here is an obvious linkage: one community group could lead on that issue, but sure start should be part of the process. Funding may be available through objective 1 or neighbourhood renewal, but joined-up thinking about the linkage of issues is necessary. The last thing that we want is community groups, whether development groups or trusts, doing all the leg work in competing for funding, when there could be more cohesion and working together. That is important for sure start, which has received funding to pay for staff. Many other community groups do not have staff, but work purely on a volunteer basis.

We must ensure that sure start is not viewed as the big sister with all the money, staff and professionals somehow undermining the other voluntary groups. That is not good for people management or working together. We do not want the volunteer groups to feel intimidated by another organisation taking over. Our board has to grapple with issues as important as linkage, but there are lessons for other sure starts in Doncaster and throughout the country.

It is important to consider management. In Doncaster, we have five sure starts. Two of them—Conisbrough and Denaby sure start, with which I am involved, and Mexborough sure start—will be under the Doncaster West primary care trust. The other sure starts will come under NCH management. Clearly, if we have five sure starts in Doncaster, there will need to be an overall Doncaster liaison group through which they can work together. As other parts of south Yorkshire come online, there will be the potential for sub-regional liaison.

I hope that people will not misunderstand me. I do not want to create a mammoth bureaucracy, but the situation needs to be considered, and Government help would be useful with regard to ideas about how it can be managed. We want to avoid a revolving-door situation, in which the same people are always going to ever more meetings.

The chair of the early years child care and development partnership, Trevor Finch, attends our sure start board meetings. However, with five sure starts in Doncaster, how will that partnership meet the needs of all five? The answer may be to have a representative on the liaison group and somehow feed into that.

My next point concerns baseline data. At least one sure start was knocked back because of a poor business plan. A key element was whether the base data on the population's needs were accurate. That was not my scheme, but having been through the process, I have some sympathy. The collection of accurate data is fraught with difficulty. Much of the local authority data is not broken down within a ward—it is only on a ward basis—so trying to break data down into smaller communities is difficult, particularly when one is trying to set targets. In addition, I understand that information on child minders is hampered by data protection legislation.

In practice, not only sure start, but probably every regeneration bid—whether from the Home Office side, the Department for Education and Skills, or wherever—relies on a group or partnership spending a year auditing or drawing together data on crime, poverty and income. In that case, why not have a central information unit collate and update that information for each locality to stop everyone reinventing the wheel? All those different projects rightly have to assess the outcomes that they are achieving as compared with when they started, and a unit such as I have described would avoid the need for individual groups to scrabble around to pull information together.

On resources or support for family support strategies, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley about mainstreaming. As I have said many times, we have five sure starts in Doncaster. I like to think of them as five pebbles in a pond. They are all in different locations. I hope that the effect of their work will ripple outward, the ripples will at some point converge, and the whole of Doncaster will eventually be covered by the innovation and ideas that sure start brings to the discussion about supporting family strategies.

There are other issues. Within my sure start, health visitors have adapted their work. Some health visitors have seized that opportunity. Previously, they did not have the opportunity or funding, but now they have. Others have found it more difficult to make the transition. They have worked in a certain way and are not ready and I imagine that that is probably the case in a number of other fields that involve working with families, such as social services and education.

There are lessons to be learned about how we can take the new ways of working forward. That leads into the modernisation of the national health service and social services. The question is how we can take ideas from the new ways of working in sure start and apply them to national qualifications and training for all workers in

[Caroline Flint]

those different fields. Some of the best practice from sure start could be integrated into the national training accreditation for health visitors in future. That would be one way of mushrooming up some of that best practice.

Likewise, before sure start, we traditionally had family centres in Doncaster, and we still have them. Much good work is done in those centres, but they are sometimes not helped by the perception that they represent an old model of local government delivery in this field. There are some fantastic people working in those centres, who, without the funding of sure start, are trying to do what it is doing. How can we embrace them in our family support network? How can we give them a chance to reinvent themselves, even if, in many cases, they are doing very good work?

On links with common health messages, sure start deals daily with drugs and teenage pregnancy. Many groups and organisations, and those involved with healthy living and healthy schools programmes, should talk to sure start about what is happening to the people whom they meet. Those groups are often not consulted or brought into the loop, although their input is valuable to the bodies and organisations that lead the way in such subjects. Government funding should require sure start to become one of the partners, or at least a consultee on such subjects, when that is appropriate.

The Government are achieving a lot and are prioritising family support, although every family is different. It is difficult for the public to get a total picture of what is going on, as there are so many initiatives and projects. Families do not fit into nice neat boxes or have, for example, only pre-school children. They may have both children at primary school and teenagers, and grandparents may be involved. Our sure start is meant to be for pre-school children, and it is, but we often have to engage all members of the family so that they can understand what we are trying to do and how we can bring them in. There are also those families in the community, particularly of an older generation, that no longer have children living with them.

Now is a good time to take stock of sure start and how it links with the national child care strategy. I am delighted that we have a full-time day nursery as part of our sure start building. However, that is not the end of the matter; we need to have all the other services in the community as well. The building is one thing, but it is the services outside the building and how we link them up with other services that support families that are important. That is a challenging piece of work. I have gained tremendously from being involved in my sure start project. I congratulate the Government on the initiative, and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley for arranging the debate.

11.32 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I join in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on initiating this important discussion. It is nice to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) because we paupers in the 175 square miles of Lancaster and Wyre do not have a single sure start project. I fervently wish I did; I am here partly to ask why we do not have one, as we need several.

I have managed family centres and child minders, have been part of local education authority partnerships, and have worked in community development, and I am particularly envious of places that have sure start programmes. They are a classic example of how the Government are working to attack poverty and some of the most difficult and entrenched problems associated with it. Sure start is the epitome of good community development. It is an anti-poverty strategy that empowers families and enables generations to move out of the cycle of deprivation lasting decades, and it enables them to improve their communities and their lives.

Sure start programmes are a way of transforming the ghastly self-serving bureaucracies with which the public sector can become engaged. The public sector can challenge them and change them into powerful agents on behalf of communities. They seem to me to be a radical way of approaching service development, and of ensuring that such services strongly reflect the needs, views and ideas of the local communities that they serve. Such projects are needed if we are going to establish responsive services that listen to and learn from the people on the ground who experience the daily reality of their communities' poverty and deprivation. They are also needed if we are going to attack the professional and organisational boundaries that often get in the way of the provision of really good services to people.

There is not a sure start programme in my constituency, but I am married to someone who managed one until a few months ago—I sometimes felt that I was married to a sure start programme—and that has left me with a good impression. Sure start works. It is a model to which communities respond. People understand what it is trying to achieve; the residents of places that have suffered most from long-term unemployment, poverty, poor services, community breakdown and deprivation recognise that a programme that will focus on the needs of a new generation can help their communities to escape from the isolation and alienation that they have experienced and that, therefore, it is worth supporting. Such communities recognise that what is needed is a long-term approach to difficulties that have been created over the long term—difficulties that are inter-generational.

Some of the problems that I have come across are caused by the difficulties of establishing sure start in areas that have several levels of local government. That produces disadvantages and they are particularly acute where a shire county council links with a district county council.

Other messages that I have received point to things that need to be worked on as a sure start project develops. Many of them refer to the quality of local people's commitment to sure start; it is important that there is a strong local partnership to enable sure start to get under way, and it is essential that Government and the sure start organisation—and all of us, in fact—ensure that the true partners are working coherently, so that sure start works.

I have heard about some of the difficulties that have been created when partners have not been prepared to take responsibility for crucial issues, such as the insurance of staff. I have also heard about partners who do not face problems and issues together, but pass the buck on to others, and about partners who have felt that they did not need to continue their investment in other

services, because there is a sure start project in the area. That entirely belies what sure start is trying to achieve. I have also heard about poor communication between partners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley was talking about several subjects: the sort of information that is needed; the impact of sure start; and the needs of particular communities. Although those are extremely important, politicians might have a different perspective and feel the need to show success, which is not always helpful to people working on the ground. Several problems with which projects are engaged are deep-seated, profound and long-standing. Even with the best will in the world, all the resources in the world and the skills and experience that go into the projects, the problems will not be addressed immediately. Dealing with the problems requires a great deal of confidence and relationship building, in addition to the empowerment of powerless communities and the building of their resources.

My impression of all this is that perhaps too much information is sought and that attempts are made to measure success too early in the process. Given the high standard of quality and commitment of the people working in sure start whom I have met, perhaps we should relax, empower and help those people and trust their professional abilities a little more. The model is good and there is a good way of working that is tried and tested. There are clear ways forward.

My hon. Friend mentioned what happens if some parts of an area have a sure start programme while others do not. As I said, I feel that acutely. Although it might be unrealistic to think that we could have a sure start programme in every community that needs one, the example of sure start should help us to transform our general services. We need services that focus on the needs, wishes and feelings of people in the community. We need services that listen to children and young people. We need services that are not interested in professional boundaries and barriers, but that are prepared to work together throughout disciplines and organisations to focus on individuals in need in our communities. There must be modernisation of the public services that deal with such issues, and projects such as sure start must be involved in early years partnerships, regeneration opportunities and a holistic emphasis on community development.

I want a huge transformation of local government services. I would like children's departments to be re-established and transformed to bring together not only local government services, education and social services, but aspects of health services. The way in which sure start operates is a good model for the future, but we can progress further and build on the success that has been achieved.

11.44 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I do not want to repeat the eloquent praise of the concept of sure start that we heard from the previous three speakers. I want to focus instead on the precise selection of communities that would be served by sure start. If my hon. Friend the Minister who is to respond to the debate has a long and detailed memory, she will remember that I raised that matter some years ago. My constituency is mainly rural, with small towns. The concentration of deprivation that is usually a sign of a requirement for a sure start programme is difficult to establish. Such deprivation is often concentrated in a corner of a rural ward or in a small village, and the sure start programme is not well adapted to deal with that requirement.

That position has now changed substantially and, last week, I moved ahead of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) because we now have a mini-sure start programme that is funded within south Derbyshire. That is excellent news and we are all delighted about it. It will be located in the area where local councillors, the local infants school, community groups that serve the estates and I lobbied for it initially. We are celebrating.

However, it is extremely difficult to get such schemes off the ground. It was not our first attempt to establish a scheme. We tried earlier and one of the difficulties that we faced was that the mini-sure start scheme offers only two years of guaranteed funding. That is an intimidating barrier for a low-income community. It means that, after two years, the services to be gained from sure start will not necessarily be funded by the public purse; they may have to be funded through a variety of means that will involve payments from the local community or additional well-resourced, fund-raising activity that is targeted through the new opportunities fund or other sources of funding.

Many lottery projects in my constituency face that difficulty. The resources of volunteers who can put together well-organised, fund-raising schemes are scarce, and to be faced with yet another large bill in two years put them off the initial project. They said that they could not proceed on that basis and did not want to land themselves with a liability that they might later regret.

There were further hurdles this time round. Although many encouraging noises were made about the early years partnership that was sponsoring the project, there was a block on the money coming through. I commend Derbyshire county council for its endorsement of the project. It loaned money to the partnership to purchase the site adjacent to the nursery that was being erected by private funds in Woodville to ensure that the project was kept on track. It also retained the builders working on the nursery, which will be finished in August, to erect the building for the mini-sure start programme in the area. The council played a critical role and provided the sellotape to ensure that the project goes through to its eventual outcome in January of next year for 200 local children and their parents in the Woodville and Hartshorne area of south Derbyshire. It will be of huge benefit.

I am not trying to make out that my constituency is the most deprived in the country. I am pleased to say that it is not. However, Woodville and Hartshorne certainly have a higher concentration of unemployment and poor health indicators than elsewhere in south Derbyshire. They are on the edge of the Swadlincote urban area and that has a higher concentration of young parents, too, which is typical within Derbyshire. Those are all reasons why a mini-sure start programme would benefit the community and I am grateful that one has been established. It has proved hard to obtain. In some ways, those difficulties resulted in a tougher and more resilient process than might have existed in other circumstances.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

An important private sector partnership is involved. Hermitage Day Nurseries is constructing a building that will provide 90 places locally, 48 of which are reserved for the local community. A close relationship is expected with the sure start programme, which will run from the building next door. The early years partnership and its members played a critical part in pulling together the scheme and making it work. As I said, the county council has been critical in trying to ensure that the scheme stays on track in spite of hiccups and difficulties.

The local infant school and the pre-schools are heavily involved in making the scheme a working reality in the community. I am certain that it will be a tremendous success and I shall be delighted to see progress well beyond the two years for which it is guaranteed. However, such projects require a support mechanism to ensure their continuity, provided that they meet our performance targets. In my area, the mechanism that should be considered is support for the early years partnership, to ensure some continuity of funding for the project into the future.

It would be a tragedy if, having won what is a small victory in the greater scheme of things but a large success in such communities, that victory were snatched away in two years' time, when significant progress was obviously being made to meet our goals. That progress involves improving parents' skills and the expected outcomes of children served by the project, and, as has been said, increasing the local community's resilience through witnessing a success in their midst that is brought about and managed by their own efforts. That must not be placed at risk by short-term, pump-priming funding, however well intentioned that model might be. I hope that the Minister will offer some thoughts about how that support can be maintained in future.

11.52 am

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am pleased to be taking part in the debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on having secured it. I have two sure start programmes in my constituency and want to make the case for a further one. I therefore have some way to go to emulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint).

The first programme was in the Camborne area. Shortly after the 1997 election, I visited the Trevu centre—a former school that had become a derelict building—and walked into a school holidays club. Cynthia Watmore and others present said, "What we'd really like, Candy, if your Government is really committed to tackling the problems of the Grenville estate and the Camborne area, is something that starts before the child is born, and goes right the way through, rather than waiting to tackle the problem until the child gets to school. Wouldn't it be great if we took this building and did something really creative with it?" I look at it now, and it is amazing. I wish that my hon. Friend the Minister could come and see it, perhaps on a visit to Cornwall. It is a true inspiration and shows what can be done when public authorities have turned their back on a building, saying that they can do no more with it. We have changed it.

Just over year ago, when the Trevu site was being regenerated and rehabilitated, it was brought home to me how such a project can impact on people. I went to the Grenville estate in Camborne. Sitting in one of the front gardens was a group of young women, most of whom were pregnant and had children at their feet. I went up to them, as one does in politics, and said, "Hi, I'm Candy. Will you be going out to vote?" They said, "No. Why should we? You never do anything for us." I pointed over to the school site and said, "You go in there in a few months. See what a difference there is and be part of it."

One young woman was quite unpleasant to me, if the truth be known, which is why she sticks in my mind—such people tend to. Amazingly, when I went back to the Trevu centre a few weeks ago to open the toy library, she was helping to run it. She was smarter and brighter and her child was engaged and actively involved. She was also there on a subsequent visit, taking a leading role.

Sure start is about taking and helping a person to emerge almost chrysalis-like from someone who sat in front of the television watching "EastEnders" all the time to someone engaged in the community and taking part in computer training, which is tremendous. The Government should be congratulated. Instead of her child growing up in an environment in which nothing ever changes, both child and mother have an opportunity and expectation for the future. Good on the Government—that is what I say.

The sure start in Camborne links into other programmes introduced by the Government, such as the working families tax credit, the health and education action zones and wider regeneration of the community. I genuinely believe that children's expectations and horizons grow when one's neighbourhood and opportunities are improved.

My second sure start is still at an embryonic stage. It is based in Penryn and the Beacon estate in Falmouth, of which I hope the Minister will be aware. Although Penryn is further down the line, people who know about the subject are aware that Hazel Stukley and others in Falmouth have done some trailblazing work around which sure start and home start have begun. They started their work during the previous Tory Government because they were so frustrated that nothing was happening in one of the poorest wards in the whole country. They said, "Enough is enough. We must start turning this around." As health visitors, they started programmes that built on others, pyramid-like. Dentistry came into the estate for the first time. Eating problems were tackled. Things happened incrementally and grew.

When I look at the Beacon estate now, there has been a remarkable change. I visited a couple of weeks ago and pay tribute to Councillor Gerald Quin Chee, Mary May and Lesley Trenchard, who are doing so much in the community. I used to be a social worker and I do not believe in putting sticking plaster on social problems, which is one reason why I went into politics. We must solve the problems at their foundations and roots. Sure start is all about that. It is not sticking plaster. It says, "Let's tackle deprivation and problems and make a real impact on social and health care, employment and your child's expectations." I am bowled over by what is happening.

One area of my constituency is not part of the wonderful scheme. As the Minister will know, my constituency is one of the poorest. We "enjoy" objective 1 status—the highest level of structural funding in Europe—because we are among the poorest. It is even mooted that, because the rest of the country is soaring away and Cornwall is doing great things, we are lagging further behind and, despite enlargement, we may qualify for objective 1 in the next round, which is very depressing. There is a feel-good feeling in the county, we are moving forward, but despite that, we still lag behind. In north Kerrier, one of the poorest parts of the poorest county, are the Redruth and Pool areas, which link across to Camborne. Camborne, Pool and Redruth are former tin-mining communities in the lee of the Carn Brea hills. Allegedly, the people of Camborne do not talk to the people of Redruth, and vice versa, although that is changing, but the communities share high unemployment and great social deprivation.

I understand that Redruth is one area being considered for that status in the last round, and I make a plea to the Minister for it to be included, to tackle problems in the foundation way that I have discussed. I strongly urge her to look sympathetically at Redruth's needs. I thank her and the Government enormously for everything else that is going on.

12 noon

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): May I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on instigating the debate. I hope that the Minister will listen to many of the comments that she and other hon. Members have made. Although the Liberal Democrats have praised the sure start initiative from its inception, problems arise from it and there are issues to be addressed. Many of those have been referred to.

Ensuring that children have the very best start in life has always been a central plank of our policy. My background is in architecture. I know that the foundations of a building have to be down before the superstructure can be put up. What happens in early years is like those foundations, and the best foundations are required. We have always given great prominence to the importance of identifying at the earliest possible age children with particular needs and providing remedies with the potential to meet those needs so that they can move forward with their peers and take the fullest possible advantage of their education and social opportunities.

That should mean that many children who might otherwise face considerable difficulties have the chance to grow up as well-rounded and productive members of society. For as many years as I care to remember, we have argued for the integration of care and education, and multi-agency involvement in the early support of a child and its family.

Another principle dear to us is that decision making should happen at the lowest possible level. Sure start meets all those criteria. It is a well-founded scheme in its planning and delivery and it is making real differences to the lives of many children and families. I hope that it will go on to benefit many more. The Government must be praised for that. For too long, Governments of all colours have tended to tell people what is good for them, whether they like it or not. Some parts of the Government still tend to do that, although not in this case. The requirement to involve local people, especially those who will benefit from sure start schemes, in the planning and delivery of services as far as possible departs significantly from that tendency. The extensive consultation required, and the fact that users of the services all over the country are involved, should be a great source of satisfaction to the Government.

Of course, it is difficult to get such people involved in what may be an intimidating experience for them. It must be very difficult for a layperson to sit on a committee of health care and education professionals, planning the delivery of multimillion-pound schemes. However, on the principle that large oaks from little acorns grow, it is hoped that, once service users get the taste for being able to influence directly what is on offer, many more will wish to be involved.

As an aside, it is worth saying that the Government should pay attention to what is happening in that respect and extend the principle to other areas of their policy. All over the country, Liberal Democrat councillors have found that consulting and involving local people in decision making makes the quality of service provision, as measured by its relevance to the lives of local people, rise considerably. Long may that principle continue at all levels of government.

One criticism of sure start is that it was originally concentrated in urban areas. The Government responded to that criticism, however, and the problem has been tackled. Sure start projects have recently been introduced in rural areas and about 50 schemes are in operation or at the planning stage. We welcome that significant improvement in the extension of sure start ideas, but with one or two reservations. In particular, the level of funding is rather low and the duration of the schemes is rather short.

The Liberal Democrats have often drawn attention to the fact that considerable deprivation exists in many rural areas and we are pleased that the Government have recognised its existence—particularly since the foot and mouth disaster, which has had such an impact in many remote areas. The nature of such areas means, however, that it is often more difficult and expensive to deliver the quality services necessary. Remote areas have transport difficulties and problems of isolation affect precisely those families who are most likely to benefit from sure start. In addition, consulting and helping such people is an order of magnitude more difficult.

That is not to say that innovative schemes have not been devised or that local people have not been involved. Dedicated and creative people have done a great deal of significant work to overcome shortcomings. The sure start unit approved an interesting scheme that was developed in north Allerdale, in north Cumbria—an area that was devastated by foot and mouth disease. In the light of the large and scattered area covered by the project, the local steering group decided that it would be difficult, if not impossible to avoid the stigma of sure start provision to the disadvantaged. It has therefore devised a scheme to seek external funding to make services available to all the children and their families. That has meant raising the same amount of external revenue funding as is provided with sure start and a considerable amount of

[Richard Younger-Ross]

extra capital funding. That will greatly benefit all the children and families in the area and provide extra specialist help for target families. It is a credit to the sure start unit that it recognised the innovative nature of the north Allerdale scheme and gave its approval. I am sure that the scheme will be closely watched and that lessons will be learned from it.

I referred to the problem of funding for small sure start programmes and more needs to be done in that regard. The small schemes are funded for only two years, and there has been no indication of whether funding will continue after that initial period. It makes little sense to devise a programme to support children from birth to three years old, only to end it after two years. That contrasts with the full sure start schemes, which run for 10 years and receive considerably more funding. Funding for small sure start programmes may have been intended to cover the period until the end of the current comprehensive spending review and may be extended in the next review—I certainly hope so. It would be a great shame and a disservice to rural areas if schemes were cut just when they were becoming effective.

Much of the criticism of time scales would disappear if the Government gave a commitment to extend the schemes beyond the current two-year period. Could the Minister give such an undertaking? If so, small sure start schemes would take their place alongside the full schemes as effective and innovative solutions to long-term pressing problems. Without such an undertaking, however, they will be short-term fixes only with a lasting impact on only relatively few children.

12.8 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on initiating a good debate in what has been a pleasant atmosphere. The concerns and criticisms that have been expressed have been sufficiently benign for the Minister to be quite relaxed when she replies. By and large, she has responsibility for what we all consider to be a good programme. We all want improvements to be made to it, but she will recognise that it is well supported and has great practical effect, judging from the local examples that we have been given.

Sure start is a key part of the Government's anti-poverty strategy, and I shall remark on that as well as on sure start itself. That we seriously consider poverty and recognise the complexity in putting forward solutions and ideas is self-evidently a good thing, but it is fraught with hazards. Among those, is the party political approach that seems to deny that anyone else cares about the subject, or that anything was done before certain key dates, which normally coincide with the election of parties to Government. Another hazard is to become too attached to particular policies as "the answer", although the evidence might be piling to suggest that it is not.

What depresses all of us, whenever the issue is addressed, is to recognise that the map of areas of relative deprivation throughout the United Kingdom shows little change over a century. In a country that has become progressively wealthier, material poverty is markedly different from that of previous generations, but the poverty of hope, aspiration and achievement is perhaps more acute now than ever before; that so much of it seems to be concentrated in children and young people is doubly hard to bear.

There have never been such opportunities—and many people grasp them—but what is it that prevents some from even dreaming of the heights to which they could aspire, let alone achieving the steps along the way? My background in the subject is that I was a Minister in the Department of Social Security with responsibility for low-income benefits and poverty issues between 1992 and 1995. Between 1994 and 1997, I had responsibility for city challenge projects in Hulme in Manchester, in Bolton, in Blackburn and in Wigan. I was therefore able to make judgments at the time, and to have made them since, on which national and local policies have been successful. Nothing has yet convinced me that there is one simple answer, as others who have described the long-term nature of the problem have confirmed this morning.

Sure start has always struck me as a sensible initiative. To bring together a variety of bodies that are concerned with the welfare of the child at the earliest stage, in places associated with poor expectations and outcomes, has obvious merits. I look forward to hearing further about the evaluations when completed. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley gave graphic examples of why the scheme was necessary in her area. She described family breakdown, those in difficulty with their children, parents who find the most basic things difficult, and the lack of knowledge about what to do in every possible circumstance. She also spoke about delinquency. All in all, sure start has made a difference to her, and the way in which she described that suggests that she wants the lessons learned to be accepted elsewhere.

The hon. Lady was followed by the hon. Members for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) and for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross). In various ways, they described how the scheme could be reformed or how some schemes could be introduced to particular places. I was pleased that a couple of hon. Members mentioned the problem of trying to deal with indices of poverty in areas that are generally well off, but which have poorer pockets. I suffered from that, as you will recall, Mr. Winterton—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but in this place I have a particular title that has been hard-earned over many years—additional Deputy Speaker.

Alistair Burt: Mr. additional Deputy Speaker, I shall place both knees on my chair to address you so that I strike the right pose. You will recognise, as you are from the north-west, that one can represent an affluent constituency, but still find pockets of deprivation within it. We would all be pleased if better targeting dealt with that.

The sure start initiative seems to pick up one of the key lessons learned from initiatives such as city challenge: attending to the bricks and mortar of environmental improvements is only one part of a

complex jigsaw. The more difficult part is to affect hearts and minds, to change attitudes and expectations, and—with sympathy and great effort—to work on changing people.

The initiative must also take note of the second most important lesson, which, as the hon. Member for Teignbridge said, is one that the Government sometimes find hard to take in: control must be relinquished to allow people as much power as possible to effect the most important changes in their lives. It was noticeable that hon. Members who spoke of successful schemes thanked those who were involved locally and gave credit to people who were the inspiration behind several of the initiatives.

We also need to be honest about the time scale. It is unfashionable for politicians to admit that anything they want to achieve will take longer than the term of a Parliament; hon. Members referred to that. Let me be doubly courageous. First, the Prime Minister was courageous and right to break the rule when he talked about ending child poverty over a 20-year period. Secondly, even that time scale is not long enough. It will take longer than that for certain changes really to take root, and they have to last more than one generation.

I am reminded of the need to work for a longer period by an article that appeared in *The Times* today about Bob Holman, whose name is familiar to many of us who deal with poverty issues. I first went to see Bob on his estate in 1992, when I had responsibility for benefits, and saw some of his work. Ten years later, he is still doing essentially the same work and demonstrating the benefit of continuity. The newspaper article includes a quote from him:

"Our work is long term. You cannot solve problems in three years here. You have got to grow up with people. You have got to grow up with families. It just doesn't seem to be within the grasp of politicians who want it now and who want to work on short-term targets. It's a different ball game."

I get the glimmer of a sense that dealing with poverty issues is not a short-term game. All hon. Members can agree on that, and that is welcome.

However, may I briefly flag up two areas of concern, both of which might undermine the child poverty reduction initiatives, of which sure start is such an important part. I alluded to the first earlier; namely, the danger of being overly attached to certain policies, despite the evidence. Last week, the Government published data on child poverty that revealed that they had failed to meet their claim to have taken 1.2 million children out of poverty in their first term. I refer to a press release from the Child Poverty Action Group:

"The Government has failed to meet its target for reducing child poverty, official figures published today reveal. The figures, which give a snap shot of child poverty before the last election, reveal that child poverty fell by only 500,000 between 1996/97 and 2000/01. This is against the measure of poverty which the Government has consistently used in setting its targets."

Without dwelling too much on that, may I suggest that one reason for that is the myriad changes to low-income benefits, particularly an over-reliance on tax credits.

The Minister will be aware of criticisms that have been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who is particularly concerned about the way in which tax credits have been used. They have not fulfilled the objectives that we would all like to achieve of relieving child poverty and contributing to anti-poverty measures.

For example, between 1999 and 2003, the Government will have successively abolished family credit, introduced working families tax credit, introduced disabled persons tax credit, introduced child care tax credit, introduced employment credit, abolished married couples allowance, introduced children's tax credit, introduced baby tax credit, abolished working families tax credit, abolished disabled persons tax credit, abolished children's tax credit, abolished baby tax credit, introduced child tax credit, abolished employment credit and introduced working tax credit. In all, between those years, the Government will have introduced five new tax credits for families, scrapped four of them and then introduced two new ones in April 2003.

It is no wonder that, A, people are confused, B, the take-up has not been as good as it should be, C, some of the benefits are not going to the most needy and, D, there is a worry about introducing more tax credits, because they are not actually doing the job that they are designed to do. I would be grateful if the Minister addressed the issue and explained where it fits in with the present anti-poverty strategy. Perhaps it is time to review it.

My last point is even more difficult. I introduce it gently, but it is very important. At some stage, any serious attempt to lift children out of poverty will have to examine the damage caused by broken relationships and reconsider the promotion of marriage. No one doubts the emotional and financial damage done to children and families through the breakdown of relationships. However, strong evidence is emerging from a series of studies that points to the advantage of marriage over all other forms of relationship for positive outcomes for children in relation to health, achievement, propensity to crime and so on.

Let me be very clear about what I am and am not saying. We have moved on from taking the side of marriage from a moral-authoritarian point of view that one ought to marry because it is right, and one should be condemned if one does not do so. I do not advocate that attitude. Those who advocate marriage are not simply putting forward a rosy, starry-eyed view. Marriages are rarely perfect, but successful ones weather the sort of storms in which other relationships may break down, in which case the most vulnerable are left more vulnerable still.

Can people have successful relationships outside marriage? Yes, of course they can, and that is their choice. Can children be brought up successfully in relationships outside marriage? Yes, of course they can. There is, however, growing evidence that the best outcomes for children come from married relationships. If we are really serious about the issue, it is time not for a particular political party to claim that idea, but for all of us to recognise that strong families, which can exist with good values from any class or background, need support and advocacy.

Bearing that in mind, will the Minister say why the Government have withdrawn their support for national marriage week, which the Lord Chancellor's Department has previously supported? It could easily be

[Alistair Burt]

supported within the Government's existing policy of not distinguishing between different forms of stable relationship. If we are looking at what works and what works best, the evidence is growing in favour of marriage as the most secure base for children. It is time that we all re-examined our attitude to that in a non-pejorative, rational, straightforward manner. With that, and the continuing successful work being done by sure start, the future for anti-child poverty measures in this country is quite bright.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) on securing this debate and choosing to raise an issue that is immensely important to young children and their families, and will continue to be important to them for many years to come.

It is a great privilege to work on the sure start programme because it has immense support throughout the country, and it is clearly supported by Members of Parliament of all parties. It is unusual when the most hostile question that one gets from MPs is, "Can we have one in my area, please?" That is a tribute to the immense amount of work that is being done throughout the country by the sure start programmes. I also pay tribute to Naomi Eisenstadt, the head of the sure start unit, and her team, which does an immense amount of work on a new programme that is difficult because it requires a new way of working. We sometimes overestimate how easy it is to do things such as sure start that have so much support because everybody wants to do them and thinks that they are valuable.

Sure start produces a lot of challenges in local areas and it requires many changes in the way in which things are traditionally done. It is an immense tribute to the huge amount of work that is being done in those areas that the sure start programme is gaining so much support. Some of the most powerful evidence is the anecdotal information that one hears when one visits sure start programmes. I was given a scrapbook that had a series of pictures and images that local children and parents had collected. It included the phrase, "Please, please keep our sure start going because it has changed my life."

I have heard very strong statements from parents. I visited the Nottingham sure start, where one woman said that she had been on the housing transfer list for a long time. She had been waiting for many years and had just been offered a house in another area. She had been desperate to get off her estate for a long time, but because sure start had arrived she rejected the move because she wanted to stay. Having sure start facilities and sure start support on her doorstep was making a huge difference to her family life, and a huge difference to her wanting to stay in that area. That is powerful testimony to what sure start is doing. Of course, it is not all that easy. There are real challenges, and many hon. Members raised issues that we need to address. However, sure start is working and making a real difference to family lives.

Sure start was established in April 1999 after work in the comprehensive spending review showed that there were alarming disparities between the life chances of children in poverty and those living in more affluent circumstances. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley described many of the problems that sure start aims to address. One key issue is the difference in life chances for those growing up on a low income compared with everyone else, which can be observed in children when they are as young as 22 months. One can see the differences in what is happening to children very early in their lives, and then see those differences widening as they grow up. It is also about recognising that universal mainstream services often do not do well enough at supporting those in poverty in the lowest income areas, who often do not receive the same services as everyone else. We must recognise that it is part of a broader strategy, as many hon. Members suggested, to abolish child poverty altogether.

Abolishing child poverty is about not just raising family income, but addressing and raising opportunities. The key elements of sure start are: focusing on the under-fours for the first time, focusing on parents and communities, and what parents want in their local areas, focusing mainstream services on deprivation and integrating services, while ensuring that they are universal and non-stigmatising. We have set clear targets for sure start for social and emotional development, health, the ability to learn, and strengthening families and communities. During the first five-year period, £1.4 billion is going into sure start. That will set up 500 sure start programmes—437 have been announced already and 259 of those programmes have been approved. We expect to reach about a third of children under four who are living in poverty.

I accept the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) in favour of a further sure start for Redruth. I also understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) was seeking more sure start support for his constituency. Hon. Members will understand that the way in which the sure start programmes are targeted is to recognise areas of deprivation and concentrate on them. The sure start programmes that are already up and running are having an impact on the increasing number of child care places and other related issues.

It takes a long time for sure start to have an impact. Ultimately, we are concerned with making an impact on children in 10, 20 or 30 years. We have a substantial research programme to monitor and evaluate sure start programmes—not just what they are doing during the next couple of years, but what they will do for the long term. We will need to learn those lessons.

I particularly want to deal with the points that many hon. Members have made about where sure start goes next. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) said that there were problems about sure start that had to be addressed. They are not necessarily problems; I think that they are limitations of the existing sure start programme. We must recognise that the programme cannot do all of the things that we want it to do. The question is, what are the next steps for the programme?

We must recognise the issues identified by my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) as regards areas where there are smaller pockets of deprivation. What can one do about the situation in Doncaster, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member

for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)? There are four sure start programmes there already. How do we link them up to cover all of the areas in between? How do we reach children living on low income who do not live in areas of concentrated deprivation, which are the most suitable areas for the current model of sure start?

We have already examined how one might build on the model of sure start by considering the rural pilots, for example. We are taking sure start into 13 rural areas, and four more are being developed. Those areas face different types of problems, which are not about simply taking parents and children to sure start services. We need to take sure start and mainstream services to parents and children in those rural areas. I accept the points that hon. Members have made about the mini-sure starts. Those must consider the long-term issues, not just a two-year period. The programme that we have set up so far is not the solution to the problem of small pockets of deprivation. It is a £22 million limited-pilot programme, from which we will learn lessons.

We know that there are people who live in small pockets of deprivation that we cannot reach through the existing sure start programme. We must learn how to reach them. Our long-term aim should be to provide sure start support for all children who are living on low income, wherever they may be. The challenge for us is to establish how to do that. One method is the mainstreaming programme, which is relevant to the situation in Doncaster. Pilot areas in Birmingham, Manchester, Leicester, Sunderland, Southampton, North Tyneside and Rochdale are looking at trying to mainstream the lessons from their sure start programmes and spread them across the whole area. They will pick them up in the mainstream services. I can certainly send my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley more information about those because she rightly raises some complicated issues.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) raised a series of tangential issues concerning child poverty and marriage. He should take those up with the relevant Ministers. Sure start should support all families, whatever their background and status. We must learn from what sure start is doing at present. A lot of progress is being made. We have many lessons for the future too.

Larne Magistrates Court

12.30 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the issue of the future of Larne magistrates court and to comment on the Northern Ireland Court Service's consultation document, "Court Accommodation in Northern Ireland 2001-2010". I wish to focus on the need to retain the Larne courthouse, which, among others that I cannot speak about from personal experience, is under consideration for closure.

I first want to record my appreciation of the willingness of the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor' s Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton) in accepting my invitation to visit Larne courthouse. The interest she showed when she met the mayor of Larne, Councillor Fleck, chief executive Colm McGarry and the courthouse staff who provided a conducted tour and answered her probing questions was much appreciated. The consultation document has succeeded in stimulating discussion and public debate on court accommodation in Northern Ireland. The aims listed in paragraph 1.3 of the consultation document will have broad support. The Northern Ireland Court Service should plan to provide high-quality court accommodation in Northern Ireland; it should give the public value for money in the overall cost of building and refurbishment programmes; it should use resources sensibly; it should improve the quality of facilities for everyone who uses the courts and ensure that courthouses are reasonably accessible.

I am concerned that the burden of expense that would transfer to the least well off clients served by Larne courthouse could not be justified by a caring Government who claim to defend those least able to defend themselves in society. I challenge the assertion that facilities at Larne courthouse are poor and that there is little room for improvement. The special needs of children, families and the disabled within the justice system can be best served only by retention of Larne courthouse. It has the essential facilities to meet local needs and other desirable facilities could be added at modest expense.

I have served as an elected councillor in Larne, in the buildings opposite and adjacent to Larne courthouse, since 1973. I have never had a single complaint about the courthouse facilities. However, I cannot say the same about the medicine prescribed by the resident magistrates for those found guilty in court. Solicitors and barristers who use Larne courthouse regularly do not consider the current facilities to be sub-standard. When I contacted local legal practices for opinions on the consultation document, I received supportive replies. O'Rourke, McDonald and Tweed solicitors told me:

> "In all our time of using this Courthouse, we have not had any complaints from our clients in relation to the facilities at the courthouse. As solicitors, we also do not have any problems with the facilities at the courthouse and have had no difficulties whatsoever carrying out duties there. Given that neither our clients nor ourselves nor, as far as we understand, our local colleagues, have had any problems with the facilities, we would suggest that, even though it is not a modern courthouse, its facilities are more than adequate for members of the public and professionals alike."

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

A representative of Johnston and Courtney solicitors agreed with that statement, as did McAllister, Keenan and Co. solicitors, whose experience of Larne courthouse is definite. McAllister, Keenan and Co. told me:

"As regular practitioners within this Court, we have never had any complaints from any of our clients in relation to any of the facilities. There may be a way in which the Courthouse facilities could be extended . . . [and] . . . some extra space could prove to be useful."

However, their next observation is significant:

"It is our experience that no matter what the facilities of any given building, people and products expand in order to consume the space available."

Although Larne is not a modern courthouse, the facilities are more than adequate for members of the public and professionals alike. The question has been asked locally whether the Northern Ireland Court Service is writing off Larne as not important enough to have its own courthouse. Life-long residents, runners into Larne like myself who have worked in the borough for more than 40 years, and the borough council, which represents the whole community, feel strongly that it is a matter of civic pride that Larne should retain its courthouse. The borough's population is increasing and continued growth is predicted.

At present, the courthouse handles a wide range of work daily and the staff provide a friendly service to all who have business to transact. Due to the geography of the borough, people who live outside the town already have to travel many miles, from Carnlough and Glenarm in the north of the borough and Islandmagee in the south, to attend Larne courthouse. There is a matrimonial court, a criminal court, a family proceedings court, a small claims court and a juvenile court, which all provide accessible local justice and other services.

Approximately 560 people per month use Larne courthouse, and the proposed closure and transfer to Antrim would cause immeasurable hardship, distress and inconvenience. Clients and professionals would be required to travel a further 20 miles, and there is no direct train or bus service. To get to Antrim for a 10 am sitting would mean catching the 6.53 am train from Larne to Belfast central station in order to catch the 8.5 am connecting train to Antrim, arriving there at 9.4 am. People living outside Larne town would be unreasonably inconvenienced and could be travelling from 6 am to get to Antrim for 10 am. The cost of a return ticket, at £11, would be like another small fine.

Bus travel would involve some risk of being late for a 10 am court sitting in Antrim. It would mean an early 7.35 am start from Larne to Belfast and then taking the 8.45 am connecting bus from Belfast to Antrim. A return ticket costs £10, with £3 for a taxi between the station and the courthouse, while a single taxi fare from Larne to Antrim costs £20.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): My hon. Friend's point about the poor quality of public transport and the impact of the proposals on people who do not have access to cars—many people who are involved in the court proceedings do not have such access—relates to my concern about Banbridge magistrates court. In drawing up the proposals, the court service does not seem to have taken proper account of the transport difficulties, which is partly why we in Banbridge are concerned that our courthouse is retained as well.

Mr. Beggs: As I pointed out, I personally know the details of how my constituents will be affected in Larne, and as my right hon. Friend noted, there will be comparable situations in other areas, including Banbridge. The proposals would adversely affect specific areas in Northern Ireland, and we want those matters to be considered further.

Most people who pay fines do not have bank accounts or chequebooks, and there could be major defaulting on payment of fines if the court moved to Antrim. That would put extra pressure on Antrim court, as warrants would have to be issued. Regrettably, police time would be wasted in serving them at a time when there is an acute shortage of police in most police stations.

Maintenance is paid into and out of Larne court to estranged wives and children, and is an important service. That money provides part of an essential weekly income and any disruption to regular payments into and out of the court would cause hardship.

Finally, press reporting in local papers of court sentences for crimes committed against society names and shames offenders, and in a small way may deter others from criminal activity. Readers of Larne newspapers do not purchase Antrim newspapers, so local accountability as a result of local reports of the workings of the criminal justice system would be lost. If our Government and the Northern Ireland Court Service care for clients who use court services in Larne and elsewhere, I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to convince those of us who also care by withdrawing the proposal to close Larne courthouse.

I also ask the Parliamentary Secretary to consider how more desirable, although not essential, facilities can be installed at a reasonable cost to the public in the existing courthouses in Larne and Banbridge.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on securing the debate. He has campaigned vigorously on the issue on behalf of his constituents. I thank him for his kind remarks about my visit to Larne, which I will talk about later in greater detail. I listened carefully to all the points that he made so eloquently, but I will start by outlining some of the background to the changes that are proposed in our consultation document.

As hon. Members know, the Northern Ireland Court Service's accommodation strategy for 2001 to 2010 was issued for public consultation on 7 December 2001. The consultation document was circulated to an extensive range of court users including staff, the judiciary, the legal profession—the hon. Gentleman made several comments about the response that he received from local members of the profession—interested parties such as MPs and Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and local councils.

Copies of the document were also sent to a wide range of groups outlined in the Northern Ireland Court Service's equality scheme, such as victim support groups and citizens advice bureaux. The document is the result of an internal review by the Northern Ireland Court Service and outlines a strategy to improve the overall quality of court accommodation for court users.

I should like to reiterate the important principles that guided the review. We believe strongly that all court buildings should be high quality and meet modern requirements, in line with health and safety, fire, energy conservation and environmental regulations. Cases should be shared out as evenly as possible between each court division. Services to court users should be efficient and high quality and we should make the best possible use of existing facilities. Court buildings should be easily accessible for disabled people and meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Child witnesses and victims of crime should have modern specialist waiting facilities and trials involving children charged with serious offences need to be held in surroundings consistent with the principles set out by the European Court of Human Rights. Maximum advantage should be taken from advances in modern information technology and courts should be located, wherever possible, within reasonable travelling distance of users.

The strategy details the future of court accommodation in Northern Ireland and proposes the closure of a number of courthouses that currently have inadequate facilities. That means the subsequent transfer of business to other more suitable and better-equipped venues. The venues identified as having inadequate facilities are Larne, Banbridge, Limavady, Cookstown, Clogher and Kilkeel. Business will be transferred elsewhere; in the case of Larne courthouse, the business will transfer to Antrim, a newer and in many ways better appointed building.

The consultation period closed on 29 March. I have visited four of the venues proposed for closure; Larne, Banbridge, Limavady and Cookstown. I have viewed the alternative facilities to which the business is proposed for transfer; Antrim, Newry and Londonderry. I have also seen the new courthouse at Dungannon and I plan to visit Clogher and Kilkeel shortly. It is important to see all the courthouses myself to gain a first-hand knowledge of the facilities.

As the hon. Member for East Antrim mentioned, I visited Larne courthouse on 22 January and met the mayor of Larne council, David Fleck, and the chief executive of Larne borough council, Colm McGarry. I much appreciated the warm welcome and the frank discussions that took place then. On the same day I visited Banbridge courthouse where I met the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) whose intervention highlighted the travelling difficulties likely to result from the closure of the courthouse. I am aware that the right hon. Gentleman has taken every available opportunity to press the case for the retention of the Banbridge courthouse. The detailed plans that he has provided have been most helpful, but I hope that he will take advantage of my officials' offer to meet the architect and discuss his plans.

My officials have also arranged a series of meetings with members of local councils to discuss our proposals in order that I have as much local feedback as possible. I want the consultation process to be open and transparent so that we have as much information as possible before we take a decision.

The Government are committed to providing a high standard of court accommodation in Northern Ireland, as I hope we have proved by the significant investment to improve the court estate; about £63.8 million in the last 11 years. The new Laganside court in Belfast, which was constructed under a public-private partnership arrangement, represents a capital investment of £22.4 million. We have made future provision for capital expenditure of £20 million for the period to 2006. I hope that that reassures hon. Members that there is a commitment to ensuring a high standard of court accommodation.

The public consultation period produced more than 50 responses, eight in relation to Larne courthouse. My officials in the Northern Ireland Court Service are at present undertaking a detailed analysis of those responses. During the consultation period, an independent survey of court users was undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, at Larne, Banbridge, Cookstown and Limavady courthouses. The results of that survey will be the subject of detailed analysis. Initial results suggest that although there is a high level of satisfaction among persons using Larne courthouse, people who were probed about specific issues such as waiting areas acknowledged that the accommodation provided was less than satisfactory. I have asked for an equality impact assessment to be undertaken in respect of each of the courthouses concerned under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That will include outreach work where necessary. I expect the results of these assessments by the end of April.

Larne courthouse is used for magistrates courts business and occasional county court and small claims business before the district judge. Court statistics show that the workload at Larne is, at present, diminishing. Magistrates courts sittings totalled 87 in 2001, a reduction of 29 when compared with the figure for 2000. Between 2000 and 2001, there was a 22 per cent. reduction in the number of adult defendants dealt with. County court business was minimal, with only seven sittings in 2001.

The administrative office at Larne courthouse is located on the upper floor and accessed by an internal staircase. There is at present no lift for disabled access. However, when I visited the courthouse, despite the difficult working conditions, I noticed the dedication and enthusiasm of the court staff. We should take every opportunity to praise the staff, not least for their cheerfulness, and I hope that my words will be passed on to them.

In approaching any proposed courthouse closure, I have to bear in mind that all users of court buildings deserve an efficient service that is delivered in well-equipped and secure buildings. The venues under consideration for possible closure have been identified as lacking necessary facilities, such as secure prisoner accommodation and separate waiting areas for victims and witnesses

Lady Hermon (North Down): The Parliamentary Secretary will know from the court accommodation strategy document that it was proposed that Bangor courthouse in my constituency should close. Will she confirm that it is now not listed for closure and explain to my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) why Larne cannot gain a reprieve as well?

Ms Winterton: We gave a strong commitment that Bangor courthouse would close only when we had built a new courthouse to replace those of both Bangor and Newtownards. I hope that that answers the hon. Lady's question. If I can give her further information, I will write to her, as I am conscious of the time.

It is important to have basic accommodation standards. Court users can reasonably expect that in the 21st century. However, I note all the comments made by the hon. Member for East Antrim—particularly about travelling difficulties—and by local solicitors. We have to balance the need for accommodation improvements against factors such as the availability of local transport and accessibility. The hon. Gentleman set out in great detail some of the difficulties that would be encountered. I will certainly pay close regard to those very relevant considerations before reaching any final decision on the future of the courthouse.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I know that this is an important issue and I emphasise again the importance that I place on full and effective public consultation. As I said, the results of the consultation exercise are being analysed, as the results of the court user survey and equality impact assessments will be. I shall not rush to judgment, because I want to balance all the points that have been made, including in today's debate. There is no doubt that some points will be conflicting. When reaching a conclusion, we will have to balance all views, but I hope that it will be possible to make a decision before the summer recess.

I again congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim on securing the debate and on the hard work that he and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann have put into representing their constituents and ensuring that I am aware of those considerations. I am also grateful for the warm welcome that I received when I visited Northern Ireland. As I said, I will certainly write to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) if I have anything to add about Bangor courthouse. I hope that that provides some reassurance that we are considering this issue carefully and that we will take into account all representations that have been made by Members of Parliament.

Robin Hood Gate, Richmond

1 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I thank Mr. Speaker for allowing this debate after my earlier requests in January, February and March. The issue may appear to some to be parochial, but wider and important matters arise from it. The wall of the organisations involved that I have come up against has led me to pursue a new direction and, as Richmond park is a royal park, I contacted His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, and asked him to comment on the situation. As a keen environmentalist and, more importantly, someone who has acknowledged the role of a decent, clean and safe urban environment, I hope that he will respond.

I have advised the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) of the debate as the park is in her constituency. However, the relevance and importance of the issue for me is its undoubted impact on my constituents, especially those in Roehampton. I shall explain why the proposed closure of the Robin Hood gate—the main access from the A3 and Roehampton vale—has attracted such criticism and will delve briefly into the history of the decision, but only so far as to draw useful lessons for the future on consultation and decision making.

The criticism of the proposal stems from a concrete event; the foot and mouth epidemic of last year. During that period, as was to be expected, Richmond park was closed to all vehicles in line with the standard safety procedures throughout the United Kingdom. The resulting displaced traffic—families, commuters, dog walkers and the thousands of others who frequently drive through the park—were obliged to use routes around the park. Predictably, that caused problems on all the surrounding roads and areas and affected local residents, schools, businesses and those travelling through the area.

The side roads off Roehampton vale and Roehampton lane were havens for rat running, and the main roads were gridlocked. The gridlock extended down to the Upper Richmond road and the south circular. Pupils arrived by bus at the Paddocks school on the Lennox estate after 10 o'clock in the morning. I even contacted Transport for London to see if the Upper Richmond road was wide enough to install a bus lane between Roehampton lane and Priory lane but, regrettably, the road at that point is too narrow. So the chaos continued, only to disappear as soon as the gates of Richmond park were re-opened after the end of the foot and mouth epidemic.

What for some in the countryside was a nightmare proved an equally salutary lesson for those living in Roehampton. With that in mind, I was incredibly surprised to hear the Royal Parks agency's proposal to close the Robin Hood gate to Richmond park, among its other plans such as closing the central car park and the introduction of a land train. I was telephoned about the decision to close the gate just before Christmas 2001. I spoke immediately to William Weston, the chief executive of Royal Parks, and asked him why he had not consulted me before making the decision. He said that he had no statutory requirement to do so and that the Minister, Baroness Blackstone, had spoken to the hon. Member for Richmond Park, who had raised no

objection. The hon. Lady has told me subsequently that she had not endorsed the proposal for the closure. I spoke to the Minister who agreed that the permanent closure proposal should be replaced by a trial period of five months, but she did not agree to drop the proposal.

We have at our disposal foot and mouth traffic data, which provides an almost perfect test period for the closure of the gate and highlights the problem that will arise following a closure. That data predicts that some 700 extra cars an hour will be on the roads through Roehampton when the gate is closed. At the time of the original December 2001 decision, no traffic data from that time had been made available to Royal Parks from either Kingston or Wandsworth councils. Royal Parks would not wait for the information, which surely would be not only helpful but essential for an informed decision. Equally extraordinary, up to last week, Wandsworth council had still not, according to Royal Parks, sent the full foot and mouth traffic data.

According to Wandsworth council in an e-mail that was sent to me this week, after weeks of my asking for such information, the traffic reports were passed to Peter Brett Associates, Royal Parks' consultants, on 5 March. As if that were not late enough, I was told in the same e-mail that

"we were not in a position to pass them the base data as this was funded by the Transport for London".

I am afraid that I have not had time to find out from Wandsworth council the technical difference between the traffic reports and the base data.

The base data was passed to Transport for London on 16 May 2001. I do not know why that information was never passed to Royal Parks to help it make its decision; that seems ridiculous, as the plans for the park have been in the air for several years. To be deprived of such excellent comparative data is extraordinary and does not speak wonders for Wandsworth council's long-term thinking. If it was that worried about the closure of the Robin Hood gate, why did it not pass on key data before March? It smacks of publicity-seeking to rush to a judicial review.

At the end of March, some two months after Royal Parks announced its proposals, Wandsworth council finally debated the matter and opposed the closure. With two days to spare, it threatened Royal Parks with judicial review because consultation on the closure of the gate had not been separated from other matters that Royal Parks wished to pursue about the park. Royal Parks gave in and agreed to a fresh consultation, which ends in June 2002. Royal Parks is adamant that the closure must still go ahead. That has always been the case; indeed, the original consultation carried no option for residents to vote for retaining the status quo until I insisted on it.

I understand that the status quo was a very popular option, although that appears to have made little impact on the decision-making process. Why? Those who answered the consultation questionnaire handed out in early 2001 overwhelmingly wanted all the gates to be left open as they are now, with the same opening hours as now. However, Royal Parks says that the status quo was never an acceptable option. Change was essential so as to better preserve the quality of the environment; the flora and fauna in the park. That is laudable, but no park such as Richmond stands apart from its surroundings, nor does traffic in the park stand alone as an issue.

As a practical and keen environmentalist, I chaired London Agenda 21 between 1994 and 1997, and I look forward to going to the world summit for sustainable development this summer. However, when there is a trade-off between the environment inside and outside the park, we must look for a balance. Changing the status quo and closing the Robin Hood gate would affect my constituents disproportionately.

We must consider the longer-term view by making the roads to the park safer for cyclists, improving the public transport infrastructure for those going to and through the park, and changing to vehicles that run on liquefied petroleum gas or zero-emissions vehicles. We should encourage people to shop locally and to educate their children in the high-quality local schools in the Roehampton and Putney area, thus eliminating the school runs through the park. I would love it if Richmond park were without traffic. It is my local park, and I have visited it in the past 30 years with my children. However, without the necessary infrastructure surrounding the park, I do not believe that that is an option.

The balance, in terms of quality of life and extra pollution outside the park, would be hugely weighted against my constituents if the closure went ahead. The suggestion that the closure of the Robin Hood gate would protect the environment also sits strangely with Royal Parks' next proposal. It is for the development of a new golf centre, complete with floodlit driving range, a large car park and banqueting suites in the area between the internal south-north road and the Alton estate; that is, the Roehampton estate. The golfing centre is accessed by the A3, Roehampton vale and Norstead place. It would open the Chohole gate to the public and build over Silver hill, Hyde Park nursery, and Kings Farm plantations. Currently, all of them are open areas. With this proposal, Royal Parks is not following what appears to be its usual practice, which is to attempt to protect the environment.

Although nobody could object to speed bumps on park roads or a 20 mph speed limit, Royal Parks has told me that a reduction from 30 to 20 mph would require primary legislation. Surely, that cannot be the case. Will the Under-Secretary clarify that?

I mentioned other changes to traffic arrangements in Richmond park. Chief among them is the proposed closure of Pen Ponds car park. That has caused outrage, not only from Putney constituents, but from across south-west London; a petition has already gathered 10,000 signatures, and it is swiftly gaining more. Royal Parks has now proposed to allow the elderly, and people with disability stickers for their cars, to continue to park in that central car park and to allow everyone else to park there outside peak times. However, that appears to be another muddle, and I ask Royal Parks to scrap its plans, and to think again.

What lessons can be learned? First, Royal Parks and the Under-Secretary should consult with Members of Parliament, and authorities that represent people who will be affected, before any decisions are taken. Secondly, all statistical data that can be made available—in this case from Wandsworth council and Transport for London—must be handed over to Royal Parks within a time scale. With regard to that, in this case I exonerate Royal Parks because it has been asking for that information since last September, and it has not

[Mr. Tony Colman]

received it. Moreover, Wandsworth council says that it did not pass the relevant information to the traffic consultants until 5 March, which was three months after the announcement of the proposed closure of the gate.

Thirdly, if such data are not available, any decision should be deferred until the information is made available. Fourthly, any future plans for the park should look at all angles of sustainable development—not only at the environmental consequences within the park, but at the social consequences, and the right of the people who live around the park in Roehampton to live without the extra traffic pollution and gridlock that would result from the closure of the Robin Hood gate, as happened last spring and summer. Fifthly, Royal Parks should consult with the local decision-making bodies, such as Transport for London, on the impact of in-park policies; it is narrow-minded not to hold such consultations, and that must be avoided in the future.

Finally, I wish to correct the misleading impression that might have been picked up by those who have been watching the edited television and radio coverage of this issue in recent days. They might think that I see it as a people versus animals issue, and that I would support the people every time. Not only do I have a clear commitment to all forms of environmental concerns, but this issue was never so black and white. I believe that the existing balance with regard to access for cars should continue and, if that were maintained, it would go a long way towards protecting the environment of Richmond park.

I am grateful that the Under-Secretary is present, and I look forward to his response.

1.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on drawing the Chamber's attention to this important subject. I pay tribute to his efforts on behalf of those of his constituents who will be affected by the proposal to close the Robin Hood gate in Richmond park. With regard to that, he has made a strong case for proceeding with great care.

I wish to set the issue in context. It is important to remember that the royal parks are a national asset. They are paid for out of central Government funds, and taxpayers in Richmond in Yorkshire contribute as much towards their upkeep as do the residents of Richmond-upon-Thames; or, indeed, people in Macclesfield or Pontypridd.

The royal parks have been given to the nation in trust by the Crown to provide open spaces where people can enjoy the open air, and get away from the pressures to which they are subjected on every day of their urban lives. I am not sure that I like the phrase "urban lives", but you know what I mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The parks are special places that form part of our cultural heritage, and in managing them we are committed to maintaining high standards of care and maintenance and taking the lead in good environmental and horticultural practices. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney, who has been a doughty and imaginative fighter for the incremental advances in environmental protection and understanding that we need.

By the same token, roads in the royal parks are not public highways. They are not the responsibility of local highway authorities but are maintained by Royal Parks to provide access for those living and working in the park and for people visiting the park. The parks have not escaped the inexorable rise in the volume of traffic on the country's roads over the past 30 years, and drivers have increasingly taken to using the parks' roads. Those roads were never intended to make up for the inadequacies of the local road network, and Royal Parks is entitled to try to reduce the intrusion caused by thousands of additional vehicles taking short cuts through the park.

Richmond park is unique. It is an internationally regarded park and a grade 1 listed historical landscape. In addition, because it has been managed as a deer park for 300 years, it has evolved a unique habitat that has made it home to species of insect and plant life not found anywhere else in the region. It has been designated a site of special scientific interest, a national nature reserve and a European special area for conservation.

The inspector responsible for the first review of the Richmond-upon-Thames unitary development plan said that the

"difference in status between Crown Roads and public highways must carry substantial weight in assessing the role of the parks in the functioning of this important and cherished part of the Borough."

Royal Parks is considering how to reduce traffic in Richmond park not on a whim but as part of a process that started several years ago. Indeed, it has been conducting an exercise that all local authorities are now required to do: to consider how to reduce traffic on their roads, which is a clear Government objective.

In 1991, the Government set up a series of reviews of all royal parks, chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, to find out how they were managed and set out principles on which they should be managed for the foreseeable future. The review group considered each park separately and invited stakeholders in all the parks to contribute to its reports. In addition, stakeholders were given an opportunity to comment on the final draft before the report was published.

In 1996, the review group, which contained, among others, the leader of Richmond council, published its report on Richmond park, which states:

"On the basis of wide consultation, traffic is by far the most contentious issue affecting Richmond Park."

It also states:

"This stretch of countryside within a world city, in itself quite extraordinary, is undermined by noise, pollution, congestion and danger from cars, all aspects of the great city which most park visitors have come to escape".

It noted that

"the need to reduce the impact of traffic . . . rates high priority".

The Government accepted the review group's recommendations.

In 1998, Royal Parks addressed the first issue raised in the report and carried out an origin and destination study of traffic using the park. That established that more than 95 per cent. of traffic in the park on a weekday—and about 80 per cent. at weekends—was through traffic, with almost 4,000 vehicles entering the park in peak hours.

Following that, a working group that comprised agency management, police, traffic engineers and landscape architects produced a paper on which the agency consulted during the autumn and winter of 2000-01. The proposed range of options for reducing through traffic in the park included: making the park roads one-way only; introducing speed humps, road width restrictions and other traditional traffic management measures; introducing a 20 mph speed limit; introducing a road toll for through traffic; and closing the roads in the middle of the park to prevent through traffic during rush hours, although that would allow park users to drive into the park.

The agency carried out a thorough consultation involving the distribution of 30,000 questionnaires throughout local communities. It held five public meetings and 10 separate public exhibitions. The whole exercise generated around 1,000 written representations. Following the agency's consideration of the responses to its consultation, it produced the report that it presented to local authorities on 17 December 2001.

If Wandsworth borough council had responded to the agency's request in August 2001 for traffic data to help the assessment of the effect of different options, the matter might have been settled by now. It was important for my hon. Friend the Member for Putney to state that clearly in his speech. One would have thought that a big, powerful and famous borough would have bothered to notify the agency about crucial traffic figures as part of the consultation. However, it chose not to; one wonders why.

Despite what those who would support unrestricted access to the park for traffic might believe, the agency clearly took account of views expressed during the consultation. Indeed, it was praised for the way in which it did that at the presentation of its report to local authorities on 17 December.

Mr. Colman: The current access arrangements do not allow unrestricted access to the park. I do not want unrestricted access, but a continuation of the current arrangements, which provide a balance, especially during the dark hours of winter.

Dr. Howells: I take my hon. Friend's point, and I shall try to deal with it in a moment or two.

The agency rejected many of the original options, and it is worth explaining the reason for that. It did not close Ham gate because that would have led to additional traffic on the already overcrowded roads to the west of the park. It rejected the use of speed humps and other traditional traffic calming measures because they are designed for urban streets and are inappropriate for a park. A one-way system was considered to be unsafe because it might encourage speeding and tempt drivers to perform dangerous overtaking manoeuvres. Options to close link roads in the park were rejected because that would affect the routine and daily lives of people and businesses. The agency decided to try to work with local authorities to assess whether it was possible to control traffic in the park by using measures outside the park.

The fact that the suggestion to close Robin Hood gate was made at one of the public meetings is proof, if that were needed, that the agency took account of the consultation process. That option was chosen because Robin Hood gate offers only limited access; this may address some of my hon. Friend's points. The gate is already one-way because a driver may not enter the park through it. It closes at dusk in the winter months and, therefore, it is unavailable during the evening rush hour for several months during the year.

Wandsworth borough council was reluctant to come forward with traffic figures at the time of the consultation. That is inexplicable, given the importance of safety on roads, especially in the urban areas about which my hon. Friend is concerned. Nevertheless, the council is rightly concerned about the effect of the closure on traffic in the area. However, it gets little credit for quoting figures that apply to a time when all park gates were closed to traffic because of the foot and mouth outbreak. The agency has no wish to avoid consultation as its efforts over the past two years have clearly shown. It did not, technically, consult on the closure because it was not a stand-alone option in the original consultation paper.

Royal Parks has withdrawn its proposed closure of Robin Hood gate in order to consult the local authorities and Transport for London and I assure hon. Members that it will not make a decision on the closure until after that consultation. I hope that that gives my hon. Friend some comfort.

It is estimated that the closure would reduce through traffic in the park by some 5 per cent. That may not seem much, but given the level of opposition to options that would produce more significant reductions, the agency would be satisfied with that amount until further options were investigated.

A 12-month trial is proposed. The period must be long enough to take into account the effect of seasonal variations in traffic volume and usage, and to allow time to measure the full effect of the resulting re-assignment of traffic. It is well documented that, when a road is closed, drivers gradually disperse over a wider area to find more convenient routes. That is more likely to happen with longer-distance traffic. Some 60 per cent. of park traffic is from outside the three neighbouring boroughs, so it is unlikely that all of it would go through the immediate neighbourhood, about which my hon. Friend is rightly concerned. However, to satisfy the local authorities, the agency has agreed to carry out an initial review after six months.

Of course, I cannot say whether the effects of the proposed closure will be as severe as the council claims, which is, after all, why the agency proposes to close the gate for a trial period. The actual effects can then be measured rather than relying on the outcomes of desk-top exercises. The royal parks are important assets. They are a recreational resource for those who live nearby, historic landscapes and wildlife habitats, and tourist destinations for visitors from the United Kingdom and abroad.

From time to time, the agency needs to take measures to preserve the character of the royal parks that makes them such special places; such desirable places to be neighbours with. My hon. Friend is right to be primarily concerned about the health, safety and welfare of his constituents in the neighbouring streets. Nevertheless, I am sure that he would agree that it would be absurd and unreasonable if the agency were never allowed to do

[Dr. Howells]

anything that might affect people living outside the park. I thank him for the opportunity to clarify the position taken on this important matter by my noble Friend Baroness Blackstone and by Royal Parks.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

1.29 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): It is nice to be here and, although there are not many hon. Members present, several interested parties are here to listen to the debate.

I am honoured to lead this brief debate this afternoon. Although the debate concerns the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital, I will briefly dwell on its history. It was founded as long ago as 1123, and was the first hospital in what is now the United Kingdom. It received its royal charter from Henry VIII in the 1540s, and anyone who walks through West Smithfield will see his statue. Exactly 100 years ago, it became the first teaching hospital in the country. In all that time, it was endowed and supported by the local community; indeed, that local support was integral to its continued existence for centuries.

Barts, as local residents affectionately know it, is internationally renowned for its medical excellence. Institutionally, it is equally well known across the nation. I would not mind betting that if we asked people anywhere in the United Kingdom to name one hospital other than their own general hospital, Barts would be mentioned more often than any other hospital.

The national health service was founded in 1948. It is ironic that, today of all days—when the Chancellor of the Exchequer will extol the virtues of Labour's health service—we must remember that St. Bartholomew's hospital happily operated without the health service for 825 of its 879 years. I am afraid to say that it has only been in the 54 years since the nationalised health service came into being that the hospital's future has been threatened.

I take no pride in confessing that it was my party—the Conservative party—that sought to implement the Tomlinson report when it was last in government. The report was, in my view, predicated on user figures that applied in the depths of the early-1990s recession and which were manifestly not borne out. It is a great regret that my party put in place some of the reforms that have affected Barts and which have upset not only the residential population of the City of London, but people across London and much of the UK. One thing that has become evident to me, even though I became a Member of Parliament only nine months ago, is the strength of feeling throughout the UK among people who have great reason to thank the staff at Barts or who simply see it as one of those institutions that have been undermined over the years.

The Minister and I must have an eye on the decades to come, rather than simply the past. Independent bodies have made projections about the City fringe working population. The Minister may know that the figure was 550,000 in 1999 and that is envisaged to rise to about 695,000 by 2016. A further 150,000 people are therefore expected to start working in the City fringe area in the next decade and a half.

We must also consider the residential population of the City of London; my constituents. In the past decade, the population has increased for the first time in more than two centuries. As many people will know, roughly 160,000 people lived in the City of London at the time of

the first census in 1801. As of last year, the figure was 6,500 and rising. The City of London is now a very attractive place to live. The Minister will be aware of the Barbican, which is no more than a stone's throw from the West Smithfield site, but there are other new developments. There is a thriving residential community in the City of London.

There are difficulties with congestion in central London, and Mayor Ken Livingstone is putting his congestion charge in place in the next nine months. It is only a couple of miles from the eastern fringes of the City of London down Whitechapel road to the London hospital, but the journey can take a perilously long time because of the congestion that is part and parcel of life in central London.

In several debates about London in Westminster Hall and the Chamber, I have said that we must recognise that London remains the economic powerhouse of the United Kingdom. The London Development Agency, under Ken Livingstone, recognises that. We have a crisis with our infrastructure in the capital, and that seems likely to remain for some time. Health is only one relatively minor aspect; transport, which has been much in the headlines, and other areas, particularly housing, are also part of the difficulty for central London in ensuring that highly-qualified public sector staff work here.

I work closely with several Labour Members, Liberal Democrat Members, and the cohort of 13 Conservative Members in London. There is agreement across the political divide to ensure that we avoid the idea of a zero sum game, which the Government have all too often tried to impose on London. For example, there is an idea that for Barts to get better health care, other places must suffer; the Homerton and Whittington hospitals, or others in London's five rather large health authorities, must get fewer resources. The argument is that if more money goes to central London, the suburbs must suffer, but I entirely reject that reasoning. London remains the economic powerhouse, and it has great difficulties, which include an increasingly large residential population and a large daytime population.

The events of 11 September were a wake-up call for us all. The threat of a terrorist attack is in the forefront of people's minds in central London. It applies not just to the City, but to Canary Wharf and this part of London—Westminster—which is the political capital of the country.

The lesson of what happened in America was that hospitals in New York were close at hand to cater for the relatively few casualties; tragically, there were few casualties, but many outright deaths on that day. If we were to have a similar incident in central London, I believe it would cause utter chaos for our infrastructure. As I mentioned, the two-mile journey from the City of London to the London hospital would be an enormously difficult obstacle to overcome.

There is no necessity to build a new hospital in central London. We have the facilities, and, as many know, enormous investment less than a decade ago went into the Barts site; some £15 million was spent on six new operating theatres, many of which have been under-utilised during the past nine years. At the same time, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), the Minister for London, has written a letter to several central London Members of Parliament, which recognises:

> "The NHS does not have the reserve capacity maintained for the purposes of major incident management."

He had obviously been contacted by a number of the hardworking residents' groups that have fought a long-standing battle in relation to St. Bartholomew's. After 11 September, they had clear concerns that difficulties could exist.

I understand that the rumours are true and that a further £18 billion or £25 billion—it depends on which paper one reads—will be injected into the national health service in the coming years. Even if the Government do not feel that they can bring back a fully-fledged accident and emergency unit, I should like the Department of Health to consider doing as much as it can for this unique part of central London. Could we have heralded admissions with a receiving room to take account of what I accept, as I am sure does the Minister, is the skewed daytime population of central London? Many people are aged between 18 and 45, and they have particular health needs that are different from those that apply to the suburbs or other parts of the south-east. In Scotland, where accident and emergency units have closed down in city centres, there is some authority and experience of having heralded admissions with a receiving room to take particular account of local circumstances.

I shall not go on much longer, because I should like the Minister to respond at length. The issue of Barts is not a narrow, constituency interest, although there is a growing residential population in the City of London, which has understandable concerns about the relatively long journeys in terms of time—by London standards—that they are expected to take to the Whittington, Homerton or the London. Barts is, and has been since its foundation almost 900 years ago, an asset for all Londoners who rely on the City of London services daily for their work and pleasure.

I want to salute the hard work of several people, particularly Wendy Mead, who is in the public gallery here today, as well as many members the Corporation of London, who have fought a long-standing campaign over the years. I have come to the campaign relatively recently, having been elected for the first time last June, though I was made well aware during my 18 months as a prospective candidate that the issue required significant highlighting.

Today, we understand that there will be an announcement of significant new investment in the national health service, which will be funded by many of those taxpayers who make up the daytime population of the City of London. I call upon the Minister to explain how he will ensure that the voice of St. Bartholomew's hospital is allowed to express itself during the ongoing discussions concerning the expenditure of the colossal sums that we envisage being injected into the health service.

1.41 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on raising this issue, and for the spirit in

[Mr. John Hutton]

which he deployed his arguments. I would never accuse the hon. Gentleman of pursuing narrow constituency self-interest, although I suppose that there is nothing wrong with that. However, he has not done so, and that will not form any part of my response to his points.

He has a perfectly legitimate concern, which he has expressed very eloquently, about the ability of the national health service to respond to circumstances such as—heaven forbid—those which occurred in New York city on 11 September. I want to deal with the concerns that he has raised. I will explain the issues that we have addressed, or tried to, since 11 September, and how we have approached the problem and challenge of dealing with that type of emergency planning scenario in the City of London.

The hon. Gentleman made several points at the beginning of his speech about funding. He referred to a zero sum game and objected to a process that promised development and enhancement of services in some parts of the capital only at the expense of others. I should make it clear that that is not how we do things. We are not funding or securing the development of services at Barts by starving other parts of the national health service in London. On average, most health authorities throughout London received a cash increase of about 10 per cent. About £500 million of additional NHS capital investment is going into the city this year in addition to the £600 million of additional revenue support. It is not true to say that development in Barts, or any other part of the NHS in London, is funded only at the expense of reduced allocations to other parts of the NHS in the city.

I want to deal specifically with the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. As a Minister, I have had the good fortune to visit Barts on several occasions. In fact, I was there only last week. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's description of Barts. It is a building of exquisite beauty with an unrivalled history in the development of medical sciences in our country. I agree with him that our challenge is to secure its future. There is a very lively debate taking place in the Corporation of London and elsewhere in the hon. Gentleman's constituency about the future of accident and emergency services. The challenge for us today is to think about how we develop the long-term future of hospital services on that site, and that is where I want to start my comments today.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that developments at Barts will be at the centre of a huge capital scheme, worth £620 million, to build a major new teaching hospital at the Royal London hospital, Whitechapel, and secure the development of Barts as a specialist cancer and cardiac centre. I should point out the scale of that to the hon. Gentleman: it is the largest hospital development scheme in the United Kingdom today. I believe that the scheme will secure the long-term future of the hospital. It will not bring what the hon. Gentleman has described, but it is a significant moment in Barts history because it will bring major opportunities to contribute for decades to come to the health and well-being of the people of east London and the City.

Following the London review led by Sir Leslie Turnberg in 1997, Barts and the London NHS trust, together with other local NHS organisations, began to develop plans to modernise hospital services throughout the trust. In January 2000, the Department of Health gave formal approval to plans for a 10-year programme of development and improvement to health services. Since that time, the trust's plans have been developed further, and advanced work is due to commence at St. Barts this summer. The planned development is a combination of refurbishment and new build that will increase by 100 the number of beds throughout the two sites, creating a total of around 1,285 beds, of which 900 will be at the Royal London hospital and nearly 400 at St. Bartholomew's.

As well as modernising hospital services for east London and the City, the project will also help to regenerate the area by addressing employment, education and environmental improvements. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that the NHS employs about 150,000 people in London and contributes 6 or 7 per cent. of the capital's gross domestic product. It is obviously a major provider of health care services, but it is also a significant partner in the economic development of the City about which the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster has spoken. As well as cancer and cardiac services at St. Bartholomew's, a range of services will be provided, including diagnostic imaging, pathology and pharmacy services, as well as a patient hostel. The minor injuries unit will also remain fully functional.

The hon. Gentleman did not raise today the issue of whether an open-access chest pain clinic should be provided at St. Bartholomew's as part of cardiac services, but he has raised it with me before. Local health services already have two chest pain clinics at Homerton hospital and Newham hospital. Those locations were chosen because their local population has the greatest need for those services. Chest pain clinics are generally regarded as general hospital clinics, and as cardiac services at St. Bartholomew's are regarded as tertiary services, the advice that I have received is that it would not be appropriate for such a clinic to be located at St. Bartholomew's hospital.

Mr. Mark Field: I appreciate that in the raw terms of population the decision on chest pain clinics makes sense. Clearly the population is based around the East Ham area and, indeed, Hackney. However, does the Minister not recognise—I am sure that he does and I should like to hear his comments—that there is a large daytime working population? When it comes to consideration of such clinics, Barts should be treated as a different, and in a sense unique, case. As I mentioned in my initial comments, there is a daytime population, rather than a full-time residential population, for chest pain clinics of more than 500,000 in the City and its fringes.

Mr. Hutton: I obviously accept the hon. Gentleman's point. It is the responsibility of local NHS organisations and the new director of health and social care for the capital to keep such considerations under the most careful review. The question is not whether there should be additional services, because I am convinced that there should be and I am hopeful that we will continue to receive the investment to allow such development to take place. The difficulty in all those cases is to decide where the investment should go.

On those issues, I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that we in the Department of Health always try to act on the best clinical and medical advice. It is very important that that remains so because that is the proper discharge of Ministers' responsibilities. He and other Opposition Members frequently criticise us for meddling in the affairs of the NHS, and I would take issue with him on that, although not on this occasion. Generally speaking, such decisions need to be informed by the best medical, clinical and scientific advice, and we act on that. If any such advice were different from that that I have received it would be a factor to which I should pay the most careful attention.

Returning to the developments at Barts, the first stage is the £21 million upgrade of the west wing and Kenton and Lucas block using public as well as charitable funds. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the west wing is a grade 1 listed building currently accommodating out-patient clinics and support offices. The greatest care will be taken to maintain historic features while adapting the space for new clinical use. Work is due to commence this summer, and we hope that it will be completed by the end of 2003. Once refurbishment is completed, the breast care unit will be located in the west wing, allowing all those facilities to be centralised together in a new, modern environment.

Refurbishment work at Kenton and Lucas block, a grade 2 listed building, will begin this summer and once completed in 2004, slightly later, will accommodate an integrated rehabilitation unit, sexual health clinic and fertility clinic. Other moves that have already taken place at Barts include the provision of better nursing accommodation for nurses previously housed in Queen Mary wing, which will now be redeveloped to make best use of the space for clinical services. The remainder of the developments at Barts will progress alongside the developments at the Royal London hospital.

In February this year, I announced approval for Barts and the London NHS trust to seek private finance partners to implement the development proposals. The trust advertised in the *Official Journal of the European Community* in February 2002. It is expected that work will begin on that scheme in 2004.

I want to say a few words about whether full accident and emergency services should be provided at Barts, which I think is the main theme of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He has raised with me before his concern that the reviews informing the decision to close the accident and emergency department at Barts were based on old data and that in the climate following 11 September workers in the City need to be reassured that there is emergency provision nearby. I fully understand that. He has asked me to reconsider the decision taken in 1993 to close the accident and emergency department at Barts.

When I last met the hon. Gentleman to discuss those issues, in October, I explained that the decision to close that department would not be revisited. That remains the Government's position. The decision was based on the best clinical advice from the royal colleges and I am not aware of any convincing new evidence, since the decision was made, that would lead me to conclude that it should be reconsidered.

The closure of the accident and emergency department at Barts was supported in the Tomlinson report back in 1992 on the ground that accident and emergency services at Homerton, Guy's and St. Thomas's, the Royal London and University College hospitals were all within easy travelling distance of the population local to Barts and accessible in the event of a major incident. Those services remain in place and continue to be accessible.

Mr. Mark Field: As I understand it, one difficulty in looking at the 1992 Tomlinson report is that the projected figures for daytime population were drawn up at the absolute depths of the last recession, as I mentioned in my initial comments. Even in the seven or eight years since then, we have seen an explosion of the daytime population in London. We envisage that that will continue, in a fairly uniform way, for the next decade and a half. Some of the basic statistical premises made to justify the closing down of the accident and emergency department in 1993 seem, therefore, to be faulty, if not entirely out of place.

Mr. Hutton: I perfectly understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and was hoping to come on to it in a few moments. I do not dispute for a second that matters have changed since 1992. They clearly have. I am on this side of the Chamber and the hon. Gentleman is on the other. That is one change, one of the more welcome ones, but that is not a theme for today.

I do not dispute the hon. Gentleman's fundamental point that accident and emergency services in London and elsewhere might need to expand as the population grows and as the working population in parts of the country expands. It is the responsibility of the national health service to make plans for that. Clearly, if the population increases, we will need more beds in hospitals and more nurses and doctors. That is axiomatic. The argument, in relation to the points about Barts and the wider points that the hon. Gentleman has made, is about where those extra services, if they are needed, should be located. I shall return to that point in a second.

Since the accident and emergency department at Barts closed, the number of accident and emergency attendances at the four hospitals to which I just referred has risen as capacity has increased. In particular, attendances in accident and emergency at Homerton hospital have increased by a little more than one third. That lends support to the view that there is adequate accident and emergency capacity available for the people of east London and the City. Patients are being attended to in those departments well within the time limits that we have set as national targets.

If there were a mismatch between capacity and demand, the length of waiting times in those four accident and emergency departments would be rising significantly. They would certainly not be beating our target of 75 per cent. of patients being treated and discharged or admitted within four hours. Throughout those four departments, more than 90 per cent. of patients are admitted, transferred or discharged within that four-hour target.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the accident and emergency department closed in March 1995, and the minor injuries unit opened at exactly the same time. In 1997, as part of the London review, Sir Leslie

[Mr. Hutton]

Turnberg re-examined the St. Barts hospital closure and considered views from as wide a spectrum as possible. That will continue to be our approach.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the people of east London and the City will be able to have a say in decisions that affect health service provision. We certainly need to improve the way in which we communicate with, consult and involve patients and the public in all areas of decision making. I hope that the new primary care trusts, supported by the strategic health authorities, will be able to do that. New legislation in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill will take patient and public involvement in the NHS to a new level.

We are actively trying to encourage a climate in which decision making is as open and informed as possible. I certainly do not take the view that has been put to me on occasions by other right hon. and hon. Members that the NHS operates as a secret society. I understand why the criticism is sometimes made, but it is profoundly damaging to the NHS if such allegations have any legs. It is the people's service, and the people must be fully involved in the decisions. They may not always agree—that is the problem—but I certainly share with the hon. Gentleman a very strong desire to involve them fully. It happened on this occasion, and we will ensure that it does in the future.

The previous Conservative Administration's decision to close St. Barts was overturned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) when he was Secretary of State for Health, but he upheld the decision in relation to the accident and emergency department. It was and remains the right decision.

At the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel, the trust has a comprehensive major incident plan that centres on accident and emergency services. Following events on 11 September, the plan has been updated and was tested as recently as February. The London Ambulance Service co-ordinates a well-rehearsed plan for the transport of patients to several receiving hospitals in the capital in the event of a major incident.

The trust's day-to-day accident and emergency service is run from the Royal London hospital, which has a trauma centre and a dedicated children's accident and emergency department. A 24-hour comprehensive emergency service is provided seven days a week, including on-site senior accident and emergency staff. In fact, the accident and emergency department at the Royal London hospital is unique within London and the United Kingdom in its provision of a resident accident and emergency consultant 24 hours a day, Monday to Friday. That is not the case anywhere else. It has some of the best clinical outcomes in the UK for patients who undergo surgery following emergency admission.

The minor injuries unit continues to operate at St. Barts. It is open from 8 am to 8 pm, Monday to Friday, and will be retained as part of the new development. There is no prospect of its disappearing. In the event of a major incident in the City, which is the hon. Gentleman's concern and should be a concern of us all, there is an escalation plan for the walking wounded who might arrive at St. Barts, but the hospital would not receive any patients directly from the London Ambulance Service. That is a clear protocol.

Two new walk-in centres were developed at the Newham and Royal London hospitals during 2000. They will offer fast and convenient access to local NHS advice, information and treatment seven days a week without an appointment.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raised the question of the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital. The Government are committed to modernising health services and ensuring that patients receive treatment of the highest quality that is fit for the 21st century. The development of St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London is part of the commitment and will modernise services for patients and staff in east London and the City. After years of deliberation, the future of the hospitals in those areas is now clear, as the modernisation and rebuilding plans for both sites reach the final approval stages. I say to the hon. Gentleman with the greatest respect that the debate needs to move on, so that we can focus on ensuring the success of the exciting plans to redevelop the NHS in east London and the City.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 April 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Social Fund

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the Social Security Committee, Session 2000–01, HC 232, and the Government's response thereto, Cm 5237.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am delighted to have this opportunity to share with colleagues some of the deliberations of the Select Committee on Social Security—now the Select Committee on Work and Pensions—whose report on the social fund was published on 27 March 2001.

As I came up the stairs into the Chamber, someone provided me with what I think will be the killer punch in today's debate—an article from *The Daily Telegraph* of Monday 15 April that announced to the world that J. K. Rowling is on my side. It says that she called for reform of the social fund in the foreword to an important report by three charities—the National Council for One Parent Families, the Family Welfare Association and the Child Poverty Action Group. She is also in favour of child development grants that focus on providing essentials for decent homes.

I am told that if the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), is not kind to us this afternoon, he might be cast in a not especially advantageous light in one of Miss Rowling's novels. I know that he is a literary man and that he will know exactly what that could mean for him—*[Interruption.]* He might indeed get a share of the royalties, which he would no doubt give to charity.

It is important that we have this debate now, although it is inconvenient for two reasons. First, hon. Members in the main Chamber are discussing important social security and welfare issues relating to the Budget. It is not my fault that we cannot be there: today is the day that was allocated for this debate, and the Select Committee decided that we should take the best possible advantage from it. Secondly, colleagues serving on the Standing Committee on the State Pension Credit Bill would have been here had their duty not been to that important part of the work of the House. Hon. Members might be slightly thinner on the ground than they would have been had the debate been better timed, but at the end of the day it is quality that counts, not quantity.

For two reasons, however, it is important that we hold the debate now. The report was published in the dying days of the last Parliament, and the Government responded, as they are bound to do, in the early days of the new Parliament. I hope that the Minister, who took office in middle of the process, has had slightly longer than usual to reflect on the recommendations in the Committee's report and on the Government's response. I hope, too, that he has been able to gain an idea of the inevitable competing and conflicting priorities in his Department. The report was published a year or so ago, and it is reasonable to step back and consider now how the policy on the social fund and its various elements is being implemented, and whether it is achieving the desired objectives.

The other reason why this is an important time is that it will be difficult for the Minister to make a substantial impact and bring about reform on the necessary scale within the tight envelope of existing departmental budgets. However, as we all know, the Government are carefully considering what they will do for the next three-year comprehensive spending review round. The Minister will, I hope, take some comfort from what is said this afternoon, because it should strengthen his hand in trying to find out what scope there is for making step changes in the next three years to aspects of the social fund and its objectives.

I have always supported the Government's substantial policy changes to encourage people into paid work. Making work pay, welfare to work programmes and other related policies are all important. They are changing the culture. It is right to encourage people to find their own path and work their own way out of sustained periods on benefit. The adage used by the Government to encapsulate that idea starts "work for those who can", but the other half of the adage is "support for those who can't".

I listened carefully to the Budget statement—yesterday afternoon was exciting. About extra resources for the national health service, some of us would say, "Not before time." However, I am concerned that some people are being left behind by the Government's aspirations—their ambitious targets and objectives to help those who are not in work into work and to sustain those in low-paid work. People who are a long way removed from the labour market—some of them in impossible positions and with few realistic prospects—are being left behind. Are the Government giving support for those who cannot get into work the same energy and commitment as they have expended on trying to make work pay and get people off benefit into work of some sort?

It is easy to forget that members of families and households who experience chronic long periods on benefit can be left behind. They are the forgotten poor, living at the very low end of the market. Despite the Government's good work on welfare to work, some of the policy discussions that we have had in the House in the past three or four years have tended to overlook those who are abjectly poor and living below the poverty line. Some of them, because of the impact of the social fund, are working with budgets that are less than minimum social security rates; that is impossible to sustain for any length of time.

I am therefore absolutely behind the Child Poverty Action Group and other pressure groups that are arguing that an effective voice should be made available for the poor—I am talking about members of households with below average income in the bottom two deciles, especially those who remain there for a long time. We must find some way of making a better connection with them, because they are largely alienated. They inhabit estates that are despairing places in which to live and raise families. We must try to engage

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their interest and prevent the alienation that is rotting the social fabric of many estates throughout the United Kingdom. I do not want to exaggerate that decay, but we all have pockets where those problems are prevalent in our constituencies. The problems are complex. There is no easy solution; I ask only that the same degree of attention be paid to that category of claimant as to those who are nearer the labour market and have been able to take advantage of the new deal and other programmes, which the Government are right to have introduced and for which they deserve credit.

The Social Security Committee's third report of the 2001–02 Session was published on 27 March 2001, and the Government's reply was published in July. We have all had time to consider the content of both documents, so I shall simply sketch the background to the social fund. Launched in 1988, it is in two parts today. The first part is the regulated social fund, from which payments are made by right to people who meet certain conditions; there is a full right of appeal to a social fund tribunal.

The second part is the discretionary social fund. Discretionary payments are made from a cash-limited budget, but there is a restricted, internal right of review. The regulated social fund is responsible for sure start, maternity grants, funeral payments, winter fuel payments and cold weather payments. People receiving a range of benefits, including income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance, are eligible. Working families tax credit gives access to maternity and funeral payments; housing and council tax benefit gives access only to funeral payments. Winter fuel payments are made on the basis of age to households containing people aged 60 or over, regardless of income.

The discretionary social fund, the one that principally concerns us, consists of three elements. First, community care grants meet the needs of people coming from institutions to help them to become established in the community—or help to prevent people in the community going into institutions. Secondly, budgeting loans, which are repayable by the claimant through weekly benefits, help to deal with expenses that occur irregularly. Thirdly, crisis loans are designed to meet unforeseen emergencies; those, too, are repayable from weekly benefit. The discretionary fund remained substantially unaltered between 1988, when the social fund was introduced, and April 1999, at which time, as a result of pressure and advice, the Government tried to simplify the budgeting loan application process by simplifying and computerising it and taking a more mechanistic approach to the business of awarding loans.

Let me describe the spending involved. In 1999–2000, the regulated social fund spent about £1.7 million on winter fuel payments, £38 million on funeral payments, £17 million on maternity payments and about £1 million on cold weather payments. The latest figures that I could obtain for the discretionary fund were for 2001–02, when £103 million was allocated to community care grants. Gross expenditure on loans for 2000–01 was £514 million, but owing to higher than forecast loan recovery and an underspend of £10 million—it may also have been a year of reallocation—the gross loans budget was increased for 2001–02 to £548 million. Net expenditure—after loans were repaid—was £32 million in 1999–2000.

In August 2000, deductions were made from the benefits of 746,000 claimants so that they could repay social fund loans of one kind or another. Of those claimants, 51 per cent. were lone parents and almost a third had disabilities. Estimated average deduction from benefits was £9.60 a week, which is a large sum for people in those already disadvantaged categories. Many people's benefits are reduced because of the requirement to repay loans.

It is worth noting that, according to figure obtained from the Secretary of State's annual report, administration costs in 1999–2000 were £250 million. That is a shocking figure, given that it was twice as much as the grant budget and about six times as much as the net cost of the loans budget for that year. There are real difficulties with how much it costs to achieve the outcome, and whether the outcome is adequate to meet the need.

The main thrust of the Committee's report was to consider five key objectives for the social fund. The first objective was to contain expenditure, which has been achieved. The second was to maintain the efficiency of the income support scheme; the integrity of the income support scheme has been preserved. However, it is more difficult to be confident about the remaining three objectives. The third objective was to concentrate help on those facing the greatest difficulties, the fourth to enable a more variable response to inescapable individual needs, and the fifth to break new ground in community care. Some progress has been made with community care grants and how they are applied, but the Committee contends that, at the very least, a question mark hangs over whether the latter three objectives set out in 1998 have been met in anything but the breach.

In paragraphs 117 and 118 of our report, the Committee responds to that problem. Paragraph 117 states:

> "We urge the Government to use the opportunity offered by the re-organisation of the DSS to take a radical look at the Social Fund, so that it may work to enhance the strategy to reduce child poverty"—

the subject of one of the Chancellor's main campaigns—

> "rather than work against it."

Some evidence showed that the social fund objectives worked directly against the Government's stated aims. As paragraph 118 states, at the start of the inquiry

> "we asked ourselves whether the Social Fund was achieving the aim set for it . . . In particular, we asked whether it was helping the poorest and most vulnerable in our society."

The report's main general conclusion is that

> "the scheme in its present format needs urgent overhaul and an injection of funds. Without such action, there is a strong possibility that the wider social policy objectives of the Government will be endangered."

That would be a shame not only for the Government but for those whom the social fund is designed to serve.

The Minister is a friend, a former member of the Select Committee, and a man for whom I have tremendous respect, but I have to tell him that we were upset by the cursory nature of the Government's response. There was an election in the offing, so perhaps

there was little time to prepare it, or perhaps civil servants go on holiday during elections—I do not know. The fact that the response was published the day before the summer recess began might have had something to do with it. I do not know why the response was so short, but I tell the Minister honestly and openly that the Committee took the view that the Department had given only cursory consideration to the serious piece of work that the report constitutes. The response does not seriously engage with the issues at all.

Paragraph 117 of our report states that

"the huge gaps and inconsistencies caused by the inadequacies of the Social Fund risk undermining important initiatives aimed at tackling homelessness, helping victims of domestic violence re-establish their lives, supporting vulnerable people in the community and re-settling people from institutions."

All those are supposedly stated targets of the fund, but current practice does not help to achieve any of them. Our other main complaint is that the opportunity for reform that was available while Jobcentre Plus and other parts of the new Department were being established was missed. Jobcentre Plus is an exciting and commendable reform, but it could have been used as a platform for rethinking the place of the social fund in the Government's wider social agenda on reducing poverty and social exclusion.

My impression is that Ministers were at a loss to know how to cope with the social fund. The fund in its various parts applies to almost all the disaggregated parts of the Department, such as the pensions agency, Jobcentre Plus, child benefit centres, the disability directorate, and so on. I have yet to be assured that the final resting place of the social fund—the way in which it is finally embedded into the new, reformed Department—has been properly considered and established so that it may stand the test of time.

We thought that there was a clear case for using better trained and specialist staff working directly and intensively with social fund applicants, perhaps for short periods, and to allow them to become involved in liaison with other agencies such as local authority housing departments, social services departments, the probation service, homelessness resettlement projects and welfare rights services. Help given at a vulnerable point in a social fund applicant's life might help them to put their lives back on a more stable footing and allow them to think about the future and access to the labour market. In the longer term, that might reduce the cost to the public purse in terms of benefits. It seems that social fund crisis loan applicants have been excluded as a group from the new, allegedly customer friendly approach of Jobcentre Plus.

In the case of applicants for crisis loans, all claimants will be sent to a designated office within a jobcentre cluster where they will be interviewed by staff sitting behind protective screens. When drawing up our report on the ONE pilots, the Select Committee drew attention to the fact that the Government had promised in paragraph 46 of their response to the social fund inquiry that social fund alignment payments, which comprised 30 per cent. of crisis loan payments last year,

"will be handled as part of the normal claim taking process in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder areas ... and immediate payment facilities will be available when a customer comes in for an Adviser interview."

I understand that the Government have reneged on that promise. I do not know whether there are sound policy reasons or difficult administrative reasons for that, but although they seemed enthusiastic, they now seem to have set their face against it. I urge the Government to reinstate their earlier promise and give careful consideration to how realignment payments are treated in the new Jobcentre Plus set-up. That is important, because life could be made a lot easier for clients.

There is a substantial case for increasing the community care grant element of the budget. The Select Committee's report calls for a substantial increase in the budget to a level that would at least ensure that all applications that are classed as high or medium priority are met to the full amount required. The report drew attention to the severe pressure on the community care grant budget, which was leading to an unfair postcode and calendar lottery. That argument is set out at greater length in paragraph 37 of the report.

In paragraph 115, on the case for grants, we argued for a system of entitlement that ensures that all those who qualify for payments are entitled to receive them regardless of where they live or the time of year the application is made. That is only common sense and natural justice. A system of entitlement would also allow money to be targeted at specific groups—for example, ex-offenders—to complement other Government objectives. I refer the Committee to the discussion in paragraph 31 and to table 1, where community care grants are set out in tabular form, which is more easily understood by reference to the report.

The tables show that there has been an increase. The community care grant allocation was raised to £103 million for 2001–02, and it will be £108 million in 2002–03. That modest increase is welcome, but it is not enough. The community care grant budget has risen only 11.3 per cent. in the past eight years—although it might be better if someone checked that, because I made the calculation myself. It is a cause of concern that about two thirds of all community care grant applications are refused, and that since 1994 the share accounted for by grants, as opposed to loans, has changed dramatically from about one third to one fifth. It can be argued that the balance has shifted too far towards loans: they impoverish claimants, forcing them to live below subsistence level.

The Committee recommended that the Department commission research to re-examine the basis on which the community care grant budget is allocated to local offices, including the relative weighting given to different client groups and the accuracy of case load and legitimate-demand measurements. The detailed argument for that is contained in paragraph 38 of the report. In their reply, the Government said that they would review the principles underpinning allocation and that the results would be reflected in the community care grant budget allocations for 2002–03. If there has been a change, it would be helpful if the Minister explained the thinking behind the review.

Ethnic monitoring was an important part of the report. I have been the Chairman of the Select Committee for four or five years, and hardly a report by the Committee has not immediately run across problems that arise directly from the difficulty that the Department has in servicing applicants from minority and ethnic backgrounds. That difficulty was a novelty to

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me because as a representative from south-east Scotland, I have had no experience of dealing with substantial multicultural social groups, so it is fascinating to learn about the difficulties that other colleagues have.

I am absolutely certain that the Department can no longer ignore such matters as it seems to do. To give an example from the report, we learned that the call-centre system to deliver the new pension credit does not include a centre anywhere near the south-east. Everything will be done by telephone, no doubt by highly trained people, in places such as Blackpool. I have nothing against people working in Blackpool, but I do not understand how the system can possibly cope with areas of heavy demand for pension credit and other social security benefit entitlements by remote control. Without experienced, trained interpreters, advisers and support staff who work in those communities, there is no real prospect of delivering a high-quality service to an increasing proportion of the population of the United Kingdom.

The social fund report threw up ethnic monitoring as a problem. It was a problem before, and it is a problem now—it seems to be a problem in just about every report that we do. I plead with the Minister that, when considering the social fund report, he not confine himself to that single policy area, but that he give serious attention to the problems connected with ethnic monitoring, and work with the Commission for Racial Equality as we suggest. To be fair to the Government, their response stated that dialogue was taking place, but the problem is a serious one of first principles. The Government and the Department have substantial work to do to satisfy me that they are dealing adequately with it.

An issue that is not restricted to the social fund and its delivery but crosses the whole of the poverty debate is that of wider access to capital and revenue for disadvantaged households. Increasing and worrying evidence indicates that there is a massive overhang of debt in many such households. I am sure that all hon. Members know from their casework of families who are over their heads in debt. Citizens advice bureaux do valuable work trying to rationalise and reconcile the debts, making it easier for people to work on a cash basis from week to week, but there is overwhelming evidence—it was clear in the evidence presented in the social fund inquiry—that more and more vulnerable families are now victims of loan sharks, who legally charge usurious rates of interest on loans to purchase basic household items to families in adversity, whose circumstances allow them nowhere else to go.

If the social fund were part of a sensible system, it would deal efficiently and expeditiously with cases, even if only by means of a loan which had to be repaid eventually. Instead, people find accessing the social fund so complicated, unpredictable, long-winded and bureaucratic that they would rather go around the corner and pay an extra £100 or even £200 in the course of a year repaying a loan. There was a very good example in the report from the Family Welfare Association. The total cost of buying a £400 refrigerator or washing machine would be £500 if one dealt with it sensibly by applying to the social fund, or £600 if one bought from a catalogue. The report gave examples of people were paying as much as £2,000, because they repaid the money over a long period of time to loan sharks who charged increasing compound annual percentage rates.

It is ridiculous in this day and age that people can legally charge such rates of interest. I do not know why the Government have not considered capping the rates of interest that are used and abused in such ways. To keep their families together, people have no alternative but to get the money now, and pay interest at leisure, in a way that makes no financial or economic sense. Wider access to social fund loans is important because it would deal with a problem that is facing more and more families.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): The hon. Gentleman makes his point cogently. I apologise for missing his initial remarks. I am not being critical of the Select Committee, but the difference between the regulated and the discretionary social fund is not as hard and fast as we might want it to be. Without going into detail, one of my constituents was seeking a funeral grant after the death of his mother. Initially, it was disallowed because he had a sister, albeit they were estranged. He overcame that, but was then told that he could not receive a grant towards a gravedigger because the gravedigger did not work for the council. Within the regulated social fund, there are discretionary elements that drove a gentleman who was on benefit for many years to seek appeals. He is still paying back the loans because of the discretionary sums, and the sum allowed for funerals falls ridiculously below the going rate for their true cost. Would the hon. Gentleman like to comment on cases such as that?

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes, we heard about a number of similar cases, but that one sounds especially perverse and difficult. I concur with the hon. Gentleman.

It is now time that we stood back. We have plenty of experience on which to base our judgments, and the time is now right for serious examination and fundamental reform. I know that the Minister is very sensitive to the problems and that he understands them as well as anyone. I know that he will use his best offices within his new office to address the problems. The debate gives us a chance to discuss some of the difficulties facing our constituents, and the Minister will be able tell us whether the next three-year spending round offers some hope that the system will be improved. In the social fund as it is currently constituted there is significant scope for improvement.

3.4 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on chairing the Committee during the production of its comprehensive report on the issues arising from the social fund. I shall try extremely hard not to fall into the trap of being a tad repetitive, because so many important points have been made, but I cannot promise.

I recognise what my hon. Friend the Minister has achieved over the years and what the Government have done to tackle child poverty. That was reinforced so importantly yesterday, in a way that I greatly welcome:

not only have the Government set the most ambitious target of any post-war Government in committing themselves to eradicating child poverty, but they have made real and substantial progress, however one cares to measure it.

The fact that the target will prove difficult to reach underlines the importance not only of the strategy of improving basic benefits—the working families tax credit and the new tax credit that it will become as well as income support—but of addressing the various ways, of which the social fund is an important one, in which Governments can help families on low incomes to tackle the problems that they face, especially those arising from crisis or the pressures of being on a low income for a very long time.

It is my view, and that of the Social Security Committee, that the social fund, far from contributing substantially to solving those problems, is in many ways part of them. The need for reform is urgent. The social fund is probably the last remaining element of a Dickensian, poor law approach in a welfare state that we are modernising very satisfactorily. So much progress is being made with Jobcentre Plus, the integration of benefits and work, and personal advisers that the service is shifting from a rather hostile, often patronising and generally unpleasant one, which it was for so many people for so long, towards one that is welcoming and positive and that supports people through the welfare to work process.

However, there is a core of people, often those whose lives are the most chaotic or who are in deepest crisis and trauma for a host of reasons, whom we are looking after least well. That is why the need for reform is so urgent. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire mentioned the report recently produced by the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Council for One Parent Families, "Like it or Lump it", which is their most recent review of the social fund and the case for action. In many respects, it reinforces and updates this report, and develops some of those groups' thinking. The Committee and I do not necessarily agree with it all, but it is a helpful contribution to the debate.

Those organisations are generally very positive indeed about what the Government have done to tackle child poverty. They are certainly friends, although critical ones, as they should be, of the Government's approach. Their report says:

> "The operation of priorities and weightings, subject to local cash limits has led to criticisms that the Fund operates both a 'postcode' and a 'calendar' lottery rather than responding to real need. People can also receive loans if it is considered that they are able to repay them. Spending on loans far outweighs that on grants and in some years the Fund has recovered more than it has paid out in loans . . . About one third of Community Care Grants and almost half of Budgeting Loan spending is paid to lone parents . . . but many are refused help".

That single paragraph crystallises the practical problems with the social fund.

Importantly, however, that is not to argue that the fund does not mean well, that the principles underpinning it are not well intentioned or that most people involved in its administration at all levels are not doing a good, competent and well-meaning job. I believe that they are. Compared with the experience that people on low incomes have of unlicensed credit dealers, the fund is a model of good practice.

I very much support the points that have been made about the operation of credit, which is so exploitative of those on low incomes. The fund offers loans at low interest, which is clearly of great value to people looking for a sum of money to spend who would otherwise turn to credit dealers, and is open to public scrutiny and accountability, which is why we are having the debate. That is much to its credit.

The fund is flawed in two respects, however. Its provision is not adequate to meet needs—I shall not spell out all the different ways in which that is the case, but it boils down to the fund not being large enough to direct assistance to all those who need it—and it cannot assist in the right way those who have recourse to it. That is due to two factors that are often conflated.

Many people turn to the fund at a time of crisis. Such crises include domestic violence, burglary, fire and a host of other things, and we know that people on low incomes are disproportionately likely to be affected. For example, hon. Members who represent inner-city constituencies will be extremely familiar with the fact that 50 per cent. of families on low incomes have no household insurance. Families without insurance are three times more likely to experience a domestic burglary than families with insurance. The more that people need the protection of an insurance policy, the less likely they are to have one, despite being more at risk. Families are trapped in a vicious circle in which they frequently do not have the money to insure themselves and often live in what are classified red-light districts for insurance purposes. If they are burgled, they find that they are unable to replace their property. Such crises drive people to seek the help of the social fund.

Similarly, we know that low-income families are more likely to be the victims of domestic fires—a fact borne out by statistics. In particular, families living in private rented accommodation in multiple-occupier homes are far more likely to be victims of domestic fires. When such people turn to the social fund, some are refused help and many others are not given all the help that they need. Some are turned from the social fund grant section towards loans. Even allowing for the fact that those loans are interest free, people become trapped in repayment problems and long-term poverty.

We must ensure that the fund is resourced to enable most people to get most of the help that they need most of the time in grant form during a crisis. That should not be subject to the arbitrary impact of the calendar and postcode lotteries that we researched for our report and which are referred to in the National Council for One Parent Families and Child Poverty Action Group report. That means that the social fund must be more generously funded.

I appreciate that not all those matters are in the Minister's remit, but I shall be grateful if he responds and assures me that such thinking is being taken up. Other Departments—in particular the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is responsible for housing—whose responsibilities overlap with those of the Department for Work and Pensions should take up those issues. If we were able to direct assistance towards them, we could help people who would otherwise end up in crisis, which would lead them to call on the social fund.

[Ms Karen Buck]

A good example of that is the expansion of the furnished tenancy scheme, from which two of the worst interactions with the social fund that I have ever heard of arose. One family—in my experience, this is a common feature of families using the social fund—had spent two years in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. They were rehoused in an unfurnished tenancy and applied to the social fund, from which they received assistance. However, they did not receive enough to purchase a fridge. The family had three children, every one of whom had special needs. One child needed daily medication, which had to be kept refrigerated.

Without access to a fridge, the child's mother had to travel three miles to a hospital to pick up her child's medication every day for more than six months. That occurred about three years ago, but it is a classic example of how the social fund helped in the end—the family won their case on appeal. However, had we been able to do more for families leaving temporary accommodation by providing furnished accommodation as a rule, that family's needs would not have had to depend entirely on the social fund.

The second case happened about 18 months ago. A family left temporary accommodation for a flat. They received assistance, and got the cooker, the fridge and bedding, but they were not allowed a carpet. The father of the household was epileptic, so we had to pursue the case through the appeals process on the ground that when the father had an epileptic fit, which was frequently, he would fall and smash his head on an uncarpeted, hard floor. However, that was not considered an acceptable case for the special provision of a carpet.

Those are just two examples of the problems that we face. To set the fund in the broader context of what the Government can do to help in such circumstances, it would be useful to know that they are proceeding more energetically by considering furnished tenancies.

Tenancy-linked insurance schemes should also be mentioned. Some housing associations, and possibly some councils, are doing good work by building an insurance component into rents. Each week, they collect an insurance contribution with the rent, which makes sense. If we could encourage people to have affordable insurance policies, several demands on the social fund would be deflected. Many families, particularly those in chaotic circumstances who have tried to manage on a low income for a long time, simply cannot find £150 or £200 for a domestic insurance policy. They certainly cannot pay in a lump sum.

I shall briefly mention one of the main thrusts of the CPAG research and the representations made during the inquiries into both the social fund and the integrated child credit, which makes provision for what has been nicely described by the Family Welfare Association as "lumpy items." The Government have recognised the principle of the lumpy item with measures such as the winter fuel allowance and the sure start maternity grant, which is an excellent provision. Increasing the sure start maternity grant is one of the many good things that the Government have done to tackle poverty. Nothing is lumpier than a maternity grant.

However, that principle needs to be extended further to provision for later in life, particularly when children start school. The report develops how a social exclusion grant or a child development grant could be provided as of right to families on low incomes who receive maximum child credit and suggests how that would help families who spend several years on income support to meet the cost of the purchase, replacement or repair of items that are normally out their reach. Such costs are not necessarily those that arise from crises such as fire or burglary. I commend that approach.

I shall address the operation of the social fund, rather than whether the fund provides sufficient resources to help people out of poverty. My comments will reflect what the Committee said in its report, but I have also drawn heavily on an update from my local law centre, which I told about the debate. It was one of the places that the Committee visited while producing the report, and it helpfully provided us with cases and information on its experience of the social fund.

The law centre tells me that claimants still have problems getting past reception staff to make an application. Many people are being turned away by the gatekeepers—this is raised in the CPAG-NAOPF report—and are told, in advance, that they will not qualify for assistance. Those refusals do not show up in the statistics. People are being deterred from making a claim. Some cases, although the evidence is anecdotal and we cannot show how large the problem is, do not even appear as refusals. The law centre gave me an example. A client was given a claim form to complete. After he completed it and handed it in, he was told by someone who was not even a decision maker that his application had failed. He took the claim form back to the law centre, but it was unable to find any record of what happened. That example confirms its case, and our report draws that out through claimants' evidence to the Committee.

In addition, in written and oral evidence, the advice agencies talked about a culture of disbelief among the gatekeeping staff. Most Benefits Agency staff, at all levels, serve the public extremely well and to the best of their abilities. However, as the Chairman of the Committee said, we could do much more to raise the quality of all staff, particularly those on reception, and to monitor the quality of the service provided. In particular, we should do more to monitor and improve the quality of service delivery to ethnic minority clients, who, like more than a third of my constituents, do not have English as a first language, and those with mental health problems, who make a disproportionate number of the more casual claims on the service.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend accept those who have been in care or been fostered are another particularly vulnerable group? I can work only on the basis of anecdotal evidence, but it has been reported to me that, although such people are already in the system, the different parts of that system are bad at communicating with each other. The Government have done a lot to raise the group's profile, but there are problems, particularly with loans.

Ms Buck: I thank my hon. Friend. Indisputably, young people in care and leaving care are very much at risk of falling through holes in the net. The service,

however much it has improved, still has a long way to go. The advice agencies think the information needed to support a claim and ensure that it is properly considered quite disproportionate to the nature of the request. To succeed, claimants must submit a variety of evidence such as reports from doctors and social workers, sometimes for payments of only £200. That is particularly worrying in view of the social factors that must be taken into account.

One claimant who gave evidence to the Committee spoke about people in rural areas sometimes having to go to two, three or four different villages or towns to visit the doctor, social services and the social fund office. In the cities, there is a different problem. Distances are not so great, but the functional illiteracy that many people have to overcome is a serious barrier to access to all the agencies that need to be accessed to draw together the information required to make a case. One knock-on effect of that is that advice agencies across London and in many other areas are buried in such work. They have to marshal the evidence, because too many clients are unable, for perfectly justifiable reasons, to do so themselves.

The third concern is the standard of initial decision making, which is sometimes unacceptably low. The law centre drew my attention to the example of a single parent with mental and physical health problems caring for his six-year-old daughter. The two had recently arrived in the United Kingdom, having witnessed, shortly before they left their home country, the death of the child's mother.

The child was traumatised and was referred to a child psychiatrist for assessment. She also had kidney problems and an immune system deficit. The two were moved from a homeless hostel to a flat that they needed to equip. Initially, they were refused a community care grant because they were not considered to be a family under exceptional pressure, which I find impossible to believe. All the supporting evidence had to be resubmitted, and it was then remarshalled and updated by the law centre. It was finally approved, but at considerable cost to the Government. That example shows how much law centre bureaucracy is necessary to take such a case to appeal.

Discretionary decisions are all too likely not to be properly objective and transparent. I accept the argument that being over-prescriptive may cause difficulties—a balance must be struck—but there remains a suspicion, not only among clients, that decisions may be unfair. We must address that issue. If law centres and advice services have to work with so many clients to guide them through the system, they may need more guidance on what is likely to succeed or fail.

On loan repayments, the Department for Work and Pensions claims back more per week than priority debtors may obtain through the courts. For people on low incomes, £2.70 a week is too high, and other non-priority debtors may expect to receive much less. The limits on repayment could easily be extended. I cite the example of a client who appealed against an incapacity-for-work decision, with income support already reduced to 90 per cent. of the personal allowance. The client was repaying loans at £7.80 a week and living, therefore, on only £33 a week. The Government should extend and ease repayments for those who are directed to the loan service.

I welcome what the Government have done to tackle child poverty, but I remain of the view that reforming the social fund is essential if we are to join up all the aspects of the system and make them work effectively, especially for the 10 per cent. of low-income families who are the most needy. We must help those whose lives have been most disrupted by homelessness or domestic violence, or who are in need because they are refugees, because they have suffered a fire or a burglary, because they have mental health problems or because of some other crisis in their lives. Although it would be good to put more money into the social fund to extend eligibility and grants provision, more could be done within the existing budget to make the system work well for people.

We should remove the sense that is shared by too many social fund claimants that their relationship with the fund is stigmatising. They should not feel that they are being robbed of their dignity while having to overcome the problems of low income, but the anecdotal evidence is that that attitude is widespread and rooted among clients and advice agencies. I am convinced that many people have had bad experiences of the service.

I give thanks to people in my law centres and advice agencies, who work 24-7 to deliver a service to the poorest in the country. It is time that more was done to recognise the quality of the service provided by advice agencies throughout the nation to help people at the bottom of the pile.

3.27 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I speak as a new Member of the House who was not a member of the Social Security Committee. Having not taken part in previous discussions, I do not want to intrude too much on the debate. I begin by congratulating the Committee on its interesting and comprehensive report, and I share the disappointment at the Government response.

Having read the report of the Welsh Affairs Committee last year, I admit to a sense of déjà vu when I note, in paragraph (cc) of the response, the point about expanding the social fund's role to other groups. I remember seeing that recommendation before.

I have reservations about the social fund in general—and I speak as someone who used to help people to apply for payments under the pre-1986 system. That often entailed indignities and stigma for those people, and I remember pleading with officials in those far-off days for extra bedding or a heating addition. It was a dispiriting and stigmatising process. I am an unreconstructed warrior from the mid-1980s; I was against the social fund at the time and I have always taken the view that the only reform that the social fund needed was to be scrapped. I saw it as a vehicle that established the social norm of extreme thrift that was so dear to the last Conservative Government. For a Government who were against the nanny state, it seemed a blatant piece of social engineering. However, the Committee now urges various incremental reforms, with which I have no quarrel in the short term.

[Hywel Williams]

The social fund system has always struck me as being markedly worse than the previous system. The reasons for that are well known and have been rehearsed this afternoon. I shall not dwell on them, but I shall mention a few.

The fact that the fund is cash-limited rather than needs-driven is fundamental. The worries expressed about the balance between loans and grants struck me again when the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) told us that the proportion had reduced to 20 per cent. from the third that we were used to. The administrative costs of the social fund are high. I used to joke that if the fund was a bank it would now be in receivership, given the proportion of cost to the money administered and the good done by the fund—although I do not deny that it does a certain amount of good. I used to worry—I still do—about the operation of discretion; to say the least, it is unclear. Indeed, that is confirmed by what I have read of the report, and other Members have referred to inconsistency over time and from area to area, as a result of the postcode and calendar lottery.

However, my biggest worry is the long-standing worry that the social fund drives people into debt. One cannot say too often that people on income support are driven into debt, and therefore live on an unacceptable level of income. It does not happen by chance; it is well understood that people with social fund debts live below the income support level. They are poor, and they often have to borrow in order to buy the essentials of everyday life. It is no comfort to them to know that those with debts to moneylenders or loan sharks are even worse off.

The Government's response to recommendation (k), on page 7 of their reply to the report, was revealing. It was that extending the period for recovery of budgeting loans would

"extend the period when applicants would be unable to access further loans from the Social Fund because of existing debt."

That is an argument against extending the period. However—this is so revealing—the response continues:

"This could then drive applicants to encumber themselves with debt from other sources".

I have a message for the Government; indeed, I am sure that they already know it. That is the effect at present on people on income support who have debts to the Government for months, or even years, which they cannot avoid.

I asked the people at an advice centre on a local housing estate what the current effect of the social fund was. As always they expressed a number of fears. There is a lot of tick, a lot of tally and many unpaid debts. The people who do not get repaid are often claimants themselves; people who, from the goodness of their hearts, help their friends or relatives, then find themselves short of money. Later in their response, the Government say that they will take a softer view on rescheduling those debts. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on that.

The Committee recommends reforms, and I shall mention a few of them—first recommendation (d), on fuel poverty. I cannot understand how the Government can argue that people with a disability or those with children are at lower risk of fuel poverty than the elderly. They share the same risks. They have little money, they are more tied to the house, and they will need more heating than the general population. I hope that the Government will reconsider the matter, because some people need more money as a result of disability or child care responsibilities.

The Government suggest in paragraph 5 of their response that in the past benefits have broadly kept pace with fuel costs. However, as they say in the ISA advertisements, past performance is no guarantee of future performance. Vulnerable groups should have the security of knowing not only that they can safely turn up the heat now, but that they will be able to do so in future.

As regards the allocation of community care grants to local offices, it has always been a mystery to me and others how the level of social fund money is determined locally. I have always assumed that the historical level of claiming is determined and then forms the basis for the allocation, but it is not a real guide to need. Three months after the social fund was introduced in my area, there was a review of the amount paid out. It was an interesting case. My area has high levels of disability, and there are many older people and long-term unemployed, but my office in Portmadoc paid out at the same level as the office in Harrow on the Hill. I could see no comparison between the two communities, and there certainly is none now, because Portmadoc is paying out as much as it can.

On determining local need, I draw the Government's attention to the index of multiple deprivation, which the National Assembly for Wales published last year after commissioning expert research. The index lists electoral districts according to several measures of poverty and gives scores for individual measures and a combined score. Using the index, it would be possible to list every one of the 750-odd electoral wards in Wales according to their relative deprivation, and it has already been used it in respect of stamp duty exemption.

The index is not perfect, but I commend it because it is better than the previous system that we used in Wales. Let me give two examples of that system, which are perhaps well known. First, car ownership was taken as a measure of wealth, and the possession of two cars was presumably a measure of even greater wealth. However, wages in Powys county are the lowest in Wales, while the level of car ownership is the highest. The ownership of two cars is also more widespread than elsewhere. The new measure gets over such ridiculous assumptions.

Secondly, part of my constituency that is known to suffer extreme deprivation would not have shown up under the old measures. One ward, which now shows up as the fourth most deprived in Wales, previously did not show up at all. Another ward, which did not appear in measures of housing deprivation, is now recognised as having the worst housing in Wales. The new system therefore measures deprivation, and I commend it to the Government.

I turn briefly to the level of community care grants and the level of funding year on year. Community care grants are a tiny proportion of the social security budget. I note from paragraph 10 of the Government's response that the level of funding has increased, but given that it was set too low in the first place, we are starting from a very low base. Indeed, 3 per cent. of not a lot is only a little bit more, and we should consider that.

I want briefly to discuss social fund staff training. When the social fund was introduced, many staff welcomed the possibility of working in a more welfare-oriented style with people who claimed grants and loans. Many social fund staff would welcome that opportunity again, because they do not want to be merely administrators or assessors; they want to work more constructively with people in difficulties. The welfare element should be more prominent, as it sometimes was in the past and certainly should be in the future. To take up an earlier point, additional training might also counter some of the high error rates that we have experienced.

I used to joke with my students—with an element of gallows humour, I am afraid—that the social fund was the poor people's bank. I would show them a leaflet about loans and shield the source of that leaflet. It showed a bright young family loading some rather nice antiques into the back of a Volvo estate. I asked my students whether they thought that that social fund application form was an application form for the poor people's bank. Of course, I then went through the actual application form, looking at the amount of evidence needed and discussing the stigma attached.

The Committee calls for an urgent overhaul and an injection of funds. The Government say in their reply that they are prepared at least to review the social fund, but I do not think that a willingness to review the fund is a sufficiently serious response to the report. Those who cannot work or who, through no fault of their own, cannot find work cannot simply wait for the occasional review. I urge the Minister and the Government to take more radical action.

3.40 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his excellent Budget speech, said that the way in which a country cares for its dispossessed and underprivileged is a clear indication of how civilised that society is and what values it has. Our subject for debate today—the Social Security Committee's recommendations for the reform of a system of benefits that sustains and supports Britain's poorest people, and the Government's response to those recommendations—should be seen as part of such an assessment.

Having read the Committee's third report on the social fund, published last March, and the Government's response to it in Command Paper 5237, published last July, I feel that it is important for me, as a new Member, to make an individual contribution to the debate. I shall focus my remarks on three aspects: community care grants, crisis loans and budgeting loans. As I, like the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), am a new Member, the views that I shall express in this speech have been shaped by my experiences during the past 10 months as a Member for a constituency that has, despite the Government's best efforts, higher than average numbers of people in poverty and need.

I must point out that although I am—I hope—a reasonably fresh-faced new Member, and a relative newcomer to this aspect of social policy debate, I have had extensive experience in local government. I served as a councillor for 17 years, for six of which I was chair of the housing committee for one of Scotland's largest cities, Dundee. As the convener and chair of that committee, I was glad to introduce a scheme of housing insurance open to tenants on a voluntary basis so that they could make provision for times of disaster in the household when household goods had to be rapidly replaced.

It was often heart-rending when the people who came to my surgeries or to the council chambers needed provision for that sort of thing but had been refused by the social fund, and we had to go through the other charities. That was one reason why we went down that road. I am very much aware of the issues surrounding poverty and housing benefit. The relationship between the social security system and housing benefit provision can be complicated, to say the least.

Considerable areas of Dundee, East have been designated as social inclusion partnership areas, as they are called in Scotland. The term applies to Scottish communities that were once labelled areas of multiple deprivation, and they continue to be the Government's and the Scottish Executive's priority areas for regeneration and Government-funded assistance. The nature of this discourse has also been shaped by discussions that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scotland Office and I had this week on the occasion of his visit to Dundee, at my invitation, to meet groups and organisations in the Dundee area involved in tackling poverty.

That is an area of social policy in which I have a particular interest, because of the social and economic composition of the electorate in my area. The Minister of State's visit stemmed from his response to a question that I put to him in the House late last year. I asked him about the joint efforts being mounted by the Scottish Executive and the Scotland Office to combat the pernicious blight of poverty in Scottish society. That is still a high priority on the Government's agenda, and rightly so.

The groups that we met during the visit were Dundee's anti-poverty forum, with which I have been acquainted for some time in my role as convener of housing, and a relatively new organisation known as the Bridge project, funded by the Government through Scottish Executive funding and social inclusion partnership money. That project aims to provide advice and, where necessary, temporary bridging finance support to individuals and families who, for whatever reasons, cannot get social fund assistance. The project is closely allied to the Dundee money advice support team, which gave evidence as part of the consultation exercise in the preparation of the document. It is aware of the Committee's work, and hopes that the work will bring results in the end. Although it is funded through the Scottish Executive, the vast majority of its cases stem from problems with national benefits and the social fund.

Those organisations have made many interesting and valid points about the operation of the social fund, and how it fails at times to help those in need. The Minister of State and I expressed our willingness to listen to what

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they had to say, and to take up their points at the earliest possible occasion with the Ministers and Departments responsible. I am therefore glad to have a chance to make my comments and to set their case for change in the system against the backdrop of the Committee's third report and the Government's response to it.

From our discussions, from my constituency work load, and from the findings of the Social Security Committee report, it is clear that we still have some way to go to ensure that we have the best possible system in place to tackle adequately the periods of transition and crisis that have an impact on the lives of the poorest members of British society.

The current social fund, introduced as part of the Fowler reviews of the 1980s, replaced what was felt to be a much fairer system of discretionary grants under the old social security benefits scheme. The Chairman of the Social Security Committee, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) made the point that although it was introduced in 1988, it was put on the statute book in 1986. Implementation was delayed because of the general election that the Conservatives had planned for 1987.

There was much controversy and opposition when the social fund was introduced. I remember being involved in the campaigns against it. It was intentionally targeted at a very restricted client group, because the Government were aiming to reduce social security expenditure by imposing strict budgeting and fixed cash limits. It was fairly heavily criticised, to say the least, on its introduction, and although the current Government have done much to make it more accessible, I still feel that it suffers from its Thatcherite origins.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and others have made very persuasive arguments outside this Chamber for the scrapping of the fund. Given the reformist nature of the Government, I feel that it is not beyond their scope to start on that task, and they should begin soon.

Community care grants are the first of my immediate detailed concerns. The groups that we visited were worried, as I am, about the criteria for eligibility. However, the major concerns, which are clearly shared by the Social Security Committee, related to the strict budgetary guidelines that were imposed on a national basis with little account taken of local circumstances. The budget control at local level means that a system of tight priorities has to be imposed. As a result, sometimes the needs of the applicants are not fully met; that was brought to my attention this week. That is the nature of the Bridge project: it tries to supply a bridge until further funding can be found to help people out of their problems.

The organisation with which we had those discussions claimed in its presentation, of which the Minister of State, Scotland Office and I have a copy, that the budget for the community care grant was restricted for the first 10 years of the social fund's life.

In the Tayside district, in which Dundee lies, there was an increase of about 1 per cent. in the real-terms value of the social fund's budget, although according to my hon. Friend's calculations there was an increase of 11 per cent. It is, however, clear that that part of it was underfunded during the first 10 years of its life. Although there has been a 3 per cent. increase, underfunding during its early years means that there is still a lot more to do. Until we can push the fund up to a credible level, there will always be cases in which priorities are not met. The Government need to pay attention to that and take steps to alleviate the problem.

I acknowledge the proposals, which are set out in paragraph 6 of the Government response, to carry out a review of the principles underpinning the allocation of community care grants, and to develop proposals for adjusting the criteria for budgets to reflect more accurately the needs of individuals in specific areas. Those who work on tackling poverty in Dundee, and I, will look closely at the budget allocations for this year, which are to take account of those findings. Following yesterday's Budget statement, perhaps the Minister will be able to address some of those concerns in his winding-up speech.

Many people consider the criteria for crisis loans to be too strict, and the current method by which applications are processed is often distressing and time-consuming. I agree wholeheartedly with the Select Committee's recommendations that the eligibility criteria for crisis loans should be increased to make them more accessible. Despite the explicit direction given in April 1999 that Benefits Agency staff should review applications for crisis loans in the light of the circumstances that would be created by the possible refusal of a budgeting loan, it is my impression that problems still exist.

That leads me on to the issue of budgeting loans. The point has been forcibly made to the Minister of State, Scotland Office and me that the requirement that an applicant for such support must have been in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance for a minimum of six months means that many applicants, particularly young single parents, miss out. Some of them attempt to apply for community care grants, where they are relevant, but there are also strict criteria for that funding. Others are left to rely on charity organisations such as the Bridge project or their families to provide them with their most basic requirements. I hope—this is a request from the organisations that I have consulted—that the criteria for awarding budgeting loans will be revisited.

In any benefits structure or Government regulation there are always going to be loopholes; that is one thing that emerges from the report. We are thinking about the ways in which people fall through such loopholes and do not receive the benefits that they deserve. One such loophole that was mentioned to us is the fact that persons in receipt of incapacity benefit are barred from access to budgeting loans and community care grants. That is because long-term incapacity benefit, plus an age addition for those between 35 and 45, produces a figure of about £74.60, which is 15p more than the cut-off point for income support entitlement. Again, that can place incapacitated and vulnerable people in considerable hardship and stress when they are least able to handle them. I know, however, that it is difficult to cater for the borderline cases.

Looking through the Select Committee report, I see that much of the casework was done in the Bridge project. I can supply the Minister with the annual report, which highlights some of the cases; it might be

useful to him and his officers. A mechanism is needed to cover borderline cases—in the case that I have described, 15p can result in a great income difference.

Although I welcome the Government's open, concerned and responsible approach to the issues raised in the Social Security Committee's report on the social fund, and the increase in real terms of the benefits made available through the social fund this year, I believe that there are issues still to be addressed. I hope that the reorganisation in the Department for Work and Pensions will bring a greater focus to bear on those issues, and lead to a speedy resolution. The Committee and its Chairman are to be congratulated and commended on their report and the comprehensive way in which they handled the investigation. I know that the issues will be raised with the Department and the Minister by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Scotland Office, and given the nature of the Government's commitment to social justice, which was clearly voiced yesterday by the Chancellor, we can be sure that the representations will receive a fair hearing.

3.56 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. It is a great misfortune that it coincides with that part of the Budget debate that focuses on the work of the Department for Work and Pensions. We do not often have debates on such subjects, and when we do they seem to come along together, like London buses. None the less, we must make the best of what we have.

We have heard excellent contributions from the hon. Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), and for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), all of whom brought expertise and personal experience to the subject. I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for introducing the debate so comprehensively and for chairing the Social Security Committee that prepared the report. Looking at the list of the Committee's members on the second page of the report—the Committee's quorum was 11 members, but it had 26 members during the last Parliament—I am amazed that they completed any reports. Of course, the membership was very distinguished—I am sure that that had something to do with the quality of its reports.

The report is certainly important. I remember the introduction of the social fund. The hon. Member for Dundee, East and I were county council—and, therefore, social services authorities—leaders at the time, and I well remember our criticisms of the proposals. However, we are dealing with what we have now and the way in which the present Government operate the fund.

The Committee's criticisms are trenchant. Paragraph 117 of the report states categorically that

"less is being spent on the Discretionary Social Fund today than five years ago with no evidence of diminution of need."

Its conclusions, given in paragraphs (ee) and (ff), state:

"We urge the Government to . . . take a radical look at the Social Fund, so that it may work to enhance the strategy to reduce child poverty, rather than work against it . . . We have concluded that the scheme in its present format needs urgent overhaul and an injection of funds."

Those are strong criticisms, and the question is whether the Government response really takes measure of them. I am not sure that the present operation of the social fund works against the strategy to reduce child poverty, as the Committee says it does, but I accept the argument that it does very little to enhance it. That is a key issue.

We are dealing with a fund of last resort. The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North said that it is one of the last remnants of the Poor Law. In some ways, it is. It is what people turn to when everything else fails. Sadly, it is not always the last action that they take, and that is one of the problems. If they fail to get what they need, either fully or in part, from the social fund, they will inevitably be tempted at a time of crisis or utmost need to seek the necessary funds elsewhere. That is when they find themselves saddled with unsustainable debt, which makes matters worse, not better—a point made by the experts, including citizens advice bureaux, law centres, and people who deal with debt counselling and people in great need. The paradox of the current operation of the social fund is that in many ways the least well off are the least likely to benefit. That is one of the clear conclusions in the report.

The report raises questions about the quality of advice. Let me make it clear that I am not criticising the people who work in the offices and who do the best they can, often in difficult circumstances. However, over the years, the culture of the Benefits Agency combined with budget restrictions that mean that staff must be extraordinarily careful about their decisions have militated against wanting to provide the maximum, not the minimum, at the point of request. I would love to hear the Minister say today that the Government have overturned that and sent clear instructions to staff—and provided appropriate training—that they should work with prospective claimants to enable them to take the best possible avenue and make the best possible application to enable them to receive what they need. Many disappointments would be prevented and the need for many subsequent appeals would be obviated if that positive approach were adopted from day one—from the moment at reception when someone says, "Look, we have a problem and we need your help."

With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and his Committee, I am not sure that I agree with the recommendation that appeals should be made direct to the independent review service. Appeal systems work best if appeals are taken within the organisation and then go to review. I am not sure that there would be a clear benefit from another approach, but I may be persuaded by the Government's response.

Turning to the actual components of the social fund, it is clear from what the Select Committee said and the evidence given to it that there is still a lack of transparency in the criteria used to assess applications for community care grants. I note that the Government said that they were working to improve clarity, but we need criteria that are more easily understandable by applicants and assessors and are slightly wider drawn than the current, rather restrictive criteria.

Many commentators have made the sensible suggestion that one criterion that should be included is the need to be able to respond to milestone events. We all recognise in our own families that some events and upheavals require a little extra financial support to allow

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progress to the next stage. Sometimes, that involves significant expenditure; sometimes, it requires less expenditure but over a longer period, which drains the pot. Responding to such events in people's lives would be extremely helpful.

There is also a strong case for extending the benefit of the payments—the same applies to other components of the discretionary social fund—to applicants who are dependent on low incomes rather than on benefits. There is no obvious logic in relating the social fund to the type of benefit received rather than to absolute poverty. It is in any case linked at one remove to means-testing, so a system that did not discriminate on the basis of benefits received would be more sensible.

Important questions have been asked about the repayment of budgeting loans. If repayment demands on people who have received budgeting loans are at the high end of the spectrum, people are—perversely—encouraged to borrow again elsewhere. They then find themselves in the double bind of high—in relative terms—repayments on a restricted income, and having to find extra money to fund additional borrowing, which will almost certainly be at a usurious interest rate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said. That is in nobody's interests, least of all in the interests of those who make applications.

A formal mechanism for rescheduling debt is sensible, as is recognition that rescheduling may often be needed and that the impetus for it can come from the Government agency rather than from the individual. As the tide rises overhead, the agency should start to consider rescheduling and alternative arrangements for debt repayment, as any good bank manager would.

The 26-week qualifying period in respect of budgeting loans has properly been criticised. Our experience of constituency case work suggests that the early part of a life crisis that can put people in a dependent position, for what one hopes will be a short time, is often the most difficult. One can bet that the problem did not come out of the blue, and that before the person or family qualified for initial support, they had already taken budgeting measures. For example, repairs might not have been carried out or spares purchased; things might have been allowed to go to the wall. It is in the early stages of difficulties that people need prophylactic support that will enable them to avoid the spiral in which everything goes wrong and they cannot keep pace. Other hon. Members will understand when I say that often people visit my surgery at the point at which it is difficult to recover the situation. We all know that what little help we can give is as nothing compared with the help from advice agencies that deal so well with such cases daily.

The Select Committee rightly drew attention to the large percentage of crisis loans that are allotted in response to alignment claims. That suggests that something somewhere is going wrong. If a bridge is needed between benefit arrangements and it can only be in the form of a so-called crisis loan, why do we not consider the structures of other benefits to see how they can be better fitted together and so avoid the hiatus that causes damage? The criterion for serious damage or risk to health and safety is narrow, and it is capable of being misinterpreted by an assessing officer. Many situations result in serious damage or risk to health and safety, but not to the point of crisis. A sensible assessment should be able to take a medium to longer-term view of what needs to be provided to avoid a more serious crisis. That is not entirely possible under existing arrangements.

We keep coming back to the problem of funding for the discretionary social fund. If it is to be restricted—the Government say in their response that they are not prepared to change it, at least not for the moment—there will always be perverse decisions and over-zealous thriftiness on the part of officers. As a result, people will be denied assistance for which they are probably qualified simply because the funds are not available. Whatever the reason for that—even if it is the distribution of money to local offices, which is based largely on historic use—it is not a sensible way to deal with the problem.

None the less, even if there was a proper distribution system between local offices, it will always happen that a local office has a rush of claims or that local circumstances or even bad luck need to be dealt with. Even if the Government do not increase overall funds, as I would like them to, they should at least provide some form of contingency fund or lump sum from which local offices can draw down enough money to guarantee that high and medium-priority claims will be met if they meet the criteria. Such claims should be met irrespective of the circumstances of the local office. It is of little interest or importance to claimants whether civil servants have the funds in the local account to do the job.

We also need to consider refusal of social loans because of existing debt, because of the multiplication factor. If all we do by preventing access to social fund support because of existing debt is drive people into the hands of less scrupulous lenders and less financially advantageous borrowing, we do no favours either to the system or to the individual. We need to address that problem. However, that raises the question asked by the Committee: whether the social fund could be a vehicle for dealing with wider financial exclusion.

I ask the Minister to consider the relationship, if any, between the social fund and universal banking arrangements. Should there be a relationship between the two? We have developed the one-stop-shop concept not only with Jobcentre Plus, but with the universal bank. Could that be a vehicle for a wider concept of social loans that provide for a wider section of the community and help people in need who cannot access conventional financial institutions?

Might such loans provide a travel or transport element, which is especially important in rural areas? One of the worst aspects of social exclusion of poor people in rural areas is that they cannot get to the places that provide even basic elements of support. As the formal support systems of Government retract from rural areas to town centres, that problem is exacerbated. It is all very well to have a cottage with roses around the doorway if one has money, but a person without money in a rural area is stuck in more intractable poverty than people in cities who have access to at least some support. The Government have not adequately tackled that issue.

My last point relates to fridges. We were discussing fridges in the Chamber this morning during questions to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural

Affairs. This country currently has a fridge mountain, owing to the incompetence of the Government—but not of the Minister who is here today. I am not saying that poor people should go down to the local tip and pull a fridge out of it, but we could develop a more active process of recycling electrical goods in this country. That might provide people with opportunities to obtain cheaper household goods, it would be environmentally and socially friendly, and it would help to deal with exclusion. Given that we now have legislation that prevents disposal of fridges—and in future other electrical goods—the Government should act now to enable proper local recycling. That would allow people to have things in their houses that most of us take for granted but which they cannot currently afford.

Winter fuel payments made through the regulated social fund are mentioned in the report. Bizarrely, the Government defend to the death universal winter fuel payments to pensioners on the grounds that they are cheap, administratively easy and reach every pensioner. They use precisely the opposite argument in respect of other elements of pensioner support, saying that such support has to be targeted, cannot be universal and must be paid via the most complicated route possible. The Government are making a significant contribution to pensioners in need, but they could make that contribution to other vulnerable people. The Committee makes that point, but the Government have not properly addressed it.

The Minister is right to say that the home energy efficiency scheme payments scheme makes a new avenue available to people, but he must realise that it does not deal with immediate heating problems. It is a long-term programme of investment. A constituent of mine was on the list for a home energy efficiency scheme improvement to his house. His heating system broke down completely and he could not afford to do anything about it, so he asked to be treated as a priority in the scheme. He was told that he would have to wait until after winter—they might get around to fitting him in at some point, but there was a long waiting list for the scheme. He was vulnerable and needed help with his heating problems but was unable to get it because there was no element of urgency or prioritisation within the scheme. The Minister should consider that problem.

Funeral payments are important, although they do not affect a huge number of people. Those who are affected by them are in the most tragic circumstances. It is wrong to deprive someone of the dignity of an appropriate funeral simply because the funds provided do not match the cost of such a funeral. I understand that the Government do not want simply to pour money into funeral directors' pockets for over-expensive funerals, but there is a minimum cost involved. Funeral directors' costs comprise not only of their own costs, but costs imposed on them by others, such as the medical profession. That should be taken into account in the grant.

At present, the sums do not add up. The Government should make matching the funeral payment with the cost of funeral arrangements a matter of urgency, so that no more people in those circumstances are forced to worry. People should not be put through the indignity of being unable to meet the costs of proper funeral arrangements. I agree with the Committee about widening eligibility. Furthermore, even if next of kin do not fall within the narrow confines of the existing arrangements, there should be discretion to provide the payment through them.

The Minister may want to communicate my final point to his colleagues in another Department. There is serious concern in the funeral directors' industry—if that is the proper term—about arrangements between coroners' offices and individual undertaking companies that do not appear to be open to traditional competition or even examination. Coroners represent a strange Crown office, one that is not easy for Members of Parliament to examine. That may be appropriate, given that the office of coroner pre-dates that of Member of Parliament. I do not know whether the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Home Office has responsibility, but we must examine that if we are to tackle the point that funeral directors have so forcefully put to me.

I am enormously grateful to the Committee for its report, which should have much greater currency. It certainly deserves a more responsive attitude from the Government, whose reply gives the impression of complacency. It suggests that they are largely making do with the social fund in its present form, and that they are treading water while waiting for something else to come along. I want radical reform, and it is time that we had it. In view of the reforms that are taking place in work and pensions, the time is right now. Most of all, I want the fund to be the opposite of the description given in one of the report's subtitles. I want a fund that likes to say yes—a fund that gives people the support they need in the most appropriate way.

4.21 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am happy to take part in the debate, which, as hon. Members have observed, coincides with other debates on work and pensions and with statements on the Floor of the House. As a member of the Committee that is presently considering the State Pension Credit Bill, I have had an embarrassment of riches this afternoon, if that is the right phrase to use in the context of work and pensions.

The report is important and deserves careful scrutiny. I congratulate the Select Committee on its hard work in preparing its submission, which goes back to the previous Parliament. I also offer many congratulations to the Chairman of the Committee on his leadership of it and on the part that he has clearly played.

When debating such reports, it is worth noting the contribution made by voluntary organisations, which give evidence and the benefit of their experience and wisdom. Clearly, many bodies have given the Committee written and oral evidence, and I should single out citizens advice bureaux, which provide constituents with good help, as I and all hon. Members know from experience in our constituencies. Their evidence to the Committee was particularly valuable and helpful and gave many insights. It reminded us, if we needed reminding—hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon clearly have a good deal of knowledge about this subject—that people who use the fund are often highly vulnerable. They

"are usually extremely poor. They often face other problems such as long term ill health, poor housing or family break-up (including domestic violence)."

[Mr. James Clappison]

When one reads some of the case histories in the report, it is noticeable just how many times people have turned to the social fund as a result of family break-up and domestic violence. Indeed, that theme runs throughout the report.

We are trying to help vulnerable people who suffer from many disadvantages, but there are constraints on funding for the social fund. There are valuable lessons to be learned from the report about how well the money is spent. Different views have been expressed about the adequacy of the funding, but I am sure that everyone wants to ensure that it is spent as well as possible. I therefore want to draw out from the report four points about how well the money is being spent. Only one relates to the regulated social fund—the others relate to the discretionary social fund.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned funeral payments. I agree with him that there are some important conclusions in the report about such payments. I wish to stress the points in the report about the eligibility rules. They are contained in paragraphs 9 and 13 of the report, which I mentioned briefly. Paragraph 9 refers to

"consistent evidence from claimants that they perceive the process as unfeeling and overly-bureaucratic."

Paragraph 13 recommends that

"there should be greater flexibility in the rules governing eligibility for funeral payments".

I do not think that the Government's response did justice to those recommendations, and I hope that the Government will be able to reflect on them more carefully and consider whether there is any way in which the process can be made more flexible.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome is right. It is obvious that people applying for such payments are going through a distressing time and that they want things to be as easy as possible. There are a number of other formalities that people have to go through at that time. However, one would hope that, where there is a shortage of money and people are trying to give their loved one a dignified farewell, they would not find too many difficulties in the application process.

I turn now to the discretionary social fund. Again, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome touched on a point that I know to be of interest to other hon. Members present, particularly the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). The point concerned alignment funds, and needs to be considered in some detail. There are some important considerations.

Paragraph 64 concerns the increasing proportion of crisis loans that are used to deal with crises resulting from problems with other payments. A crisis loan is one of the three types of loan available from the discretionary social fund. It is available, we are told, to people facing an emergency or disaster where there is a serious risk to health or safety, whether they are in receipt of benefits or not. Hon. Members have spoken of various situations in which people come to apply for crisis loans, including examples in which the applicants are the victims of crime or find themselves in other emergency circumstances.

The loans that go towards what is described as "alignment" arise in a different way. Alignment is defined by the Department as involving loans that are intended to tide people over when there is a gap until their first payment is due and they are without funds. It claims that it is a question of alignment to payday and that it does not mean that there is an administrative delay.

That is the Department's definition, but the contention that alignment does not mean that there is an administrative delay does not sit easily with the evidence taken by the Committee. Most people would regard these loans, which are being made to tide people over as a result of difficulties with their payments, as being made as a result of delay. The Department's view is flatly contradicted by the written evidence taken by the Committee from Suffolk county council, which is specifically mentioned in the report and is worth repeating. The council says:

"We also have concerns about Crisis Loans. Not only do these become an arena for conflict between Benefits Agency and Social Services staff, but our staff frequently come across situations where it should not be necessary to have to apply for a Crisis Loan in the first place. For example, crises can arise because of delays in processing benefit, lack of flexibility with the new National Insurance number requirement (this is particularly a problem for young people who have had unsettled lives and may be without a National Insurance number) and the trend to pay benefit in arrears."

Those conclusions are borne out by the evidence of a number of individual cases cited in evidence to the Committee, including a number of those referred to by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Against that background, the Committee is right to draw attention, as it does in fairly strong terms, to the substantial and growing proportion of crisis loans that are being used to meet alignments. I note that in the later stages of the report, further evidence came from the Department, which was requested by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North. It showed that the proportion of gross expenditure on alignment has risen from 31.7 per cent. to 37.3 per cent. during the past three years.

We have all heard of the constraints on the social fund's expenditure and on crisis loans, but if money is going to people who are in an emergency because of problems in receiving their benefit, it must be that officials are having to make decisions to give loans to those people and that they are being diverted from people suffering from other types of emergency. Money is being diverted from what many people might regard as the proper purpose for such a system—to help people deal with unforeseen emergencies, but not ones resulting from the administration of the Department.

The Government will have to pay a little more attention to that situation. The Committee is right to call for further analysis of it. It would be useful if the Minister could provide us, if not today then at some time in the future, with the most recent figures on alignment. A little more than 37 per cent. is a substantial proportion of the fund to be spent on dealing with such issues.

In their response, the Government say:

"The Benefits Agency and the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices aim to minimise administrative delays and to ensure that people receive their full benefit entitlement as soon as possible."

That is all well and good, but it would also be good also to hear from the Minister whether there is any evidence that those arms of the Department are in fact affecting the situation. I should like to know also the Government's attitude towards the fact that such a large proportion of crisis loans are going on alignment. I think that that has been touched on already. The Committee was right to call for an analysis of that and to reach the conclusions that it did. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on that point.

The process of applying for discretionary social fund payments has not yet been mentioned here, but it is mentioned in the report and its conclusions. Before 1999, each application was considered for all three types of discretionary social fund. Since 1999, there have been separate claim forms for each type: community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans. The Department told the Committee that it regarded that as a success on the ground of saving of staff time and the simplification of application forms, among other things.

However, it would be interesting to hear the Minister's response to evidence submitted to the Committee to the effect that that has created difficulties and delays for many applicants, especially those who apply for one type of loan when it might be more appropriate or advantageous to apply for another, and that in some cases that causes delay while a fresh application is made or for applicants to go without because they have not applied for the most advantageous or appropriate form.

NACAB says, on that:

"Social fund staff are supposed to consider whether a different payment from that applied for would be in the applicant's interest, but we have seen little evidence that this actually happens very much."

The Select Committee report refers to a series a case histories cited by NACAB, in which people apparently eligible for community care grants are claiming budgeting loans or crisis loans instead. What is the Minister's response to that? Are measures being taken to help people deal with the multiplicity of application forms?

My final point is more general, although it encompasses that which I have just made. It is the need for good quality advice to be tendered to applicants. We all appreciate that the staff in question do a very good job in many cases and that they sometimes work under much pressure. I have seen that for myself. However, we must continue bearing in mind the need to give them training and to help to enable them to give the best possible quality advice to applicants. Paragraph 79 of the Committee's report says:

"The evidence that we received suggests that, in reality, the quality of advice to Social Fund applicants is not always of a good standard."

That leads the Committee to its recommendations in paragraph 85 about improving advice. I hope that the Minister will reflect a little more on that than was the case in the Government's response to the report. I note the point made in strong terms by the Chairman of the Committee about the Government's response, and I hope that the hard and detailed work of the Committee will inform the Government over the longer term, when it has had time to reflect on its conclusions.

We must remember that we are talking about people who have reached a difficult time in their lives. There may be other factors in their lives that put them at a disadvantage. They are our fellow citizens and members of society. The social fund exists to help them. They are entitled to the same consideration and quality of help as other people. It is good for the Committee to consider how they can be helped to their best advantage and given the service that they deserve.

4.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): This has been a useful and thoughtful debate. I pay tribute to the work of the then Social Security Committee and its helpful report on the social fund. I particularly acknowledge the role played by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) who chaired that Committee with great authority and much diligence—I know that from my membership of it—over the last five years. I have yet to appear before the new Work and Pensions Committee that he now chairs.

Mr. Kirkwood: We are waiting for you.

Malcolm Wicks: I suspect that, notwithstanding the onerous nature of being a member of a Select Committee, it might be even more difficult being on the other side of the table. That experience is perhaps to come.

I underline what the hon. Gentleman said on his own behalf, and perhaps on behalf of the Committee, too. We must consider the social fund in the context of what society must do to attack inequalities, and poverty in particular. The Government's wider programme based on the principle of work for those who can, which has much support in the House as a whole, is absolutely vital. We have had much success, and cause for some confidence about the future—but not, of course, for complacency.

Throughout the United Kingdom, we are approaching the point of having 75 per cent. of people of working age in jobs. That is a record level, which puts us close to the top of the European league tables. As the Chancellor announced yesterday, since 1997 the number of people in work has increased by 1.5 million. Those are remarkably encouraging figures. That is important because the more people who are in work, the fewer will depend on the safety net of benefit—now called income support—or jobseeker's allowance.

I recall that many years ago, a former professor of mine, Richard Titmus of the London school of economics—a great authority on such matters, who was once deputy chairman of the then Supplementary Benefits Commission—said that the problem with supplementary benefits in terms of regulation, as opposed to discretion, was that too many customers were dependent on it. I think he was implying that there were too many people for us to provide the more individual tailor-made service that is required.

I hope that as we move towards work for those who can, through the Jobcentre Plus programme, we will be able to give more personal advice and understand the individual circumstances of the poor and desperate people who have been a feature of this debate, and

[Malcolm Wicks]

whom we are trying to help. That is my Department's objective. I hope that we are doing more both for those who cannot work at present and those who may not be able to work at all. From October this year, income support rates for children under 11 will be 99 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1997. That is something that we should be proud of, and we must defend the need to resource that kind of improvement, now and in the future.

Another important example is the fact that we have increased the disabled child premium in income-related benefits by £5 per week on top of the normal uprating from this month, helping about 80,000 children in the families in most need, and there will be a further £5 increase from April next year. I hope that that enables me to say to all hon. Members, particularly the Chairman of the Select Committee, that we have not forgotten those who cannot work at the moment—far from it. I am sure that there is more to do, and I am sure that many hon. Members will agree with that statement. Similarly—I will not labour the point—we are doing more for pensioners and older people in the community, particularly and significantly for those in the greatest need, through the minimum income guarantee and other measures such as free television licences.

As has been acknowledged, the Government and the Department are now involved in a major reorganisation of how we deliver services to older people and pensioners—I do not know why we refer to that demographic group by its benefit entitlement, but we all do it as shorthand, although I am not sure that that is forgivable. The introduction of the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus is a major organisational change involving the combination of Jobcentre Plus, the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to create a new service. We reckon that, along with the IT changes that are so desperately needed to modernise computer facilities, those are among the most important organisational changes happening not only in this country but across the European Union, and those changes are vital to the debate.

It is important that we think about the future relevance of a social fund, or whatever it may be called, to the Pension Service and the needs of pensioners, and the relevance of a social fund to people of working age. How can we ensure that our social fund is part—part but not all—of our endeavour to help people move from benefit dependency into work? Similarly, we need to understand better the needs of older people for access to a social fund, given the issues facing them. It is partly for that reason that we have commissioned some research into pensioner attitudes to, and experiences of, the social fund from the personal finance research centre at Bristol university. I am certainly interested in—more strongly, I am concerned about—the fact that relatively few older people are making use of the social fund, and we need to satisfy ourselves about the reasons for that.

Of course, any modern social security system requires something like the social fund. References have been made to the poor law; I do not know about that, but ever since the National Assistance Act 1948 there has been something like the social fund—its name has changed over time. That acknowledges poorer people's need to access lump sums of money, which the rest of us can acquire either through saving or through calling on recognised forms of credit.

One issue that has been a feature of today's debate—it is also a feature of the wider debate—is grants versus loans. My conclusion, and the Government's conclusion, is that we need both grants and loans in the system. Some hon. Members, along with others outside the House, have suggested that we should abolish loans and return to grants. My response to that is that we have the community care grant scheme; I shall say a little more about that in a moment. Interest-free loans allow for the efficient use of available resources to help large numbers of people. They have proved an effective and fair way of enabling the social fund to help those on low incomes cope with budgeting for short-term emergencies. They might otherwise be prey to loan sharks and other expensive moneylenders. All of us have found in our constituencies terrible examples of how the poorest are prey to evildoers such as loan sharks.

It is not a realistic option to make all social fund payments non-repayable grants, as happened under the single payment scheme. That led to poor targeting and uncontrollable expenditure, and it may be unfair to people in work. Under the single payment scheme, we found that 80 per cent. of the grants went to only 17 per cent. of the recipients. By contrast, the budgeting loan scheme has provided almost 11 million loans worth more than £3 billion since its inception at a net cost of just over £400 million. It is an efficient form of financial inclusion for poor people.

Returning to grants would be very expensive. We estimate the cost to be about £1 billion per year. Those who call for the overthrow of loans—in favour, presumably, of grants—are calling for something that is very expensive. In Budget week of all weeks, we must carefully consider the implications of that. One hon. Member said that he would scrap the social fund, and had urged that on his students. I hope that I weighed the arguments more objectively when I taught social policy. He did not clearly spell out what he would replace the social fund with.

Non-repayable community care grants are special payments to help people in a wide variety of adverse, sometimes appalling, circumstances. They are used to meet urgent needs in helping to rehabilitate offenders in the community, in helping people who are leaving mental hospitals re-establish themselves in the community and in helping the victims of domestic violence. Again, we know from our constituencies what terrible evil remains in our society.

Community care grants are important. I believe that both Government and Opposition Members have argued that more money should be spent; I understand the argument. However, we have increased the budget four times since 1997—it had been frozen since 1994—including an above-inflation rise of almost 5 per cent. for the year 2002–03. I do not want to make too much of this, but I am thankful to say that the welfare-to-work strategy has also meant that the claimant population on income support and jobseeker's allowance decreased by about 10 per cent. between 1997 and 2001, so the funds available were shared among a smaller population. That point may be too precise for the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire to appreciate, but in an age of evidence-based policy, we must make it.

We have reviewed the way we allocate grant budgets to districts from this year. The new allocation method aims to improve consistency of outcome for clients, irrespective of where they live, We have heard about the postcode lottery. Guidance on priority is currently being rewritten and will be introduced in the next amendment to the "Social Fund Guide". The guidance will increase transparency and consistency of the prioritisation process, without fettering the discretion of the decision maker. Clarity concerning who should receive help, as opposed to discretion, has been the theme of our discussion today. It is important to get the balance right and we can all be guilty from time to time of arguing for one or the other depending on circumstances. It has certainly been a long-standing theme in our social security debates since the inception of the welfare state.

As for community care grants, we must think more in the future about the words "community care" and the origin of community care grants. I am anxious that we think through how we might relate the granting of the money, often in appalling circumstances, to the wider objectives of community care services, whether they be to help an ex-offender to re-establish himself, or to help a victim of domestic violence or someone leaving a mental health institution. I would be interested in hearing the advice and thoughts of hon. Members on how we might do that, but time does not permit that now. Some good practice already exists, and I know that social fund officers sometimes have good contacts with local voluntary organisations, but we must think that through a little more.

In April 1999, as was acknowledged, we radically transformed the costly and cumbersome budgeting loan scheme and replaced it with a simpler, speedier and more objective decision-making process. That was the first major change in the social fund since it started in 1988. As a result, in 1999–2000 for the first time more than 1 million people received a budgeting loan, and the upward trend is continuing. In 2000–01, the number of successful applicants rose by a further 13 per cent. Under the changes introduced in 1999, the scheme limits access to further budgeting loans to some extent while previous loans are still being repaid. That is important because it would be unfair to allow a cash-limited budgeting loans budget to be monopolised by people who continually top up their loans to the maximum at the expense of other applicants.

The Committee recommended a number of further improvements to the budgeting loan scheme. In response, we have included in relevant social fund leaflets information on what to do if customers are having difficulty making their repayments as originally agreed. We have clarified guidance to staff, and since February we have improved the standard of notification letters and have provided clients with calculation sheets for budgeting loan and funeral payment decisions, which set out in clear stages how the decision has been reached.

I listened carefully to what hon. Members said about repayment rates. Clearly, there is a judgment to be made about the percentage of repayment—I understand what hon. Members are saying—as opposed to the inevitable consequence of the loan having to be repaid, if the rate is lowered, over a longer period. That discussion was useful.

Crisis loans were, not surprisingly, a feature of our debate and the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) made some comments about them. On alignment, the more we can improve, through Jobcentre Plus, on the speed with which we assess claims for mainstream benefits, the less need there may be for alignment. However, sometimes a claim will have been assessed, but an alignment payment may be needed before the benefit comes into payment, to help with that budgeting. It may be helpful if I write to the hon. Gentleman to clarify my response to some of the points that he made.

On the regulated fund, one or two hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), commented on funeral payments. It is important to get them right, for obvious reasons, not least because of the grief and sensitivity surrounding such occasions. About 40,000 funeral payments are made each year at a cost of £35 million, and in 2000–01 the average award was £892. I recently met the representatives of funeral directors, and I am awaiting evidence from them in support of their claim that the current payments are not sufficient. I have also studied the Office of Fair Trading report into the funeral industry—if that is the appropriate term—which was published last July. The report does not demonstrate conclusively that the existing £600 element of the funeral payment is inadequate for people to arrange a decent funeral. However, my mind is open on that question and I await further evidence.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome discussed the important element of winter fuel payments as part of the regulated social fund. He may have slipped into the fault of being slightly unfair to the Government. On pensions, we need to get the balance right between targeted benefits and universal provision such as the main pension itself, winter fuel payments and so on—the free television licence, of course, is based on age rather than on means. We believe that we get the right balance with the important targeted benefits.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, the Chairman of the Select Committee, made some important points about ethnic monitoring. Race relations legislation requires my Department to monitor its customer service ethnically. We are therefore scoping the work necessary to build on our present ethnic monitoring in order to ensure that we monitor all our customers. Once we have accurate information, we shall be able to provide information about social fund applicants. The point has been well taken.

My next comments must to some extent be made at random, as we have only a few minutes left. The Chairman of the Select Committee made some important points about loan sharks. That is why we have announced a major review of the Consumer Credit Act 1975, and will shortly consult on specific proposals to update the Act's provisions on extortionate credit bargains.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) made some important points about the interface between the social fund and housing. I shall want to reflect on those with my noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. The question of home contents insurance was also raised, and I want to think further about that.

[Malcolm Wicks]

The gatekeepers to our system have been mentioned. In my experience, the staff who deal with social fund applications—I have met many of them—do an extraordinarily good job, often in difficult circumstances given the serious needs that confront them. It is not appropriate that gatekeepers should simply turn away customers, and I suspect that it happens very rarely, but I will look at the guidance given to staff and the implications for training staff in order to ensure that it does not happen in future.

If I have left some significant points unanswered, I shall write to hon. Members and give further information.

The Government have responded to the Select Committee report, and we continue to keep the social fund under review. I am not merely using the usual phrase: the drum beats on the social fund in my Department, and our thoughts are active on its future. I am proud of the progress that we have made on the annual community care grant budget, which has been increased. Other parts of the scheme are also helpful, including the budgeting loan scheme, and the sure start maternity grant is now £500—a significant lump sum. Much good is done by the social fund.

We have had a useful debate. I have not responded to the earlier point made by the Chairman of the Select Committee about J. K. Rowling. My bedtime reading consists of reports from his excellent Committee. However, I understand that the books have something to do with a person called Harry Potter. I think that they relate to a fantasy playground of childhood, with many japes—a magical and comfortable world. I can see why a Liberal Democrat would find that helpful.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 April 2002

WALES

Police Recruitment

8. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department about the recruitment of police officers in Wales. [44154]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I are in regular contact with colleagues about issues affecting Wales, including policing matters.

Interim figures show that on 31 January 2002, there were 7,116 police officers in Wales. In 2002–03, Welsh forces have been allocated funding for an additional 136 recruits under the Crime Fighting Fund. These will be in addition to any other planned recruitment.

Unemployment

10. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about unemployment levels in Wales. [44156]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a range of issues including unemployment in Wales.

The Government recognise that certain sectors, particularly manufacturing, have experienced tough times, due largely to the world economic slowdown. However, over the last year Wales has the best record of any nation or region in the UK in cutting unemployment. Labour force survey statistics show that the unemployment rate in Wales has fallen to 5.4 per cent., down 0.8 percentage points on a year earlier.

26. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about unemployment levels in Wales. [44172]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues including the levels of unemployment in Wales.

The Labour Force Survey statistics show the unemployment rate in Wales has fallen 5.4 per cent., down 0.8 percentage points on a year earlier, while the claimant count was also down by 0.5 percentage points.

Legislative Procedures

11. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce new procedures for the consideration of primary legislation affecting Wales; and if he will make a statement. [44157]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The current procedure for progressing Welsh legislation through Parliament since the establishment of the National Assembly is working very well. There are already procedural options for dealing with Welsh only primary legislation and each piece of legislation will be considered on its merits.

23. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve the procedure for legislating in Wales. [44169]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The current procedure for progressing Welsh legislation through Parliament since the establishment of the National Assembly is working very well. There are already procedural options for dealing with Wales-only primary legislation and each situation will be considered on its merits.

Structural Funds

12. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly about the progress of the Objective One programme in Wales. [44158]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Minster regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with the Objective One programme. At 21 March, over 500 Objective One projects had been approved, worth a total of over £300 million in European grants. Over £68 million of Objective One grant has already been paid out by the Assembly.

28. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly about the application of EU structural funds in Wales. [44174]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues, including progress with structural fund programmes in Wales. However, day to day administration of these programmes is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales and its executive agency, the Welsh European Funding Office.

Aerospace Industry (North Wales)

13. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the aerospace industry in North Wales. [44159]

Mr. Touhig: I recognise that prospects for the whole of the North Wales aerospace industry are underpinned by the continued success of Airbus at Broughton. I am pleased that Airbus has so far managed to weather the uncertainty brought about by September 11 with minimal risk to jobs. This has been due in no small part to the good working relationship built up between management and unions. I would urge Airbus staff to continue to work constructively with unions and management in the coming months.

Steel Industry

14. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the steel industry in Wales. [44160]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This Government believe that the British steel industry is among the most efficient in the world. I believe that the Welsh steel industry has a long term future, despite the regrettable decision of Corus to cut UK steel capacity.

20. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new initiatives he intends to promote to strengthen the steel industry. [44166]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government work closely with the UK steel industry and provide support where the strict state aid provisions permit. Since 1997 the Government have supported a number of industry led initiatives designed to improve the sector's competitiveness. In February, we announced funding of £2.7 million for the new National Metals Technology Centre, which will play an important role in ensuring that the UK metals industry remains competitive and a world-leader in innovation. In addition, the Government continue to support the steel sector through the Metals Industry Competitive Enterprise (MICE) initiative, which has already resulted in significant improvements in the companies it has worked with.

Big Cats

15. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales Secretary for Rural Affairs to establish the number of sightings of big cats in Wales over the last 12 months. [44161]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues including rural affairs.

The Assembly's Agriculture Department receives reports from the public of big cat sightings and alleged livestock kills due to big cats.

In 2001 there were seven reported sightings and four reports of livestock kills. So far in 2002 there has been one reported big cat sighting and two alleged live stock kills due to big cats.

The Agriculture Department deals solely with cases involving threats to livestock. Any big cat reports that relate to human health are referred to the police. The Agriculture Department does not keep records of such cases.

Welsh Executive

16. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with the First Secretary the financial implications of maintaining the Welsh Executive at its present size. [44162]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Under the block funding arrangements it is for the Assembly to determine how it deploys its available resources.

Manufacturing Industry

17. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues about manufacturing industry in Wales. [44163]

25. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues about manufacturing industry in Wales. [44171]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet with my ministerial colleagues and discuss a range of issues including manufacturing.

The Government recognise it is a particularly tough time for manufacturers in the UK, due to the slowdown in world economy and weakness of euro. However, these problems are not confined to the UK or, in particular, Wales.

National Health Service

18. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the NHS in Wales. [44164]

Mr. Touhig: The National Assembly have put in place various strategies to improve the NHS in Wales through increased funding to support the increased capacity of the NHS in Wales to treat patients, a waiting times strategy. The Government are supporting the Assembly's efforts through the primary legislation programme with measures for restructuring the NHS in Wales contained in the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill.

Severn Bridge

19. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the First Secretary of the National Assembly to discuss the impact of recent closures of the Severn Bridge on Monmouthshire. [44165]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Closures of the M48 Severn crossing are a matter for the local police authorities, the Highways Agency and Severn River Crossing plc.

Assembly officials and the local police authorities attend regular operational liaison meetings with the Highways Agency and Severn River Crossing plc. If my hon. Friend could provide me with more detail regarding his concerns, I will ensure that Assembly officials raise them at the next such meeting. I will of course advise my hon. Friend of the outcome of any such discussions.

Poverty

21. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he makes of the change in levels of poverty in Wales over the last five years. [44167]

Mr. Touhig: Poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of people's lives including income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is no single measure that can capture the complex problems that need to be overcome.

The annual report "Opportunity for all", available in the House of Commons Library, sets out and monitors the UK Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. The UK Government are working in partnership with the National Assembly for Wales to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

Environmental Issues

22. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his responsibility for environmental issues affecting English constituencies across the Welsh border. [44168]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The bilateral concordat between the Assembly and the DTLR sets out the principles for dealing with cross-border environmental issues and the arrangements for joint sponsorship of the Environment Agency.

Youth Policy

24. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the mechanisms are for co-ordinating youth policy between his Department, the Welsh Assembly and Welsh local authorities. [44170]

Mr. Touhig: My Department maintains close contacts with both Whitehall and the National Assembly in the appropriate policy areas. The Crime Reduction Director for Wales is part of the Home Office regional team and, as such, provides a link between HO and the National Assembly on relevant aspects of youth policy.

Wales Office Staff

27. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were employed by the Wales Office in 1997; and what the current figure is. [44173]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For the period since April 2001 the average staff of my Department has been 44 full-time equivalents. The Wales Office did not exist in 1997.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47194]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office at the present time has four staff who work part-time out of a total of 40 staff.

Engineering Profession

29. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the contribution made by the engineering academic profession to the Welsh economy. [44175]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The long established Engineering Education Scheme in Wales (EESW) and those participating in it are playing a formative role in shaping the engineers of tomorrow. This is one of the key elements in making a successful technology and innovation led economy.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on care homes in Wales. [44155]

Mr. Touhig: The Assembly is very aware of the problems faced by the care sector. Its objective is to work with local government and the sector to improve the quality of care services and ensure a viable, and vibrant care home sector.

At a national level the Assembly is taking strategic action and established a Wales Care Strategy Group to discuss the current problems facing the care sector.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47184]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1073W.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his Department's expenditure by months in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [32218]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer he received from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the National Assembly for Wales. [31064]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None; the nature of its functions means that the Wales Office undertakes very few consultations.

Cynon Valley

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about health issues in the Cynon Valley. [40532]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with the First Minister and Health Minister of the National Assembly for Wales about health issues in Wales. I am aware that the Assembly has recently discussed and endorsed the Townsend Report's proposals for addressing health inequalities in Wales. These will be particularly important to communities like the Cynon Valley.

In addition, I am working closely with the Health Minister on primary legislation which will enable the Assembly to put in place structural changes to the NHS in Wales, with the aim of improving efficiency and management of the NHS in Wales.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessors since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43383]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I have not appointed any unpaid advisers as defined in paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code and I have no record of my predecessors having done so.

Details of unpaid appointments made to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups in Wales are set out in periodic reports issued by Cabinet Office, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over 50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds; [44917]

(2) how many people employed by his Department under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [45081]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 July 1999, staff in my Department have generally been seconded from the National Assembly for Wales and elsewhere. During this period, there have been no people on new deal programmes employed in the Wales Office.

Prior to that date the former Welsh Office employed seven staff under the new deal for young people. The movements of people from the new deal programme who left the Department are not monitored.

New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiatives and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44887]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department does not have any private finance initiatives or public private partnerships that have been delayed.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47245]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Staff remain vigilant in implementing security arrangements.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes. [47205]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department spent some £21,000 on hospitality in 2000–01 and some £8,000 in 2001–02. Figures for 1999–2000 are not readily available.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46843]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since the establishment of the Wales Office on 1 July 1999, my special advisers have not spent any departmental funds on entertainment.

Records prior to this date are not available.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47136]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information is available only for the period since the Wales Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Departmental special advisers have accompanied Ministers on visits abroad on seven occasions, Belgium five times, Ireland once and Spain once. It is not practicable separately to identify the costs of these visits, but all journeys were judged to comply with the Civil Service Code.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46960]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999, the Wales Office has had two special advisers. They are paid in accordance with the Government-wide special advisers' salary scales promulgated by the Cabinet Office.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47710]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions.

Apprentice Training

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he had with *(a)* the First Secretary of the National Assembly and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Defence regarding apprentice training at Aberporth, Ceredigion since 22 February. [47753]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have had numerous discussions with Defence Ministers and the Assembly First Minister about this issue since 22 February. On 8 April 2002, the First Minister and I met with representatives of QinetiQ and ELWa to discuss the company's future training plans for Aberporth.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47802]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be available after the Budget on 17 April.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48347]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has one digital satellite subscription at Gwydyr house. It allows Ministers to view Welsh TV channels when in London. It also gives access to the parliamentary channel.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48346]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department pays for one licence.

PRIME MINISTER

Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Cabinet committees and sub-committees responsible for policy on combating terrorism and ensuring appropriate public protection. [47665]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W.

Overseas Visits

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the overseas missions undertaken on his behalf since 7 June by *(a)* Lord Levy and *(b)* the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), listing in each case (i) persons and places visited, (ii) the reason for the visits and (iii) the cost to public funds. [8774]

The Prime Minister: Pursuant to my reply of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 142–43W, I regret that due to an administrative error the information provided was incorrect.

The appointment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) as Chairman of the UK-Japan 21st Century Group was not made by me. The Group is an independent organisation, which exists to strengthen ties between Britain and Japan. It is largely funded by subscriptions from its corporate members. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has in recent years made an annual contribution of £4,000 to the Group. The post of Chairman of the Group is a part-time and unpaid appointment.

Phase Three Implementation

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 619W, if he will include the environment in his priorities for Phase Three. [47613]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my speech "Environment, The Next Steps" last year, I want environmental issues to occupy a central part of the British Government agenda in the coming years.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47708]

The Prime Minister: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what new measures his office took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47252]

The Prime Minister: Appropriate measures to maintain the security and integrity of my office are in place and regularly reviewed. It is not our practice to give details.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many and what proportion of the staff of his office are part-time employees. [47241]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister how many times he has travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries he visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47117]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister how many special advisers there were at No. 10 Downing street; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46958]

The Prime Minister: There are 27 special advisers in my office.

Details of individual special adviser salaries within Departments are not given in order to protect the privacy of the individual concerned. The total cost of special advisers, including pensions and salaries, for the years 1997–98 to 2000–01 is as follows:

Year	*Cost (£ million)*
1997–98	2.6
1998–99	3.5
1999–2000	4.0
2000–01	4.4

I have already announced the introduction of a revised pay system for special advisers based on individual job evaluation. The process of evaluation is under way. The cost for the years 2001–02 will be provided once the process is complete.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister how many times special advisers have accompanied him on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47148]

The Prime Minister: Information on the number of officials accompanying me on overseas visits is included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. Lists of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 during the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001 were placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report* on 17 June 1999, columns 196–97W; on 28 July 2000, column 969W; and on 20 July 2001, column 467W. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost of running his press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46813]

The Prime Minister: The total cost of running the No. 10 press office for 1996–97 was £597,240, and for 2000–01 was £954,659. The increase reflects the ever increasing media demands with the advent of more outlets, 24 hour news and growth of the internet, for example.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister how many press officers there were in No. 10 Downing street on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46880]

The Prime Minister: At 1 May 1997, there were nine press officers, and at 31 March 2002, there were 10 press officers on the payroll of No. 10, and one on secondment from FCO.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how much was spent by No. 10 Downing street special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years; [47054]

(2) how much was spent by staff at No. 10 Downing street on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46842]

The Prime Minister: For the total cost to my Office for all official entertainment at No. 10 Downing street and Chequers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1444W.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General which public service agreement targets that are scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44840]

The Solicitor-General: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the 2002 Departmental Report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47203]

The Solicitor-General: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the 2002 Departmental Report.

DEFENCE

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37406]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on expenditure on advertising and publicity is included in the departmental performance report. However, this information is recorded by financial year and not by parliamentary Session. For 1997–98 the information is shown in page 49 of Cm 4170; for 1999–2000 it is shown on page 60 of Cm 5000; and for 2000–01 it is shown on page 68 of Cm 5290. Copies of these reports are available in the Library of the House.

Information for 1998–99 was not included in the performance report. The figures are as follows.

Category	Expenditure in £ million
Recruitment—RN/RFA	6.65
Recruitment—Army	11.77
Recruitment—RAF	10.17
Recruitment—Civil Service	3.27
PR, marketing and Business Support Services	0.84
Chief of public relations expenditure	2.39
Sales promotion	1.06
Scholarships	0.38
National Employers Liaison Committee (Territorial Army)	1.05

Information on the outturn figure for the last financial year is not yet available, but is expected to be published in the 2001–02 departmental performance report.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland. [37394]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are involved in Sierra Leone; how many have been involved in each of the past two years; what the cost to the MOD of the deployment has been; and if he will make a statement. [46672]

Mr. Ingram: We currently have some 360 shore-based military personnel deployed in Sierra Leone, supported by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel Sir Geraint, and we will maintain our presence at that level over the period of presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2002. We are also contributing 15 military observers and seven headquarters staff to UNAMSIL, the UN operation in Sierra Leone. At its peak, there were 4,500 personnel deployed on Operation PALLISER in May 2000, when we first committed troops in significant numbers. We then had up to 550–600 shore-based military personnel in Sierra Leone at any one time until the completion of basic infantry training for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) by British Short-Term Training Teams in September 2001. The re-configuration to the current troop levels was completed by January 2002. The cost to the Ministry of Defence of the deployments, excluding the provision of equipment to the RSLAF, was £16.9 million in financial year 2000–01. The cost of the deployments in the last financial year is estimated at around £28.25 million, and will be met from the cross-Government Africa Conflict Prevention Fund. The future costs of our military training and assistance programme will also be met from this budget.

As I was able to see at first hand during my visit to Sierra Leone on 19–20 March, we are making good progress in helping to develop a professional, accountable and effective RSLAF and Sierra Leone MOD. The UK-led International Military Advisory and Training Team will continue the task of capacity-building in the RSLAF and the MOD over the longer term. Our ultimate aim is that the RSLAF will be able to protect the security and integrity of Sierra Leone without needing substantial external assistance.

Navy Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether HMS Newcastle and HMS Cardiff are due to be decommissioned in 2003; and if he will make a statement. [48668]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 34W to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the refit for HMS Illustrious will *(a)* commence and *(b)* be completed; and what use will be made of HMS Illustrious in the period to the start of the refit. [48172]

Mr. Ingram: Refit work on HMS Illustrious will start in October 2002 and is expected to complete in autumn 2004. From 27 May 2002 until the start of her refit, HMS Illustrious will be held in reduced readiness.

QinetiQ

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the equity of QinetiQ the Government will retain as the golden share. [47646]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 313–14W to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts). The right required by the Government to protect the United Kingdom defence and security interests can be provided through the retention of a single special, or golden, share, it does not require the retention of any additional percentage of the equity.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those who have expressed interest in becoming a strategic partner to QinetiQ. [47644]

Dr. Moonie: In response to an advertisement in the press, almost 40 parties have expressed interest in becoming a strategic partner to QinetiQ. In order to achieve best value for the taxpayer, the Government are seeking to maintain a high degree of competitive tension among potential bidders. Publishing a list of interested parties at this stage in the process would not be consistent with this objective.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the equity of QinetiQ will be available to strategic partners. [47647]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 313–14W, to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts). The percentage of equity in QinetiQ that will be available to strategic partners will be determined as part of the negotiation process, but it is likely that the strategic partner will have the opportunity to acquire a substantial minority or a small majority stake.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Afghanistan

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of civilian and military casualties in Afghanistan since the start of present hostilities. [48614]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 432W.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if British troops in Afghanistan will be engaged in efforts to reduce *(a)* poppy cultivation and *(b)* the merchandising of heroin. [46277]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 870W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy). The further 1,700 troops currently deploying to Afghanistan will be concentrating on operations against remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security situation in *(a)* Kabul and *(b)* Afghanistan. [41894]

Mr. Hoon: The security situation in Kabul appears relatively stable, especially owing to the excellent work of the International Security Assistance Force in accordance with UN SCR 1386. In Afghanistan as a whole, the situation is less stable with significant numbers of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters still active. This is why we are deploying 45 Commando Group as set out in my statement of 18 March.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated number of Taliban and al-Qaeda troops remaining in Afghanistan is; and if he will make a statement. [44652]

Mr. Hoon: We estimate that the number of Taliban and al-Qaeda troops remaining in Afghanistan is in the low thousands. They pose a continuing and significant threat to international security.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage UK forces constitute of the coalition forces in Afghanistan. [45378]

Mr. Hoon: The numbers of coalition forces in Afghanistan vary over time. Once the deployment of 45 Commando Group has been completed, UK personnel should constitute some 15–20 per cent. of total coalition forces. These figures do not include the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul.

Retired Officers

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review his Department's policy on offering Golden Jubilee medals to retired officers. [48327]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 569W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell).

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired officers have been offered a financial enhancement to remain in post in the last 12 months. [48329]

Dr. Moonie: Retired officers are employed as civil servants within the Ministry of Defence. Like other civil servants, circumstances may occasionally arise when they will be invited to extend their service. Retired officers are not offered financial enhancement in such circumstances.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers aged 60 years and above have applied for, and been accepted for, continued service in this Army in the last 12 months. [48328]

Dr. Moonie: The total number of officers aged 60 years and above that have applied and been accepted for continued service in the last 12 months is six.

Balkans

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are serving in *(a)* Bosnia, *(b)* Kosovo and *(c)* Macedonia; and in what role. [47359]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom currently contributes some 1,900 personnel to SFOR operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina as the co-ordinating nation in Multinational Division (South-West). UK forces make a vital contribution to all of the tasks undertaken by SFOR in building peace and stability in Bosnia. SFOR continue to provide a background security presence, ensuring a peaceful and safe environment while the Bosnian people reconstruct their lives and reform their civilian and military institutions.

The UK currently contributes some 3,000 personnel to KFOR operations in Kosovo as framework nation of Multinational Brigade (Centre). UK forces take part in the full range of tasks carried out by KFOR. KFOR's main focus is the provision of a safe and secure environment in Kosovo, including the protection of minority communities and the countering of threats from extremist groups.

At any one time there are a dozen or so UK armed forces personnel working in Macedonia as part of the headquarters of NATO's Task Force Fox and in support of KFOR. Some may be double-hatted to both. In addition, three UK armed forces personnel are providing advice to the Macedonian Ministry of Defence as part of a bilateral Outreach programme. One UK Army officer has been seconded to the British embassy in Skopje as Defence Attaché.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27940]

Dr. Moonie: As the Modernising Government White Paper set out, it is important to this Government that we listen to what people have to say about new proposals and policies. Quantitative and qualitative surveys by focus groups, public opinion research and other forms of market research are an integral and important part of Ministry of Defence work. Public research spending, however is subject to the usual strict rules that spending must represent good value for money for the taxpayer and must not be used for party political purposes.

Information on the totality of quantitative and qualitative surveys carried out by the Ministry of Defence and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, our central corporate communications division, which carries out public opinion research relating to the Ministry of Defence as a whole, does have a record of research initiated by them. From the information available, the following surveys have been carried out in each of the last four years (the 2001–02 figure includes money committed, but not yet spent). Costs are inclusive of VAT:

	£
1998–99[1]	
Royal Tournament exit questionnaire Strategic Defence Review research Media evaluation	77,396.86
1999–2000[1]	
Public Attitudes to Defence surveys (quarterly) NATO Strategy Development research Media evaluation	96,211.56
2000–01[1]	
Public Attitudes to Defence surveys (quarterly) Public Attitudes to Defence focus groups	33,884.65
2001–02[1]	
Public Attitudes to Defence surveys (quarterly) Public Attitudes to Defence focus groups SDR New Chapter focus groups	100,570.27

[1] Financial year

Explosives

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will ensure that the negotiations between his Department and BAE Systems over explosive manufacture include the true cost of overseas production; [45100]

(2) what state negotiations between his Department and BAE over explosive manufacture are at; [45099]

(3) when the negotiations between his Department and BAE Systems on the requirements for explosives are due to be completed. [45101]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) maintains a continuous dialogue with Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD) about the supply of explosives under the 10-year MOD/ROD Framework Partnering Agreement (FPA). In accordance with the provisions of the FPA, the Department is required to maintain a schedule of business. This details current contracts with ROD and provides visibility of MOD's potential future requirements. The schedule of business is reviewed on a quarterly basis with ROD.

The sourcing of component parts for individual munitions is a matter for ROD. The company will source these parts as necessary to ensure that the requirements of the MOD for safe and reliable munitions will continue to be met in the most cost-effective way. Enshrined in the FPA is the principle of open book accounting, which ensures that the MOD has full visibility of ROD costs.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average waiting time is for *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* married quarters; what the average wait was in 1992; and if he will make a statement. [45438]

Dr. Moonie: Normally there is no such waiting time. When a single Service person is posted to a unit, he or she will be accommodated upon arrival under their terms and conditions of service. In the rare event when no appropriate single accommodation is available, he or she will either be accommodated exceptionally in Service Family Accommodation (SFA), or in privately rented accommodation obtained through an accommodation agency appointed by the Ministry of Defence, with the Service person receiving Substitute Single Service Accommodation Allowance. For married accompanied personnel, the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) is tasked to provide SFA with 28 days of a Service applicant's required date. If DHE accommodation is unavailable, DHE pays for Substitute Service Family Accommodation (SSFA) to be provided from the private rental market. During 2000–01, DHE housed more than 97 per cent. of entitled Service families in SFA or SSFA within 28 days of their required date. Comparable figures for 1992 are not available: there are also no centrally-held records of waiting times for single accommodation in 1992.

Warship Maintenance

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the timing of the decision on warship maintenance and support. [44803]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 562W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew).

Aircraft (India)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps she is taking to ensure that Jaguar aircraft *(a)* supplied directly from the UK to India and *(b)* produced under licence in India will not be modified to make them capable of carrying a nuclear payload; [45799]

(2) whether the Jaguar combat aircraft *(a)* supplied directly from the UK to India and *(b)* produced under licence in India (i) is capable and (ii) will be modified to become capable of carrying nuclear payloads. [45800]

Dr. Moonie: Any aircraft capable of delivering a bomb is capable of modification to enable it to deliver a nuclear weapon. For the Government's policy in respect of controls on exports to nuclear or nuclear related end-users I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my hon. Friend the then Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Lloyd) on 10 July 1998, *Official Report,* column 687W, to my hon. Friend the Member of South Thanet, (Dr. Ladyman) and by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Europe (Mr. Hain) to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford, (Dr. Stoate) on 3 July 2000, *Official Report,* column 3W, and by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Bradshaw to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton, (Mr. Love) on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1297W-98W.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what undertakings the Government have received from the Indian Government regarding the end use of Jaguar combat aircraft *(a)* sold directly to the Indian Government and *(b)* produced under licence in India. [45797]

Dr. Moonie: Information on end use documentation provided in support of an export licence application is confidential and I am withholding it in accordance with Exemptions 1, 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Jaguar combat aircraft *(a)* have been produced under licence in India and *(b)* are contracted to be produced under licence in India. [45798]

Dr. Moonie: This information is confidential between the company (BAE Systems) and the Government of India.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Hawk trainer aircraft under negotiation for sale to India are *(a)* capable of being modified to perform ground attack functions and *(b)* are suitable for training pilots to fly Jaguar combat aircraft. [45801]

Dr. Moonie: The Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer has a limited ground attack capability. It is designed for operational combat training as well as to train pilots to fly fast jets, including Jaguar.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45225]

Dr. Moonie: The numbers of individuals on secondment from outside the public sector to the Ministry of Defence in each of the years specified are set out in the table:

	Number
1999	22
2000	27
2001	24

In total this represents 44 individuals, as a number of the secondments spanned more than one year.

Staff (Local Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44545]

Dr. Moonie: Records of members of staff who are locally elected democratic representatives are not maintained centrally and so it is not possible to provide an estimate without disproportionate cost. It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to allow civilian staff, at all levels, to take full advantage of the special paid leave provisions which allow officers who are elected members of a local authority to take up to 18 days' leave each year to attend to their duties which require absence during working hours.

Israel

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions in the last five years when British forces have been involved in training exercises with Israeli forces; and what the purpose was of each of these exercises. [45184]

Mr. Ingram: There have been no bilateral training exercises between the British and Israeli armed forces in the last five years. The RAF has participated in exercises in the United States at which the Israeli Air Force among other nations have at times been involved. The purpose of such exercises is to maintain operational effectiveness.

A400M

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the A400M; and in particular what recent discussions he has had with his German counterpart. [41121]

Dr. Moonie: The A400M partner nations continue to work closely with a view to bringing the contract into effect in the very near future. Senior officials met on 22 March at which they identified mechanisms for achieving this; these are currently under consideration.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the in-service date is for the A400M; and what its original In Service Date was. [48174]

Dr. Moonie: The current In Service Date (ISD) is 2010 against an original date of 2009. To minimise the impact of cost increases caused by a number of changes by other nations both to offtake and the timing of deliveries, the UK negotiated a restructured delivery schedule; this resulted in the one-year delay. The change was made in agreement with the other partner nations in November and was made without affecting the contract negotiations. The ISD for the A400M has always been around the end of the decade and we are making good progress towards the contract entering force.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the A400M project will have on the Teesside region, with particular regard to new contracts and job creation. [48587]

Dr. Moonie: To ensure best value for money, the A400M contract does not prescribe any national workshare arrangements. The prime contractor, Airbus Military, and its sub-contractor, Airbus UK, are free to select their suppliers on grounds of performance and cost. Airbus UK has estimated that the A400M programme will directly create up to 2,500 high quality jobs in the UK—notably in design and advanced manufacturing. They have calculated that indirect employment could bring that figure to over 8,000. It is not possible to say where these jobs will be located, but companies in the Teesside region will of course be free to compete for work on this important project.

OCCAR

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the type of programmes the UK will be involved in as a member of OCCAR; and if he will make a statement. [44738]

Dr. Moonie: The Organisation for Joint Armaments Co-operation (OCCAR) was created to manage a wide range of European collaborative defence equipment programmes. Decisions to integrate equipment programmes into OCCAR are taken jointly by the member nations (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) taking into account a variety of factors. To date, the UK is involved in two OCCAR managed projects: the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle and Counter Battery Radar programmes. The A400M military transport aircraft programme is intended to be passed to OCCAR management once the contract has been activated.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how membership of OCCAR will affect decisions made about defence procurement; and if he will make a statement. [44739]

Dr. Moonie: Defence equipment procurement decisions will continue to be made with the overall aim of ensuring that our armed forces are provided with equipment which meets their needs, and which is delivered to time and is cost effective. The founding principles of Organisation for Joint Armaments Co-operation, and the processes that it uses for procurement management, are entirely consistent with this aim.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40987]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not readily available; however, I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Ordnance, Bishopton

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for his position on the Royal Ordnance factory at Bishopton to be changed. [46426]

Dr. Moonie: The Royal Ordnance factories passed into private ownership in April 1987. The Bishopton facility is now operated by Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD), which is owned by BAE Systems. Decisions on the future of ROD sites, including Bishopton, are a matter for the company.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the overseas sources which will meet his Department's requirements for propellants following the closure of Royal Ordnance, Bishopton. [46427]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence places contracts with a prime contractor for the supply of whole munitions and the sourcing of components for those munitions, such as propellant, is a matter for the prime contractor. The MOD considers achieving value for the taxpayers' money, as well as security of supply, to be key criteria in the procurement of safe and reliable munitions for the armed forces. The MOD understands that Royal Ordnance Defence has entered into a long-term supply agreement for propellant with Nitrochemie AG of Germany.

Cluster Munitions

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what exports of cluster munitions there have been by the Disposal Sales Agency and licensed sub-contractors since October 1994; and how many cluster munitions were exported and to which countries; [46161]

(2) what exports of surplus BL755 cluster munitions there were via the surplus sales programme in the three years up to 1995; which countries received the munitions; how many cluster munitions were involved; and what was the value of the sales; [46248]

(3) what transfers of cluster munitions there were to foreign Governments between 1972 and 1994 under the surplus sales programme; and if he will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions transferred and *(b)* countries of destination; [46155]

(4) what transfers of cluster munitions to foreign Governments have taken place since 2 May 1997 under the surplus sales programme; how many cluster munitions were transferred; and what the countries of destination were. [46160]

Dr. Moonie: There are no records of any Government-to-Government sales of surplus BL755 cluster munitions (or other surplus cluster munitions) by the Disposal Services Agency (DSA) (formerly known as the Disposal Sales Agency), nor any through its appointed contractors; since 1994. Records of any sales pre-dating 1994 are not available.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what exports of cluster munitions there were by International Military Services between 1972 and 1994; and how many cluster munitions were exported and what the countries of destination were. [46157]

Dr. Moonie: International Military Services ceased trading in 1991 and their records for contracts before 1991 have been destroyed. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the loose minute Interdepartmental Committee Iran and Iraq D/DESS/12/20 dated 19 October 1988, to which countries the MOD/DESO promoted the BL755 cluster munitions; and which countries purchased the BL755 cluster munition system subsequent to promotional activity by his Department. [46162]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

MOD Estate

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what method is used to share the financial benefits of third party commercial use of MOD *(a)* airfields and *(b)* other property. [48008]

Dr. Moonie: It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to exploit spare capacity, on a commercial basis, in order to generate income. There may be occasions where we use an agent or partner and on these occasions the fee will be negotiated on a case by case basis.

Planning Applications, RAF Halton

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regard he has had to DETR Circular 02/99 in submitting planning applications for the development of the Princess Mary hospital site, RAF Halton. [46313]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence has had full regard to Circular 02/99 in submitting the planning applications for the development of Princess Mary's hospital site at RAF Halton, including seeking formal guidance from Aylesbury Vale district council on the application of the regulations concerning Environmental Impact Assessments and Environmental Statements.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47177]

Dr. Moonie: A summary of progress made in 2001–02 against the Ministry of Defence's Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets will be included in the Government's expenditure plans 2002–03 to 2003–04 for the MOD, due to be published in the spring. A full account of MOD performance in 2001–02, including details of new initiatives to support the achievement of PSA and other internal targets, will be published in the MOD performance report this autumn.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47722]

Dr. Moonie: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on ministerial accountability and parliamentary questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date fire service cover at West Freugh airfield was withdrawn; and what contingency cover is available for future emergency use of the airfield. [46975]

Dr. Moonie: Fire service cover was withdrawn at West Freugh airfield on 28 March when full-time operation came to an end. The airfield is now in care and maintenance but can be reactivated for exercises or other short term use. In such a case military users will provide air traffic control and fire cover to suit specific circumstances.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations from *(a)* QinetiQ, *(b)* Serco and *(c)* DERA were received prior to the decision to close West Freugh airfield for routine operations. [46974]

Dr. Moonie: The former DERA was, as previously announced, subsumed in QinetiQ and DSTL in July 2001. Both QinetiQ and Serco have raised issues pertaining to the site but neither company objected to the cessation of full-time airfield operations at West Freugh.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47935]

Dr. Moonie: None of the Ministry of Defence agencies nor any of the MOD-sponsored non-departmental public bodies has any plans to relocate to Scotland.

War Pensions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those granted a medical discharge from the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* RAF over the last five years have succeeded on appeal in obtaining a war pension; and if he will make a statement. [46670]

Dr. Moonie: Data are not recorded in a format which can provide information relating to the success of appeals in respect of ex-service personnel who were granted a medical discharge from the armed forces. The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Discharges

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those people granted a medical discharge from the armed forces in the last five years have been granted a war pension; and if he will make a statement. [46797]

Dr. Moonie: In the last five years, war pensions have been awarded to 3,048 people who have been granted a medical discharge from the armed forces.

Deployments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel from the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Army are on deployment to (i) NATO Headquarters in Brussels, (ii) NATO Southern Command and (iii) other NATO command centres; and if he will make a statement. [46668]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out in the table.

Command	*RN*	*RAF*	*Army*	*Total*
NATO HQ	16	20	23	59
SHAPE	50	136	161	347
ACE southern region	112	82	85	279
ACE northern region	58	312	323	693
SACLANT (USA)	36	12	3	51
EASTLANT (UK)	116	62	3	181
SOUTHLANT (Portugal)	31	11	0	42
Total	419	635	598	1,652

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK service personnel from the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Royal Navy have been deployed at SHAPE in the last five years; how many of these have been deployed for a year or less; how many have been deployed between one and two years; how many have been deployed for more than two years; what the total cost is of family support and other benefits to those personnel on deployment; and if he will make a statement. [46647]

Mr. Ingram: In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, single service personnel administration systems are not programmed to hold manning figures for more than six months beyond an individual's tenure of a particular appointment; precise figures for the last five years are therefore not available. Data for UK personnel serving at SHAPE on 1 April 2002 are however given in the table, and broadly reflect the service ratio prior to NATO restructuring on 1 September 1999, when there were 360 UK military personnel at SHAPE.

Service	*Less than 1 year in post*	*1–2 years in post*	*More than 2 years in post*	*Total*
Army	71	63	27	161
RAF	44	47	45	136
RN	26	18	6	50
Total	141	128	78	347

In financial year 2001–02, the total cost of support for the UK SHAPE contingent, which includes associated UK civilian elements, is £8.907 million. Within that figure the cost of delivering family support to UK service personnel and dependants is estimated at approximately £7.9 million per annum. This figure includes: salaries for support unit staff; utilities; rents; property management and accommodation stores; staff training; administration; stationery and welfare.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK military personnel have been deployed to the US over the last three years; how many have been deployed between six months and two years; how many have been deployed for more than two years; how many are accompanied by families; what the total cost in each year for deployment of service personnel in the United States has been; what the cost of families accompanying service personnel has been in each of the last five years while on deployment in the US; and if he will make a statement. [46675]

Mr. Ingram: 464 military personnel have been posted to the US over the last three years. 357 of these have been accompanied by their families.

326 military personnel have been posted between six months and two years. 247 of these have been accompanied by their families.

231 military personnel have been posted for more than two years. 185 of these have been accompanied by their families.

The approximate in-country cost for service personnel and their families was:

Financial year	*£ million*
2001–02	14.5
2000–01	12.0
1999–2000	10.5
1998–99	10.0
1997–98	11.5

A breakdown of these costs between service personnel and their dependants could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel from the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* RAF have been deployed to work with the EU defence projects in each of the last two years, including the current year; and if he will make a statement. [46671]

Mr. Ingram: The only EU military bodies created under ESDP are the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff. The Military Staff comprise fewer than 140 people, of which the UK contributes 16 military personnel—eight Army; four Royal Navy; and four RAF. The UK representative on the EU Military Committee is also our military representative to NATO.

Other military and civilian personnel within the Ministry of Defence will deal with aspects of ESDP within the course of their normal duties.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel have been deployed to the US within the military diplomatic system in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [46669]

Mr. Ingram: During the last five years since March 1997 there have been:

Three Heads of the British Defence Staff.

Three Naval Attaches and three Assistant Naval Attaches.

Three Military (Army) Attaches and three Assistant Military Attaches.

Two Air Attaches and two Assistant Air Attaches.

Three Heads of British Defence Intelligence Liaison Services.

There is overlap due to some of the Attaches commencing duty prior to March 1997.

SA80

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the SA80 to be readmitted to the NATO list of approved weapons. [46862]

Mr. Ingram: The modified SA80 was accepted as a NATO Nominated Weapon in March 2002.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the requirements are for weapons to be admitted to the NATO list of approved weapons. [46863]

Mr. Ingram: There is no NATO list of approved weapons. There are, however, procedures by which NATO member nations may introduce a national or foreign weapon as a NATO Nominated Weapon.

The procedures for introducing NATO Nominated Weapons are contained in the Manuals of Proof and Inspection Procedures for NATO Ammunition. I will write to the hon. Member providing details and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how much modifications to the SA80 went over the estimated cost. [46865]

Mr. Ingram: The approved cost limit of the SA80 modification programme is £92 million and spending is still within this level.

Widows

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pensioners have been affected by the provision in the war widows pension whereby widows whose husbands served before 1970 receive a pension equivalent to 33 per cent. of their husbands' retired pay; and what plans he has to amend the provision. [46861]

Dr. Moonie: The rates of war widows' pensions paid under the War Pensions Scheme are not based on the husbands' dates of service or the rate of their retired pay.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many widows of post-retirement marriages to ex-servicemen are affected by the rule whereby they are only entitled to payments on service following 1978. [46870]

Mr. Ingram: There is no requirement for the Ministry of Defence to hold data on post-retirement marriages of pensioners with service before 1978. This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the situation whereby widows of post-retirement marriages to ex-servicemen are only entitled to payments on service following 1978. [46869]

Dr. Moonie: The Government have no plans to increase the current armed forces pension scheme provisions for widows of post-retirement marriages. Following long-standing practice, improvements to the armed forces and other public sector pension schemes do not apply retrospectively.

Fylingdales

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what structural and transport improvements have been made to the base at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill since 1997. [46677]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Baltic States

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of the Baltic States to discuss their entry into NATO; and if he will make a statement. [46678]

Mr. Hoon: I visited Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on 25–27 February 2002 for a series of meetings with fellow Defence Ministers and their colleagues. Our discussions covered a range of issues including NATO enlargement, NATO-Russia relations, and the UK's strong bilateral and multilateral relations with all three Baltic States.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in relation to supporting and assisting the Government of Gibraltar to celebrate 300 years of British sovereignty in Gibraltar in 2004. [48264]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Department refused permission for use of the Naval Ground in Gibraltar for the demonstration held on 18 March; on what grounds it was refused; and who gave the order that the Naval Ground in Gibraltar could not be used for the demonstration. [47415]

Mr. Ingram: A request by the Government of Gibraltar (GoG) to use Naval Number One Ground as a car park to assist in the organisation of the GoG sponsored demonstration on 18 March 2002 was made to Commander British Forces Gibraltar on 5 March 2002. This request was agreed. Subsequently GoG sought agreement to change the intended use of the ground from a car park to a public assembly area for the demonstration. Commander British Forces declined this request because of the use of Ministry of Defence facilities for political events is prohibited by Queens Regulations for the armed forces. The offer to use Naval Number One Ground as a car park was reiterated but not taken up.

ESDP

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what (1) new regulations governing European security and defence policy were agreed at the EU Defence Ministers' meeting in Zaragoza, Spain; and if he will make a statement; [46874]

(2) if he will make a statement on the conclusions reached at the informal EU Defence Ministers' meeting in Zaragoza, Spain; and if he will place a copy of the conclusions reached in the Library. [46872]

Mr. Hoon: As this was an informal meeting, intended for the exchange of views on topical subjects, no formal conclusions or decisions were reached.

European Armaments Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts regarding the establishment of a European armaments policy; and if he will make a statement. [46875]

Dr. Moonie: The Laeken European Council asked the Spanish presidency to consider

> "measures to enhance co-operation in the field of armaments as member states consider appropriate".

As a result, EU Defence Ministers discussed armaments issues at their informal meeting in Zaragoza on 22–23 March. However, no decisions have been taken on the establishment of a European armaments policy.

Defence Clothing and Integrated Project Team

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by the Defence Clothing and Integrated Project Team on outside research and development since the changeover from the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency. [46868]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Clothing Integrated Project Team was formed on 1 April 2001 and has to date spent £0.8 million on outside research and development.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Research and Project Support Organisation will be incorporated by QinetiQ; and what effect this will have on the Defence Clothing and Integrated Project Team. [46867]

Mr. Ingram: A number of options have been considered for the future of the Clothing Research and Project Support Organisation. No final decision has yet been taken, but it is unlikely that the activity will transfer to QinetiQ.

Petersberg Tasks

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to widen the Petersberg tasks missions beyond the original 1992 mission; and if he will make a statement. [46873]

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans to broaden the scope of the Petersberg Tasks. The Petersberg Tasks are: humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. They were defined at the Western European Union Council of Ministers in Bonn in June 1992 and subsequently adopted by the EU.

Japanese Prisoners of War

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will change his policy on the award of compensation payments to Japanese prisoners of war who were citizens of British colonies; and if he will make a statement. [48197]

Dr. Moonie: Reflecting the ex gratia payment scheme that I announced in November 2000, payments to those British groups held as prisoners of war by the Japanese during the Second World War include eligible servicemen who were citizens of British colonies.

With regard to former civilian internees, the Association of British Civilian Internees Far East Region (ABCIFER) has submitted an application for leave to seek judicial review in respect of certain aspects of the scheme. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on this issue at present.

Patrols

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of patrols are sent out employing close operation procedures; in what circumstances these procedures are ordered; and in what circumstances members of a patrol would carry live rounds in the barrel of their rifles inside an army barracks. [48027]

Mr. Ingram: "Close operation procedures" is not a recognised term and I am assuming that my hon. Friend is referring to Close Observation Platoons (COP). The proportion of COP patrols in comparison to other patrols is small and will vary depending on the security situation at any given time and the needs of the police service of Northern Ireland. For obvious security reasons details about their role and specific tasking are classified.

Rules for carriage of personal weapons are set out clearly in Joint Service Publications and during routine barrack security duties service personnel must always carry their weapon in a safe state with no live round being carried in the breech.

Nuclear Weapons

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the conditions under which Her Majesty's Government have determined it would be legally permissible under *(a)* treaty obligations and *(b)* United Nations Security Council resolutions to use United Kingdom nuclear weapons. [47662]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom would, in the right conditions, in extreme circumstances of self-defence, be prepared to use nuclear weapons. We would not use our weapons, whether conventional or nuclear, contrary to international law.

Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the Independent Housing Survey in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [46439]

Dr. Moonie: Yes, copies will be placed today.

MOD Personnel

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, if he will list the numbers of MOD personnel located at the same sites. [48224]

Mr. Ingram: As at 28 February 2002 the number of Ministry of Defence personnel located at the same sites totalled 6,623 as detailed in the table.

Site	*MOD numbers at each site*
RAF Alconbury/Molesworth/Upwood	286
RAF Croughton/Barford St. John	191
RAF Daws Hill/West Ruislip/Eastcote/USN London	63
RAF Digby	792
RAF Fairford/Welford	239
RAF Feltwell	7
RAF Fylingdales	178
RAF Hythe	13
RAF Lakenheath	612
RAF Menwith Hill	372
RAF Mildenhall	593
Northwood	2,060
RAF Oakhanger	248
RAF St. Mawgan	969

BUTEC and Rona Ranges

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 446W, what his policy is on the

inclusion of the BUTEC and Rona ranges within the future provision of the range of test and evaluation facilities; and if he will make a statement. [48225]

Dr. Moonie: The BUTEC and Rona ranges are included in the arrangements currently under negotiation with QinetiQ for the delivery of a long-term test and evaluation capability to the Ministry of Defence.

Land Mines

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if she will make a statement on the findings of the report "Explosive Remnants of War" published by Landmine Action. [47040]

Mr. Ingram: We welcome this report as a broadly useful statement of existing knowledge about the effects of explosive remnants of war. It effectively details the impact of unexploded ordnance on post-conflict communities. We will continue to work positively on new measures that address these humanitarian issues, while also taking into account the need to maintain essential military capability for our forces.

Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many recipients of Army pensions received the pensions through weekly order books *(a)* in each of the last five years and *(b)* at the latest available date. [47819]

Dr. Moonie: The number of Army pensioners paid via weekly payable order book in each of the last five years was as follows:

As at March of year	*Number of Army pensioners*
1997	12,000
1998	10,000
1999	8,950
2000	8,050
2001	7,200

As at August 2001, the date of the most recently held statistical data, 6,887 Army pensioners were paid via weekly payable order book. Based on current estimates, this number has reduced further to some 6,050.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation took place before his Department decided to cease to pay pensioners through weekly order books; how many people were affected; and if he will make a statement. [47820]

Dr. Moonie: No formal consultation process took place before taking the decision to cease paying armed forces pensioners via weekly payable order books. The decision affects some 6,700 people (2 per cent. of the total number of armed forces pensioners) who, from April 2002, can opt to have their pension credited to a bank or building society account, or by a voucher sent to their home address encashable through a bank or building society. Under both options, the pensioners will retain the right to receive payment on a weekly basis, and many continue to cash their money at post offices subject to having an account with certain banks.

Strategic Lift Transport Ships

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the dates are for *(a)* lay-down, *(b)* launch and *(c)* delivery of each of the strategic lift transport ships. [40316]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Pursuant to the answer I gave on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 325–26W, I regret to inform the hon Gentleman that there was an error in the information given. The keel laying date for the sixth vessel, 'Beachy Head', should have read 11 November 2002 and not 31 January 2003 as stated.

Public Funds

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39115]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is consulted by other Government Departments on the implementation of various European directives (for example those concerning employment and workers' rights) but is not generally the lead Department dealing with implementation.

The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

The lead Department concerned with implementation would be required to produce a regulatory impact assessment for proposals, including those originating in European legislation, describing whether they have significant cost implications for business, charities or voluntary organisations. Copies of these assessments are placed in the Library of the House.

Redundancies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41080]

Dr. Moonie: One civilian employee in the central Ministry of Defence press office received termination or redundancy payments in 1998.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist-related murders have taken place in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 10 April 1998 for which no person has been convicted; and if he will list each of them. [44327]

Jane Kennedy: The information cannot be provided in the format requested. The table provides statistics on the number of terrorist murders in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 10 April 1998.

Terrorist murders in Northern Ireland 1969 to 10 April 1998

Attribution	Number of murders	Number where persons were charged	Number where persons were not charged
Loyalist	841	421	420
Republican	1,761	517	1,244
Total	2,602	938	1,664

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist-related incidents have taken place in Northern Ireland since 1 January. [44321]

Jane Kennedy: The information is unable to be provided in the format requested. The table lists shootings and bombing incidents and paramilitary style attacks since 1 January but these cannot be linked to any subsequent charge or conviction.

Security situation statistics: 1 January 2002 to 20 March 2002[1]

	Number
Deaths due to the security situation	3
Shooting incidents	66
Bombing incidents	31
Paramilitary-style assaults	13
Paramilitary-style shootings	50

[1] 2002 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment

Shooting incidents

The following types of shooting incidents are included:

Shots fired by terrorists

Shots fired by the security forces

Paramilitary-style attacks involving shootings

Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Other violent incidents where shots are fired (e.g. armed robbery).

Bombing incidents

An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1005W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42646]

Dr. John Reid: All of the stolen equipment referred to in my earlier answer was used. The stolen computers stored minutes of meetings between departmental and public representatives, routine divisional information and data relevant to the Northern Ireland Information Service.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1005W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings were undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41509]

Dr. John Reid: All the incidents referred to in my earlier answer were referred to the police for investigation but none resulted in criminal proceedings nor were any of the items recovered.

Election Expenses

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the returns of election expenses for the 1998 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. [45295]

Mr. Browne: I have no plans to publish these returns. As required by the Representation of the People Act 1983, as applied through Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 1998, the Returning Officer published in not less than two newspapers, the time and place where returns and declarations could be inspected in each constituency where the election was held. Those returns and declarations were also kept available, as required, in an appropriate place, for 12 months after being received by the Returning Officer.

British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of the British/Irish Intergovernmental Conference have taken place since 1 December 1999. [46139]

Dr. John Reid: The Prime Minister and Taoiseach chaired an inaugural meeting of the conference on 17 December 1999. The conference has not met in formal session since then but Ministers and officials have continued to work with their Irish counterparts on the matters falling within the conference's area of responsibility.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of the British/Irish Intergovernmental Conference since 1 December 1999 have included members of the Northern Ireland Executive Committee. [46140]

Dr. John Reid: One. The inaugural meeting of the Conference on 17 December 1999 was attended by the Northern Ireland First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

North-South Ministerial Council

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many plenary meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council have taken place since 1 December 1999; [46137]

(2) how many sectoral meetings have taken place between members of the Northern Ireland Executive and Ministers in the Republic of Ireland under the aegis of the North/South Ministerial Council since 1 December 1999. [46138]

Dr. John Reid: Responsibility for this subject has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Departmental IT Systems

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment he has made of whether the target of conducting 25 per cent. of departmental dealings electronically will be met in 2002. [45995]

Dr. John Reid: The progress of the Northern Ireland office towards electronic service delivery targets is kept under regular review. A number of significant developments have taken place particularly in the Northern Ireland Prison Service Agency, the Compensation Agency, and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

Paramilitary Shootings

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the responsibility for the shooting of *(a)* a 40-year-old man on waste ground at the back of Bray street, North Belfast on 14 March and *(b)* a 24-year-old man shot in both legs at the rear of houses at Glenlea Park, Garnerville on 12 March. [46341]

Jane Kennedy: Police investigations into the two incidents have established that victim *(a)* did not co-operate with the police, he did not make a statement and a crime scene could not be established; victim *(b)* did not make a complaint in respect of the incident. It is believed loyalists were responsible for these attacks but they cannot be attributed to any specific organisation.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he estimates that the Public Service Agreement target for efficiency savings in core departmental administration costs in 2001–02 will be achieved. [45994]

Dr. John Reid: Yes, it is estimated that the Public Service Agreement targets for efficiency savings in core Department administration costs in 2001–02 will be achieved.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47801]

Dr. John Reid: While an underspend is expected this financial year, provisional figures will not be available until May 2002.

Compensation Agency/ Forensic Science Northern Ireland

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the quinquennial reviews in the *(a)* Compensation Agency and *(b)* Forensic Science Northern Ireland have been completed. [45991]

Dr. John Reid: Stage 1 of both the quinquennial reviews of the Compensation Agency and Forensic Science Northern Ireland have now been completed. The Secretary of State announced his decision to renew the executive agency status of the Compensation Agency to Parliament on 15 November 2001. Stage 2 of the review of the Compensation Agency is under way and a draft report will be delivered before the end of March 2002. The Secretary of State expects to make an announcement to Parliament shortly on the outcome of the review of Forensic Science Northern Ireland. Stage 2 of the review of Forensic Science will then be completed.

Fireworks

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he will take to reduce the import of illegal fireworks into Northern Ireland. [43943]

Jane Kennedy: The illegal import of fireworks is one of the areas of concern being addressed as part of the Fireworks Review, which I announced on 12 October 2001. I will be announcing my proposals shortly.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42154]

Dr. John Reid: Of 64 appointments (including reappointments) to Northern Ireland Office public bodies in the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, 40 were men and 24 were women. For the period 1 April 2001 to 25 March 2002, 13 new appointments[1] were made; nine were men and four were women.

[1] Figures, which include reappointments, will be available in early summer 2002.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45224]

Dr. John Reid: The information is as follows:

	Number of staff
1999	1
2000	1
2001	0

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45260]

Dr. John Reid: None.

Performance Management System

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the improved performance management system referred to on page 64 of the 2001 departmental report took effect from 1 April 2001. [45997]

Dr. John Reid: Yes. The improved performance management system was brought into effect from 1 April 2001. The process has been streamlined, improved guidance has been issued and new report forms are available for use electronically.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Police Service of Northern Ireland has obtained exemption from the application of the Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998. [44039]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland has not obtained exemption from the application of the Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998.

Shooting (Westrock Square, Ballymurphy)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the responsibility for the shooting of a 17-year-old youth at Westrock Square, Ballymurphy on 9 March. [44456]

Jane Kennedy: Police inquiries into the above incident have to date proved negative and no information has been received as to the identity of the perpetrators of this shooting.

Banner (Derry City Walls)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of the right hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 656W, (1) how many individuals can be seen on CCTV video tape delivering and displaying the banner as the Bloody Sunday commemorative march approached the Derry City walls on 27 January; how many of those individuals have been identified; what facilities are available for military police to view video footage; and what further action he plans to take; [43884]

(2) what type of vehicle was identified on closed circuit television video tape transporting the banner unfurled on Derry City walls on 27 January; what the ownership record of the vehicle is; and what further action he plans to take; [43885]

(3) what assessment *(a)* he and *(b)* the Military Police have made of the origin and age of the banner removed by police from the Derry City walls on 27 January; on what previous occasions has it been publicly displayed in Derry; what the organisation affiliation of those in control of its display was; and at what location it is being stored. [43886]

Jane Kennedy: The police operation on the date in question was low-key and discreet as agreed with the march organisers. Police on duty did not witness the alleged display of the banner. CCTV footage over a two-hour period at the material time and location has been examined and discloses no evidence of a banner being transported or displayed. Police did not remove a banner nor do they have the banner in their possession. A report in the *Derry Journal* of 5 February would suggest that the banner is in the possession of the Bloody Sunday marchers.

Golden Jubilee

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding was offered to the public by the Northern Ireland Office for events linked with Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee celebrations; what the closing date for applications was; where and when adverts were placed publicising this funding; how much funding was provided by his Office; and which organisations and events were successful in their application for funding. [44751]

Dr. John Reid: The NIO has not offered funding to the public for events linked with the Golden Jubilee. In Northern Ireland, the Golden Jubilee celebrations are being co-ordinated by the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure.

E-business Strategy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Department produced a full e-business strategy by June 2001. [45998]

Dr. John Reid: The Northern Ireland Office produced an initial e-business strategy at the end of 2000 and is reviewing and refining this in the context of the development of an overall information systems strategy to meet departmental business needs.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42573]

Dr. John Reid: It is the policy of the Northern Ireland Office that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment and advancement solely on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work. The Department promotes an equal opportunities policy whereby no employee or job applicant is unfairly discriminated against on a number of grounds, including age. Staff joining the Department receive, as part of their induction, a mandatory half-day equal opportunities awareness session which explains their responsibilities under the policy and addresses negative stereotypical attitudes towards people, including on the basis of age.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity for persons in nine separate categories, one of which is age. In

accordance with its commitments under Section 75, the Department has undertaken an extensive screening exercise to examine all its policies against all the categories, including age.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41011]

Dr. John Reid: 25 officers out of 1,256 staff employed by the NIO are job sharers.

Jobsharing however is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up. In the NIO there are also 116 officers who work part-time. The flexibility of the hours worked is decided in conjunction with local management to suit the individuals need and the needs of the branch.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47711]

Dr. John Reid: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's second report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Commission Reports

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the Law Commission reports and their date of publication in respect of which *(a)* no Government response has yet been published and *(b)* no legislation where the need for legislation has been accepted in principle, has been published, in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [46876]

Mr. Wills: Lists for *(a)* and *(b)* are set out in the tables. At any one time, the Law Commissioner will be engaged on between 20 and 30 projects of law reform at different stages of completion. In 1999 the Lord Chancellor established a ministerial committee on the work of the Law Commission. Its remit is to develop and co-ordinate the Government's interest in law reform. The committee looks at the effective use of the resource represented by the Law Commission; the process for referring projects to the commission; how the implementation of Law Commission recommendations may be streamlined; and considers what actions might be taken on unimplemented reports. However, it is for individual Departments to decide whether to accept the reports they receive and when to propose legislation.

(a) Law Commission reports awaiting Government response

Year	*Number*	*Title*
1991	194	Distress for Rent
1994	222	Binding Over
1994	226	Judicial Review and Statutory Appeals
1995	229	Intoxication and Criminal Liability
1996	238	Landlord and Tenant: Responsibility for State and Condition of Property
1997	246	Shareholder Remedies
1998	249	Liability for Psychiatric Illness
1999	257	Damages for Personal Injury: Non-Pecuniary Loss (Part IV)
1999	261	Company Directors: Regulating Conflicts of Interest and Formulating a Statement of Duties
1999	262	Damages for Personal Injury: Medical, Nursing and Other Expense Collateral Benefits
1999	263	Claims for Wrongful Death
2001	269	Bail and The Human Rights Act 1998
2001	270	Limitations of Actions
2001	272	Third Parties' Rights Against Insurers
2001	273	Evidence of Bad Character in Criminal Proceedings

(b) Law Commission Reports awaiting legislation

Year	*Number*	*Title*
1992	208	Landlord and Tenant- Business Tenancies: A Periodic Review of The Landlord and Tenant Act
1993	218	Offences Against the Person and General Principles
1995	231	Mental Incapacity
1996	237	Involuntary Manslaughter
1997	245	Hearsay and Related Topics
1997	247	Aggravated, Exemplary and Restitutionary Damages
1998	248	Corruption Offences
1998	251	The Rules Against Perpetuities and Excessive Accumulations
1998	253	The Execution of Deeds and Documents
1998	255	Consents to Prosecution
2001	267	Double Jeopardy and Prosecution Appeals

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [39025]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has entered into a range of equipment leases the majority of which are for photocopiers, hygiene disposal units and laptop computers. The total cost of equipment leases in each of the last three years for which information is readily available was as follows:

	£ million
1999–01	1.3
2000–02	2.1
2001–03	[1]1.9

[1] To January 2002.

The increase in cost from 1999–2000 mainly represents the additional provision of laptop computers to the judiciary.

Crown Courts

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to change the number of Crown courts. [47588]

Mr. Wills: Public consultation on a proposal to close the satellite Crown court at Knutsford and move hearings to Chester is due to commence today. There are currently no plans to change the number of Crown courts or their satellite offices in England and Wales.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were tried at Knutsford Crown court in each of the last 20 years. [47587]

Mr. Wills: I list below the number of trials disposed of in each of the last 16 years at Knutsford Crown court. The figures for the previous four years are not available.

Trials disposed of at Knutsford Crown court

	Total trials disposed of
1986	50
1987	68
1988	100
1989	108
1990	92
1991	44
1992	22
1993	50
1994	56
1995	59
1996	54
1997	86
1998	91
1999	82
2000	98
2001	108

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of the Crown court at Knutsford. [47589]

Mr. Wills: Public consultation on a proposal to close the satellite Crown court at Knutsford is due to commence today. Results of the consultation will be submitted to the Lord Chancellor who must approve any court closure.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Crown courts there were in England in each of the last 20 years. [47586]

Mr. Wills: I list below the number of Crown court centres, including their satellite offices, for each of the last 16 years. The figures for the previous four years are not recorded.

Crown court centres and satellite offices

	Number
1986	85
1987	85
1988	87
1989	87
1990	88
1991	88
1992	93
1993	92
1994	90
1995	90
1996	92
1997	92
1998	92
1999	92
2000	92
2001	92

Census 1901

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 414W, on the 1901 Census, what steps were taken to familiarise employees based in India and Sri Lanka with the handwriting and spelling used by enumerators of the 1901 Census. [47661]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The data input company based in India and Sri Lanka demonstrated that it already had in-house skills at interpreting late nineteenth century handwriting by producing test results of a very high level of accuracy prior to award of contract. In order to augment these skills, 10 Public Record Office staff with expertise in interpreting census enumeration returns spent, between them, 20 weeks at the company's bases in India and Sri Lanka. They gave training sessions on the detailed transcription rules, on the formation of the handwriting to be found in the returns and on the etymology of Welsh place names. They also responded to queries raised by individual operators while they were transcribing the returns.

Public Record Office staff ensured that keying operators had access to appropriate reference sources such as English and Welsh gazetteers and name listings. They also provided supervisors with detailed feedback on errors encountered during the quality assessment of the transcribed data to seek to prevent such errors reoccurring.

The transcription rule for most of the data found in the 1901 census returns was to transcribe it exactly as it appeared. As a result, there was no requirement to translate 1901 spelling to its modern day equivalent.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42458]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 295W.

Judiciary

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many acting members of the judiciary also practise as solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [44607]

Mr. Wills: The number of members of the part-time judiciary in the courts and tribunals who are solicitors is 2,019. The Lord Chancellor encourages and welcomes applications for judicial office from solicitors and considers that they perform an important and vital function as part-time judges.

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances he is able to exercise his power to investigate the personal conduct of members of the judiciary. [44424]

Mr. Wills: As Head of the Judiciary the Lord Chancellor is able to consider and investigate complaints about the personal conduct of individual judges and other judicial office holders.

It is not open to the Lord Chancellor to comment on, or to intervene in relation to, complaints received about decisions made by a judge or any steps in the process of reasoning underlying his or her decision, or other matters involving the exercise of judicial functions.

The criteria for investigating complaints about personal conduct of members of the judiciary are set down in procedures drawn up in 1998. The system for investigating complaints has developed over the last four years and the procedures are now being revised to take these developments into account. Details will be made available to the public once the revised procedures have been finalised.

Birth Certificates (Transsexuals)

Miss Begg: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to allow transsexual people to change their birth certificates. [34052]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Issues of concern to transsexual people (such as the replacement of birth certificates) affect the policy responsibilities of a number of Government Departments and were considered by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and is actively considering how to take the matter forward.

Legal Aid Certificates

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list for each financial year since April 2000 the savings accruing from the abolition of the issuing of legal aid certificates for cases involving personal injury or disease. [44993]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We estimate the net savings to legal aid in 2000–01 were £32 million. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available. Expenditure on personal injury cases fell substantially in the years prior to 2000–01, following the introduction of conditional fees.

Investigative Support Certificates

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many investigative support certificates have been granted for investigative support funding since May 1999. [45381]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Investigative support funding became available from April 2000 with the implementation of the Legal Services Commission's Funding Code. In the financial year 2000–01, 25 certificates were issued for investigative support funding. In the current financial year, to the end of February 2002, 31 certificates have been issued.

Litigations Support Certificates

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many litigations support certificates have been granted for litigations support funding since May 1999. [45382]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Litigation support funding became available from April 2000 with the implementation of the Legal Services Commission's Funding Code. In the financial year 2000–01, two certificates were issued for litigation support funding. In the current financial year, to the end of February 2002, no certificates have been issued.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he last met the President of the Law Society and the Chairman of the Bar. [46177]

Mr. Wills: My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, my ministerial colleagues and I have all met with the Chairman of the Bar and the President of the Law Society. The dates are provided in the table.

Minister	*Chairman of the Bar*	*President of the Law Society*
Lord Chancellor	22 January 2002	17 September 2001
Baroness Scotland	26 July 2001	25 July 2001
Michael Wills MP	10 October 2001	29 October 2001
Rosie Winterton MP	24 September 2001	7 March 2002

Courthouse Closures

Mr. Key: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the objectors who have appealed against the proposals of the Wiltshire Magistrates Court Committee to close courthouses in Devizes and Trowbridge and build a new courthouse in Salisbury. [45174]

Mr. Wills: I have received three representations against the proposals, including the Wiltshire county council's appeal. The two remaining representations are from the Wiltshire police authority and the Melksham without parish council. I understand from the Justices' Chief Executive for the Wiltshire Magistrates Courts Committee (MCC), that the MCC has received approximately 140 representations from local Members, authorities, justices of the peace and other interested parties, against the MCC's proposals to close courthouses in Devizes and Trowbridge and build a new courthouse in Salisbury. Although the majority of representations oppose the proposals, there are some letters of support.

Under section 56(3) of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 only the paying authority (the local authority that contributes financially) that is aggrieved by the determination of a Magistrates Courts Committee to close a courthouse has the right to appeal to the Lord Chancellor, within one month of receipt of written notification of the determination. The Wiltshire county council has exercised its right in this case. Once an appeal has been filed, I carefully consider all representations received before making a decision.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33686]

Mr. Leslie: The total expenditure by the Cabinet Office, its agency and the Central Office of Information on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date is shown in the table.

	£000
1997–98	11,842
1998–99	13,137
1999–2000	[1]17,247
2000–01	[1,2]55,229
2001–02	[2,3]48,462

[1] The figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 include expenditure on: the development of Penserver pensions awarding software; and Y2k work.

[2] The figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 include expenditure on: the upgrading of Central Office of Information's IT systems, networks and infrastructures and the introduction of electronic document managements systems for the Office; the development and live running of the Government Gateway, UK online and the Knowledge Network; IT systems and support by the Government Offices in the Regions, Emergency Planning and other function transferring to the Cabinet Office after the 2001 election; and the extension of the scope of services covered by the Cabinet Office's contract for domestic IT services.

[3] 2001–02 figure is to end of February and is subject to audit.

The number of contracts let and the locations of the main contracting companies are not held centrally and are available only at disproportionate cost.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he will be seeking representations on the link between biodiversity and poverty in his capacity as chair of the cross-Government ministerial committee preparing the UK position at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. [48158]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The eradication of poverty will be a key focus for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. As the summit approaches the Government are consulting widely on how to ensure that the goal of poverty alleviation is integrated into the emerging agenda. The 2001 DFID publication 'Biodiversity: a crucial issue for the world's poorest' elucidates the links between poverty and biodiversity and sets out the Government's approach to this subject. This is available on the DFID website at www.dfid.gov.uk.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47145]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, Special Advisers in the Cabinet Office travelled abroad on eight occasions, at an average cost of £1,706.46 per trip. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Special Advisers visited Sweden, the United States of America, Colombia, France, Spain, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Details of Special Adviser travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years; [46840]

(2) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes. [47213]

Mr. Leslie: Information is not held in the form requested and is available only at disproportionate cost.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

British/Irish Council

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what common policies and actions have been agreed between the British and Irish Governments and representatives of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as a result of meetings of the British/Irish Council since 1 December 1999; and what progress has been made in implementing them. [46141]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The British-Irish Council will exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on cooperation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant Administrations.

At its first summit on 17 December 1999 the British-Irish Council identified the following areas for early discussion: drugs, the environment, transport, social inclusion, the knowledge economy, tele-medicine and tourism. Work is on-going in all sectoral areas.

In the environment sector for example, in which the UK Government take the lead, work has been taken forward on the impacts of climate change. In particular, new scenarios of climate change are planned that will be tailored to meet the particular needs of some British-Irish Council administrations.

In the drugs sector, work to date has focused on the exchange of information, sharing of best practice and identifying suitable areas for practical co-operation.

I have placed in the Libraries of the House copies of the communiqués from the two most recent ministerial meetings on the environment and drugs.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many sectoral meetings of the British/Irish Council have taken place since 1 December 1999; and what plans there are for further such meetings. [46143]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The following British-Irish Council sectoral meetings have taken place at ministerial level since 1 December 1999:

2 October 2000—ministerial meeting on the environment, London

19 December 2000-ministerial meeting on transport, Belfast

25 February 2002—ministerial meeting on the environment, Edinburgh

22 March 2002—ministerial meeting on drugs, Dublin.

There have also been meetings of officials on the following occasions since 1 December 1999:

6 October 2000—officials meeting on drugs, Dublin

16 November 2000—officials meeting on social inclusion, London

16 November 2000—officials meeting on the knowledge economy, London

4 December 2000—officials meeting on transport, Belfast

23 January 2001—officials meeting on the environment, London

28–29 March 2001—officials meeting on the environment, Oxford

29 March 2001—officials meeting on the knowledge economy, Jersey

13 September 2001—officials meeting on drugs, Dublin

25 January 2002—officials meeting on drugs, Dublin

4 February 2002—officials meeting on social inclusion, London

5 February 2002—officials meeting on the knowledge economy, London

7 February 2002—officials meeting on the environment, London

26 February 2002—officials meeting on tele-medicine, Isle of Man

1 March 2002—officials meeting on tourism, Guernsey

6 March 2002—officials meeting on drugs, Dublin.

Further meetings will take place at ministerial and official level as appropriate. These are likely to include a ministerial meeting on the environment in the autumn and a ministerial meeting on drugs in early 2003.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many meetings of the British/Irish Council have taken place at summit level since 1 December 1999; and what plans there are for further meetings at summit level. [46142]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: There have been two British-Irish Council summit meetings since 1 December. Further summit meetings are planned in June 2002 in Jersey where the main topic of discussion will be the knowledge economy, autumn 2002 in Scotland and early 2003 in Northern Ireland.

Government Offices for the Region

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the costs of the Government offices for the regions. [44117]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on the 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 780W.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44817]

Mr. Leslie: All targets scheduled for completion in 2002 are on course. Progress on/against PSA targets will be reported and published in the Cabinet Office's annual departmental report for 2002.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44948]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The target time set in the Cabinet Office for 2002–03 for ministers to reply to letters received from hon. members has been set at 91 per cent. of replies within 15 working days. The Cabinet Office also aims to clear correspondence received directly from members of the public within 15 working days.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47253]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office deploys a range of security measures to protect property from theft or damage. This includes access control, CCTV monitoring, guarding personnel, routine security checks, supply of secure furniture and the provision of advice and guidance to staff.

In response to any thefts or damage to property, an investigation is carried out and any recommended new measures are implemented locally.

At the strategic level, my Department is working towards compliance with British Standard 7799: Information Security Management. This work includes revision of departmental security policies, a new security training and awareness programme, improved data collection and trend analysis and a new team and structure for managing the Department's security needs.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47709]

Mr. Leslie: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to Parliamentary Questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47800]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The estimated capital and revenue outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget Report on 17 April.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47193]

Mr. Leslie: The figures are in table form, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. They show the total number of staff in each department/agency reported to the Cabinet Office at 1 October 2001. The figures include submissions from all departments and agencies.

The figures were published in the Press Notice about Civil Service staffing levels, released on 21 February 2002, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The figures are shown on a headcount basis, and are rounded to the nearest 10. The part-time percentage figures are calculated by taking the part-time staff as a percentage of the total staff, rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

Pensions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make pensions available to those who serve on non-departmental public bodies; and if he will make a statement. [47579]

Mr. Leslie: Those who are appointed to serve on the boards of non-departmental public bodies may be provided with a pension at the discretion of the sponsoring department in consultation with the Treasury. The usual requirement is that to be eligible for a pension, board members should be paid for at least two days' work a week and have executive responsibilities.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase by March from 93 per cent. to 100 per cent. the proportion of prosecution witness expenses sent no later than 10 working days from receipt of a correctly completed claim form will be met. [47813]

The Solicitor-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Cabinet Office.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Materials (Former Soviet Union)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress on the UK's contribution to the clear up of nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union. [45367]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Since the start of the UK Government's new £84 million programme to help address the nuclear legacy in the former Soviet Union in April 2001, we have taken forward a number of initiatives recognised as priority areas for the programme. These include:

Spending some £16 million on projects during 2001–02 including part of the UK's contribution to the Chernobyl Shelter fund;

Continuing the dialogue with our G8 partners regarding the disposition of at least 34 tonnes of Russian weapons grade plutonium declared surplus for defence requirements;

Identifying and negotiating a portfolio of bilateral and multilateral project proposals for UK support focused on NW Russia associated with spent nuclear fuel and decommissioned nuclear submarines;

Negotiating a legal framework agreement with Russia to cover liabilities, site access and tax issues etc. associated with UK funded projects (completion of this agreement is expected this spring);

Developing co-ordinated strategies for future work to prevent the transfer of nuclear weapons expertise in Russia to countries of proliferation concern (focus on closed cities in Russia) and addressing social impact issues associated with nuclear power plant closure;

Developing a strategy for the provision of UK assistance to the Kazak Government in the safe and irreversible shutdown of the fast breeder reactor in Aktau;

Initiated 34 projects worth some £2.5 million in eight beneficiary countries, to enhance power plant nuclear safety;

Contributed some £2.9 million to aid the closer of Chernobyl type reactors in EU accession candidate countries (e.g. Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia).

Once the UK/Russia legal framework agreement is completed, we expect to be able to move very quickly to start a number of projects for which negotiations have been taking place with Russia and other donor countries over the past few months. We are also nearing the completion of recruiting external project managers to help us manage and drive forward these projects. The expenditure profile is expected to rise significantly once these projects get under way. The Department will be publishing an annual report on progress in taking forward the programme together with a range of publications on active and completed projects. Both the annual report and project information will be available from the DTI website and in hard copy form later this spring. Copies of all publications will be sent to the Libraries of the House.

Kassam 2 Rocket

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the Tanzim organisation's assistance in the production of the Kassam 2 rocket. [37455]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG have no evidence to suggest that Tanzim has been involved in the manufacture of the Kassam 2 rocket.

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1293W, what consideration has been given to having the trial of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh held in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [45499]

Mr. Bradshaw: None. Any possible trial in the UK would be a matter for the UK prosecuting authorities.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45068]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases which we consider may be of particular significance to this Department. We have recorded five cases to date.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

GCHQ

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many US National Security Agency personnel are at GCHQ; and what the rank is of the most senior of them. [47607]

Mr. Straw: It is long-standing Government policy not to comment on details of the staffing of the security and intelligence services. However, I can confirm that there are a number of NSA personnel at GCHQ in a variety of roles. The most senior is the Special US Liaison Officer, a former deputy director at NSA.

Lord Levy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost has been in each month since January 1999 arising from the activities of Lord Levy, broken down by *(a)* reimbursed travelling costs, *(b)* reimbursed other costs, *(c)* support costs in the UK, *(d)* support costs incurred at UK embassies and *(e)* other costs; and if he will make a statement. [47608]

Mr. Bradshaw: Lord Levy receives no remuneration and travels at his own expense. The FCO provides him with logistic and administrative support, including use of an office in London, and official accommodation overseas, the cost of which is not separately itemised.

EU Membership

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Governments of *(a)* Hungary, *(b)* Czech Republic, *(c)* Slovenia and *(d)* Croatia; and if their application for membership of the EU was discussed. [47377]

Peter Hain: The Secretary of State met the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Dr. Janos Martonyi, on 1 and on 15 November 2001. He met the Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kavan in London on 25 January 2002, and Slovenian President Kucan and the Slovenian Minister of Economy Dr. Tea Petrin in December 2001. The Secretary of State also met Croatian Foreign Minister Tonino Picula in December 2001. EU enlargement was discussed at each meeting. The Secretary of State will be visiting Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic on 22–23 April where their applications to join the EU will be discussed.

Future of Europe

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is intended that the votes taken at the proceedings of the European Convention on the Future of Europe will be recorded. [46255]

Peter Hain: The Convention's Rules of Procedure stipulate that:

"The recommendations of the Convention shall be adopted by consensus . . . When the deliberations of the Convention result in several different options, the support obtained by each option may be indicated."

They make no provision for voting to take place. The Convention is committed to making its proceedings transparent. Plenary sessions are open to the public. The Convention website (http://european-convention.eu.int)

contains records of these sessions, including video updates, details of its future work programme, and all documents submitted in the course of its work.

European Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39118]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office plays a co-ordinating role in UK EU policy. As such the Foreign and Commonwealth Office rarely leads on implementation of directives and regulations.

(a) The Foreign and Commonwealth Office lead on Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents.

This regulation consolidates the initiatives that the institutions have already taken with a view to improving the transparency of the decision-making process. The purpose of the regulation is to give the fullest possible effect to the right of public access to documents and to lay down the general principles and limits on such access in accordance with Article 255(2) of the EC treaty.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office also lead on the implementation of the following legislation where it is applicable to fishing activities in the Antarctic:

Council Regulation (EC) No 1035/2001 of 22 May 2001 establishing a catch documentation scheme for Dissostichus spp. (Patagonian toothfish and Giant Antarctic Cod).

Council Regulation (EC) No 2848/2000 of 15 December 2000 fixing for 2001 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where limitations in catch are required.

Council Regulation (EC) No 1543/2000 of 29 June 2000 establishing a Community framework for the collection and management of the data needed to conduct the common fisheries policy.

Council Regulation (EC) No 2742/1999 of 17 December 1999 fixing for 2000 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where the limitations in catch are required and amending Regulation (EC) No 66/98.

Council Regulation (EC) No 1721/1999 of 29 July 1999 laying down certain control measures in respect of vessels flying the flag of Non-Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

Council Regulation (EC) No 2479/98 of 12 November 1998 amending Regulation (EC) No 66/98 laying down certain conservation and control measures applicable to fishing activities in the Antarctic.

Council Regulation (EC) No 66/98 of 18 December 1997 laying down certain conservation and control measures applicable to fishing activities in the Antarctic and repealing Regulation (EC) No 2113/96.

(b) We do not hold information in the form requested. The information could be assembled only at a disproportionate cost.

(c) Departments are required to produce Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) for proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on business, charities or voluntary organisations. The above legislation was not considered to have a significant cost to business.

Peru

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the bomb which exploded recently in Lima, Peru. [46372]

Mr. MacShane: We strongly condemn the car bomb attack carried out in Lima on 20 March and the resultant tragic loss of life.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the level of border delays experienced by the people of Gibraltar. [46854]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the previous answer I gave him on 3 April (UIN 45472).

The Spanish Government opened a second channel on 21 March for vehicles exiting Gibraltar to Spain. Delays exiting Gibraltar have been significantly reduced. We are monitoring the situation carefully and are in close touch with the Spanish Government and Gibraltar authorities.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the funds for Gibraltar agreed to by the European Union at the European Council meeting at Barcelona will be available if the people of Gibraltar reject joint British and Spanish proposals put to them on their future. [46851]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 614W.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the Government have had concerning Gibraltar with fellow member states of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [46852]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W. It is for the European Commission to consider how best to carry forward its remit from the European Council.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Gibraltar. [47318]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 29.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to refer the question of Gibraltar's constitutional standing to the International Court of Justice. [47319]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 632W.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support and assistance his Department is providing to the Government of Gibraltar with their plans to celebrate 300 years of British sovereignty of Gibraltar in 2004. [48271]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Jim Dobbin) on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 494W.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has given details to the Government of Gibraltar of the proposals which are being considered for agreement with his Spanish counterpart regarding the future status of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [47563]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar in London on 25 January and had detailed discussions on Gibraltar's future and the Brussels process and offered to keep the Chief Minister fully informed.

At the most recent Brussels process meeting in London on 4 February my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister reiterated their invitation to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in future Brussels process meetings on the basis of the Two Flags, Three Voices formula, having his own and distinct voice as part of the British delegation.

Chechnya

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Government of Russia concerning the abuses of human rights in Chechnya; and if he will make a statement. [48613]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last raised the human rights situation in Chechnya with Foreign Minister Ivanov in March 2002, during the latter's visit to the UK. He also discussed Chechnya with the Russian Defence Minister in December 2001.

Ilois People

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive the constitutional report on the return of the Ilois people to the Chagos Islands. [48617]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no constitutional report on the return of the Ilois to the Chagos Islands. The results of Phase 2B of the feasibility studies, which will provide detailed assessments of groundwater, soils, fisheries resources and the marine and terrestrial environment, are expected to be available by mid 2002.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to introduce an order to put into effect the provisions of the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 in respect of the Ilois people. [48616]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that I gave in the House on 13 February during the debate on the Remaining Stages of the Overseas Territories Bill. As stated then, the Nationality Provisions of this Act will become law for the people of all British Overseas Territories, except Cyprus SBAs, on a date of commencement decided by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. This date will be no later than 21 May 2002.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans have been made for the Ilois people to visit the Chagos Islands. [48615]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have given an undertaking to consider, without commitment, facilitating a visit to some outer islands of the territory. We are making inquiries about the practicalities of this with a private shipping company.

India

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the India-UK Round Table's contribution to furthering the countries' partnership in education and science and technology. [46302]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 865W.

Sudan

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings Ministers in his Department held during March with representatives of the Government of the Sudan. [48017]

Mr. MacShane: My noble Friend Baroness Amos, Minister responsible for Africa, held a meeting with the Sudanese Ambassador on 11 March, during which she raised our concern about bombing of civilian targets. The UK Special Representative, Alan Goulty, represented Ministers during his trip to the Sudan, Kenya and Kampala, from 17 to 21 March. Mr. Goulty held substantive discussions about the peace process with a range of representatives of the Sudanese Government, including President Bashir.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys who entered primary school in Afghanistan at the start of the new school year on 22 March. [47703]

Mr. Bradshaw: UNICEF estimate approximately 1.8 million children to have attended primary schools across Afghanistan on 23 March—the first day of the new school year. Statistics are not yet available on the breakdown of boys and girls who attended. The Afghan Interim Administration, with assistance from UNICEF and other agencies, are actively collating this information.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure widows in Afghanistan have equal rights to participate in the Loya Jirga being convened in Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN. [47695]

Mr. Bradshaw: We will continue to urge the Special Commission for Convening the Loya Jirga to ensure that women, including widows, are able to participate in the Emergency Loya Jirga process.

On 31 March, the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga announced the procedures and criteria for selection of delegates for the Emergency Loya Jirga. These include a quota of 165 seats reserved for women. In addition to these reserved seats, women will also be entitled to stand in the regional ballot, to contest the seats reserved for refugees, nomads, business people, intellectuals, religious scholars and minorities.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many women participants in the Loya Jirga will be accommodated. [47698]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 31 March, the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga announced the procedures and criteria for selection of delegates for the Emergency Loya Jirga. These include a quota of 165 seats reserved for women. In addition to these reserved seats, women will also be entitled to stand in the regional ballot to contest the seats reserved for refugees, nomads, business people, intellectuals, religious scholars and minorities.

The Special Commission are working with the UN on the logistical arrangements for the Emergency Loya Jirga. We will continue to urge them to ensure that adequate arrangements are in place for the provision of accommodation for all delegates from outside Kabul, including women.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the call from Afghanistan's Minister for Women's Affairs for 25 per cent. female representation on the Loya Jirga being organised under the auspices of the UN. [47701]

Mr. Bradshaw: We hope that the views of women will be well represented at the Emergency Loya Jirga.

We welcome the announcement by the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga on 31 March on the procedures and criteria for the selection of delegates for the Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ). These include a quota of 165 seats reserved for women. This represents approximately 11 per cent. of the total delegate in the ELJ. This is the highest proportion of women included in any Loya Jirga in Afghan history, and as such is an important first step to ensuring that the views of women will be represented. However, in addition to these reserved seats, women will also be entitled to stand in the regional ballot and to contest the seats reserved for refugees, nomads, business people, intellectuals, religious scholars and minorities.

We will continue to urge the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga actively to encourage more Afghan women to participate in the political process.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provisions will be made to enable women to travel in safety to the Loya Jirga in Afghanistan. [47704]

Mr. Bradshaw: The security arrangements for the Emergency Loya Jirga are currently under consideration by the Special Commission for Convening the Emergency Loya Jirga and the UN. We shall continue to encourage them to enable all participants, including women, to travel in safety to the Emergency Loya Jirga.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Afghans will need an identity card to participate in the Loya Jirga. [47705]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 31 March the Special Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga announced the procedures and criteria for the selection of delegates for the Emergency Loya Jirga. These did not include reference to an ID card.

Mr. Ian Stillman

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in respect of the case of Mr. Ian Stillman following his imprisonment in India. [48163]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Mr. Stillman's welfare, and our hope that his appeal to the High Court would be heard swiftly, with the Indian High Commissioner and Prime Minister Vajpayee's Principal Secretary, Brajesh Mishra, on 26 June 2001. The Foreign Secretary wrote to the High Commissioner on 28 June 2001 highlighting our concerns. He also raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani, on 23 July 2001 and 27 February 2002. On the latter occasion he asked that Mr. Stillman's forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court be heard as quickly as possible.

In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, and Mr. Mishra on 4 July 2001. I raised it with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah, on 18 February 2002.

Our High Commission in New Delhi continues to do all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the planned visit of 19 March by consular staff in India to Mr. Ian Stillman took place; and if he will make a statement. [46552]

Mr. Bradshaw: Consular staff were unable to visit Ian Stillman on 19 March 2002 but saw him on 21 March 2002 at a hospital in Chandigarh where he was receiving a medical check-up by doctors. Two consular officials spent just under two hours with Mr. Stillman and his son.

Mr. Stillman discussed with consular staff certain issues relating to his medical condition and asked whether they would raise these with the Superintendent of Kanda Prison. This was done on 22 March. The Superintendent agreed to all of Mr. Stillman's requests.

Our High Commission in New Delhi will continue to do all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48358]

Mr. MacShane: This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48359]

Mr. MacShane: This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34287]

Mr. MacShane: The cost of legal advice and representation incurred externally to the department is

£54,667.70 for the financial year 1998 to 1999

£50,963.21 for the financial year 1999 to 2000

£117,117.11 for the financial year 2000 to 2001.

Gender Strategy

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's gender strategy is. [47697]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO's gender strategy is part of a wider Diversity strategy. This was first put in place in March 1999 and updated in January 2002.

Our diversity mission is to create and sustain a culture that values and actively supports and promotes diversity. We are currently focused on retention and work/life balance issues, including flexible working. But our gender activity is continually evolving to meet new challenges.

A copy of our Diversity Strategy will be sent to the hon. Member and placed in the Library of the House.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47952]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary currently has no plans to relocate to Scotland any of the non-departmental public bodies or one executive agency currently under his remit.

The British Council in Scotland already has a headquarters in Edinburgh and offices in Glasgow and Aberdeen. In April 2003, twenty posts from the Education and Training Department of the British Council in England will be moved to Edinburgh.

The Britain Russia Centre has its main office in England, but also has a small office in Scotland.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of whether the target to release £790 million from overseas estate rationalisation for new investment over the three years to March will be met. [47790]

Mr. MacShane: We await final figures, but believe that the £90 million estate sales target for the triennium FY 1999–2000 to FY 2001–02 will have been achieved.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of whether the target of 25 per cent. of business undertaken electronically by 2002 will be met. [47789]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 44W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47181]

Mr. MacShane: Information on progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of whether the target to halve accommodation running costs in London by 2001–02 will be met. [47784]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of whether the target of efficiency gains of £7 million by the end of 2001–02 will be met. [47783]

Mr. MacShane: I am unable to confirm the exact figure for efficiency savings before our accounts for 2001–02 are finalised later in the year. Our present assessment continues to show that we are on target to achieve efficiency gains of approximately £7 million.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of whether the target of £12 million savings by 2001–02 through improved procurement procedures will be met. [47785]

Mr. MacShane: Savings of £10.3 million had been achieved by 31 December 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of performance against the target of full cost recovery by the Government Hospitality Fund. [47786]

Mr. MacShane: The Government Hospitality Fund has been dissolved and the equivalent budget is now held by Conference and Visits Group (CVG), a new business unit that forms part of FCO Services. Full cost recovery in this area is likely to be achieved during the 2002–03 financial year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the target of 60 per cent. on internal departmental services to be reviewed under Better Quality Services guidelines by the end of 2001–02 will be met. [47787]

Mr. MacShane: The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster informed Departments on 6 February that he had decided to discontinue the Better Quality Services (BQS) scheme.

Three BQS reviews originally scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2002 are still in progress: Security, Consular Services and Training. These will continue and are all expected to be completed this summer. The reviews of Security and Consular Services were both seriously delayed by the events of 11 September and their aftermath.

The FCO is currently considering how best to conduct internal reviews of effectiveness in future, to provide assurance that high standards of performance, particularly in areas of customer focus and service delivery are achieved and maintained.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the level of sickness absence in 2000–01; and if he expects the target of a 30 per cent. reduction by 2003 to be met. [47788]

Mr. Bradshaw: FCO staff took an average of 5.9 days of sickness absence in 2000–01. Early indications are that we are on course to meet the target of a 30 per cent. reduction by 2003.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44924]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

(a) 11, *(b)* nil and *(c)* nil.

New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44906]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

(a) Four, and *(b)* the FCO does not monitor this information.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45228]

Mr. Bradshaw: Secondment refers to all continuous interchange activity of three months or more.

In line with the annual statistical exercise carried out by the Cabinet Office, the number of staff employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on secondment from non-governmental organisations is broken down by financial year (1 April to 31 March) as follows:

FY 1999–2000 = 2

FY 2000–01 = 5

FY 2001–02 = 3.

If a period of secondment covers more than one financial year, it is counted in each financial year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45269]

Mr. MacShane: The figures (collated by financial year) for private sector secondments to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are as follows:

1999–2000: 17

2000–01: 7

Current FY: 10.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43279]

Mr. Bradshaw: As at 13 March 2002, there were two special advisers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Prime Minister has announced the introduction of a revised pay system for special advisers based on individual job evaluation. The process of evaluation is currently under way and the cost will be provided once the process is completed.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessor since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43376]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 25 March. 2002]:* Dr. David Mathieson was appointed in line with the requirements of paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code as

unpaid adviser to the then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, from May 1997 to June 2001. He was an adviser with special responsibilities for media matters involving party political matters. The current Foreign Secretary has appointed no unpaid adviser.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39939]

Mr. Bradshaw: The numbers of staff employed in this function in London are:

Information Department (renamed—Public Diplomacy Department)

1997 = 78.00
1998 = 79.00
1999 = 79.00
2000 = 79.00
2001 = 79.00
2002 = 49.50

News Department

1997 = 11.50
1998 = 15.50
1999 = 17.50
2000 = 17.70
2001 = 19.00
2002 = 25.00.

In addition, there are currently 144 UK based staff and 144.41 locally engaged staff who spend 50 to 100 per cent. of their time covering this function in FCO posts abroad. The figures for previous years are not available without incurring disproportionate costs.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40033]

Mr. Straw: The number of press bulletins issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the period specified is:

May-December 1997: 381
1998: 414
1999: 593
2000: 444
2001: 363.

The figures include a daily bulletin of ministerial engagements and announcements and other press releases. The daily bulletin may contain a number of announcements. All Foreign Office press releases, including statements and speeches by Ministers, can be read on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Visitor Visa Appeals

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the new arrangements for the payment of visitor visa appeals were implemented in all posts. [34886]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am not aware of any new arrangements beyond those introduced on 2 October 2000 following the introduction of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 years and over. [36489]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 25 February, 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 879W. More detailed information on the civil service is published annually in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32026]

Mr. MacShane: In 2000–01 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office failed to pay some 2.2 per cent. of valid invoices within 30 days of receipt or the agreed contract terms where these differ. The failure rate has been cut by 0.4 per cent. (15 per cent.) since 1998–99.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45397]

Mr. MacShane: Administrative manuals and internal guidances made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are as listed. This list may not be fully comprehensive. Not all the information requested is centrally recorded and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

1995

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information—How to apply to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1996

Outline Note on the Management of FCO Records

1997 March

Guidance to Desk Officers on Export Licence and Arms Working Party Applications

Summary of Guidance to Reviewers of FCO Records

July

Criteria to be used in considering licence application for the export of conventional arms

Internal Guidance on Handling of Complaints About Maladministration by FCO staff

1998

Revised edition of Human Rights in Foreign Policy: Guidelines for Posts and Departments

Revised edition of Guidance for Desk Officers on Export Licence and Arms Working Party Applications

1999

Revised edition of Human Rights in Foreign Policy: Guidelines for Posts and Departments

2000

Entry Clearance Best Practice Treaties and MOUs: Guidance on Practice and Procedures

Handling of inquiries under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

Guide to Data Protection Act 1998

2001

Annual Training Manual

Records Management in the FCO: Policy Statement and Best Practice Manual.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years; [46841]

(2) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes. [47204]

Mr. MacShane: Total cost of entertainment for each of the last five years was as follows:

Year	*£*
1997–98	10,298,909.00
1998–99	9,314,853.00
1999–2000	11,228,371.00
2000–01	13,102,685.15
2001–02[1]	11,842,869.29

[1] To date, books not closed for 2001–02

Entertainment expenditure covers a wide range of activities from entertaining individuals to dinner receptions for Government Ministers and high level visitors and other events to establish and cultivate contacts. All are undertaken in pursuit of FCO objectives, both in the UK and in our posts overseas.

A more detailed analysis of entertainment to show the information requested about food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks is not possible without incurring disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47134]

Mr. MacShane: For information on overseas travel by special advisers for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 385W. Information on overseas travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and Civil Service Management Code.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47106]

Mr. MacShane: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Library of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Details of travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44876]

Mr. MacShane: PFI contracts to build a new Embassy in Berlin and to establish the FCO telecommunications network were both delayed by nine months against our original timetables.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total external spending by his Department was on public private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43192]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 493W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45607]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not entered into any PPP deals during the past four years.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder

stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45592]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has let two PFI Contracts during the last four years:

A contract to build a new Embassy in Berlin was let in June 1998. After selection of the preferred bidder the contract cost did not change.

A contract for the FCO Telecommunications Network (FTN) was let in May 2000. After selection of the preferred bidder the contract cost decreased from £111 million to £106 million (Net Present Value).

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47707]

Mr. Straw: Yes.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47412]

Mr. MacShane: In 2001–02 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office extended the use of close-circuit television cameras within its office buildings. In addition all Departments were asked to encourage their staff to ensure that valuable and accountable items were secured appropriately when not in use, particularly outside normal working hours.

SCOTLAND

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43259]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44813]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office does not have public service agreement targets.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its public service agreement targets. [47197]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office does not have public service agreement targets.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47805]

Mrs. Liddell: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47714]

Mrs. Liddell: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's second report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47174]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Cabinet Office.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the retail value of tobacco smuggled into Scotland without payment of the relevant duty. [46272]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

No estimate is available. However estimates of total tax revenue lost to the Exchequer through smuggling of tobacco products into the UK can be found in "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud", published by Customs and Excise at the time of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47807]

The Advocate-General: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44811]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47198]

The Advocate-General: My Department does not have public service agreement targets.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47715]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46835]

Mr. Robin Cook: This information requested is not available. However, I do not foresee circumstances in which my special advisers would entertain from departmental funds.

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes. [47206]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 701W.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how many press officers there were in his Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46888]

Mr. Robin Cook: On 1 May 1997 my Department had one press officer. On 2 April 2002 it had two.

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46812]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department does not incur salary costs for its press officers, both of whom are on the payroll of the Cabinet Office. The other information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46941]

Mr. Robin Cook: The number of Special Advisers in my Department is as follows:

Date	*Number of Special Advisers*
1997–98	1
1998–99	2
1999–2000	2
2000–01	2
2001–01	[1]2

[1] A third special adviser to me is not in receipt of a public salary

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Prime Minister, Wednesday 10 April.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47192]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department currently employs two members of staff on a part-time basis.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47182]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to my Answer given on 21 March 2002 *Official Report*, column 514W.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47246]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has a number of security measures in place to protect the property from theft or damage, although not all of them were introduced in 2001–02. These include physical security (electronic surveillance equipment; locked storerooms; video entry); security passes for all staff; a visitor book and special visitor passes and asset registers and inventories of equipment.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48360]

Mr. Robin Cook: All televisions in my Department are for business use only and therefore exempt from licensing.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Haven Gateway

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to visit the Haven Gateway; and if he will make a statement. [47038]

Dr. Whitehead: I have no plans to visit the area in the near future. However, I am following closely the efforts of the Haven Gateway Partnership to raise the profile of the area and attract inward investment and tourism.

Register of Electors

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government policy paper on the effect of the Robertson Judgment on the continuing sale of the Register of Electors will be published; and if he will make a statement. [48263]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 26 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) *Official Report*, column 968W.

Polling Stations

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will urge returning officers to seek, whenever possible, premises other than school premises for voting purposes. [47126]

Dr. Whitehead: It is the duty of district and London borough councils in England and county or county borough councils in Wales to provide for all electors such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and, so far as is reasonable and practicable, accessible to the disabled. Guidance about the conduct of elections is now a matter for the Electoral Commission. Existing guidance, issued in 2001 by my right hon. Friend, then the Home Secretary, makes it clear that, where it is necessary to use school premises for voting purposes, every effort should be made to liaise with school authorities to limit disruption to school activities.

Renewal Fund (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authorities have benefited from the new neighbourhood Renewal Fund in Lancashire, giving *(a)* the amounts and *(b)* the local authorities. [47428]

Ms Keeble: The table shows the local authority areas in Lancashire that are eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and their confirmed allocations in the first two years of the fund. Allocations for 2003–04 will be confirmed prior to that financial year, subject to parliamentary debate and approval:

	NRF allocation £ million	
Local authority	*Year 1 2001–02*	*Year 2 2002–03*
Blackburn with Darwen	2.167412	3.251118
Blackpool	1.503944	2.255916
Burnley	0.636635	0.954953
Hyndburn	0.646818	0.970227
Pendle	0.980471	1.470707
Preston	1.260217	1.890326

Local Authority Expenditure

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact of tax changes since 1997 on *(a)* local authority pension schemes and *(b)* additional resulting revenue costs incurred by authorities. [46962]

Dr. Whitehead: The Local Government Association assessed the net effect of the 1997 decision to abolish Advanced Corporation Tax relief, which impacted on local authority pension funds, as £130 million per annum. This was taken into account in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will rank each local authority in England showing the proportion of expenditure in 2000–01 which was met by central Government grant. [44792]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

London Borough of Merton

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been provided to the London Borough of Merton since 1997. [R] [47520]

Dr. Whitehead: London Borough of Merton have reported the following public funding.

Revenue and capital grants paid to London Borough of Merton

£000s

	1997–98 Outturn	*1998–99 Outturn*	*1999–2000 Outturn*	*2000–01 Outturn*	*2001–02 Budget*
Revenue Grants					
Revenue Support Grant	53,036	57,342	59,829	54,923	59,104
Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates	39,124	41,496	45,252	51,169	50,701
Central Support Protection Grant	—	0	0	376	0
Ring-fenced Grants inside AEF[1]	7,024	8,310	11,237	17,011	18,800
Revenue Grants paid into GFRA[2]	99,184	107,148	116,318	123,479	128,605
Capital Grants [3]	0	3,380	4,610	4,057	5,971
Total	99,184	110,528	120,928	127,536	134,576

Notes:

[1] Aggregate External Finance (AEF) is central government support towards total standard spending. It comprises RSG, NNDR, and certain Ring-fenced grants.

[2] This includes all revenue grants paid into the General Fund Revenue Account (GFRA), but may exclude certain public funding, for example for some non-departmental public bodies, which is recorded as income and is not separately identifiable.

[3] Consists of central government, non-departmental public bodies and national lottery.

Sources:

1997–98 to 2000–01 Revenue Summary and Capital Outturn returns. 2001–02 General Fund Revenue Account and Capital Estimates returns.

Non-domestic Rate

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what non-domestic rate is proposed for *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in 2002–03. [47943]

Dr. Whitehead: The national non-domestic rate poundage (multiplier) for England for 2002–03 is 43.7 pence.

The multiplier for Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government. The multiplier for Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Physical Agents Directive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to make representations to the European Commission in opposition to the draft Physical Agents Directive on vibration. [47976]

Dr. Whitehead: Agreement has already been reached on the Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive and it now merely needs to be ratified by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The UK has successfully negotiated provisions which meet the major concerns expressed by industry. The Government therefore welcomes the Directive, which it considers will result in time in significant improvements in health.

Local Authority Councillors (Employment)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what statutory provisions govern restrictions in the employment of local authority councillors in a maintained school in the same local education authority area. [47574]

Dr. Whitehead: Section 80 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 prohibits anyone, apart from a local authority's chair, vice chair, deputy chair, or members of its executive, from being a member of a local authority and holding paid employment to which they are appointed by that local authority, or a committee of that authority.

Regulation 9 of the Education (Transition to New Framework) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1999 provides that the disqualification applies equally to teachers in schools maintained by a local authority who do or do not hold employment contracts with the local authority.

Section 81(3) of the 1972 Act applies an exception enabling teachers employed by institutions maintained or assisted by county council to be members of a district council even where that district council nominates members of the county council's education authority.

Mayors

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he has taken to enable directly elected mayors to operate in local councils. [47609]

Mr. Raynsford: The Local Authorities (Elected Mayor and Mayor's Assistant)(England) Regulations 2002 have been laid before Parliament today. These provide for directly elected mayors to be treated as councillors for the purpose of certain legislation. This means that certain provisions which currently apply only to councillors will be extended to apply to elected mayors.

In particular, the Regulations extend the permission to appoint a political assistant, which is currently enjoyed by political groups in local authorities to mayors. We are doing this in preparation for the arrival of the first directly elected mayors in councils, following elections being held on 2 May. A mayor's assistant will be subject to the same rules as apply to assistants for political groups who are already employed by local authorities and appointed by political groups.

As with local authority political assistants now, a mayor's assistant will be a politically restricted post for the purposes of s1 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. This means they will be disqualified from becoming members of the local authority by which they are employed. In addition, mayor's assistants will not be able to discharge any functions of the local authority or the executive. The only staff which may work under the direction of a mayor's assistant are those providing the assistant or the mayor with clerical or secretarial support. A mayor's assistant will be subject to the same salary limit as a political assistant is now. This is set by the Secretary of State through an Order under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and is at present £25,044.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 359W, on ex-local authority properties, what estimate he has made of the proportion of ex-local authorities sold under the right to buy scheme in London in which the leaseholder is the tenant who originally purchased the lease under that scheme. [48637]

Ms Keeble: We estimate that about 120,000 flats in London have been sold under the right to buy scheme since its introduction. Based on information derived from the Survey of English Housing, we estimate that around 50 per cent. of those householders who, as tenants, had originally purchased the lease under that scheme, had continued to be in occupation at the time of the survey in 2000–01.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 359W, on ex-local authority properties, what plans he has to encourage local authorities actively to promote the buy back scheme to those holding the leasehold interest in ex-local authority properties previously sold under the right to buy. [48636]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to do this. Councils have discretion to decide whom to help, in the light of local circumstances. They are best placed to judge who is in greatest need and how they should use their resources to help.

Civil Service Secondments

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil servants are seconded to each of the regional assemblies. [46380]

Dr. Whitehead: 3 civil servants are on secondment to regional assemblies from the Government Offices. 1 is seconded to each of the Southwest Regional Assembly, North West Regional Assembly and Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly.

Travellers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many traveller *(a)* caravans and *(b)* households were on (i) authorised and (ii) unauthorised sites in each parliamentary constituency in England and Wales for each year since 1997. [46966]

Mr. Byers: Data are not collected in the format and area breakdown sought.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authorities have benefited from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, setting out the *(a)* amount and *(b)* the purpose of each award. [46599]

Ms Keeble: The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was launched in 2001–02 to provide additional resources for local authorities to improve mainstream services in the most deprived areas, including contributing to the achievement of the floor targets to narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country. The fund provides £900 million over three years to the 88 most deprived districts in England.

£200 million of funding was allocated for 2001–02. The purpose of the funding and individual allocations are set out in Special Grant Report No. 78, copies of which are available in the Library. £300 million of funding is being allocated for 2002–03. The updated purpose, allocations and conditions applying to the fund in 2002–03 are set out in Special Grant Report No. 93, which was approved on the floor of the House of Commons on 13 March. Copies of Report No. 93 have also been placed in the Library.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress there has been towards the baseline assessment of the number of dwellings and the number and location of wards affected and at risk from low demand and unpopular housing, announced in the Social Exclusion Unit's National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Rencwal. [46602]

Ms Keeble: As from April 2001, the annual Housing Investment Programme has included local authorities' assessment of low demand in their district. This has provided a baseline assessment of the number of dwellings affected by low demand and unpopular housing.

In summer 2001, the DTLR commissioned Oxford university to explore the feasibility of local authorities and other holders of housing data assembling data at ward level that will help establish the number and location of wards affected and at risk from low demand. This work will also inform future development of the Housing Domain of the Index of Deprivation 2000. The project is due to report in late 2002.

In addition, the English House Condition Survey 2001 will provide a valuer's professional assessment of housing demand, which will provide a more objective, national baseline. Data from the English House Condition Survey 2001 will be available in early 2003.

Empty Properties

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to incentivise the renovation and conversion of empty properties which have fallen into disuse. [46591]

Ms Keeble: In the Budget 2001 the Government introduced a reduced 5 per cent. rate of VAT on the renovation of single household dwellings that have been empty for three years or more. We have recently consulted on proposals to give local authorities discretion to charge full council tax on long-term empty homes. Our planning policies include a package of tough new measures—including a brownfield first policy to meet the country's housing needs in the most sustainable way possible.

To tackle problems in areas of low housing demand where empty homes proliferate, we intend to overhaul legislation governing private sector renewal and introduce selective licensing of private sector landlords. We are also looking at further options for more concerted action on a larger scale.

Disabled Facilities (Funding)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding was *(a)* allocated and *(b)* used by each housing association in the UK in each of the last five years for aids and adaptations to housing for people with disabilities. [47737]

Ms Keeble: Information about the amounts allocated to each housing association in England for aids and adaptations under the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and Local Authority Social Housing Grant in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on disabled facilities grants given by local authorities to housing associations is not held centrally.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding was *(a)* allocated and *(b)* used in each of the last five years for the councils disabled facilities grant, for each council in the UK. [47738]

Ms Keeble: Figures showing the Government's allocation towards each English local authority's expenditure on DFGs, and that expenditure, over the last five years were placed in the Libraries of the House in January.

Relocation (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47941]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no plans at present to relocate any DTLR-sponsored executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies to Scotland.

Building Regulations

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the costs and benefits of moving to near zero space heating buildings in advance of the next review of Part L of the Building Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [48689]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department has not commissioned specific research on moving to near-zero space heating buildings. Work on the next review of Part L is in progress and the aim continues to be to see what further contribution can be made to achieving carbon dioxide emission targets while keeping the Building Regulations proportionate, cost-effective, reasonably flexible for designers and unlikely to cause construction defects.

Once the proposals have been developed an evaluation of the benefits and the costs, including the environmental costs, of further reducing the energy consumption of new and existing buildings will be carried out, but it is unlikely that the results will indicate national regulatory requirements should demand near-zero space heating. However the regulatory requirements do not, and will not, prevent builders from adopting better performance criteria, including near-zero space heating if it suits particular circumstances.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, ref 46109, if he will place in the Library copies of the latest housing revenue account business plans submitted by local authorities. [47445]

Ms Keeble: Data from all English local authorities' business plans are already placed on the Department's website, including for example the number of decent and non-decent homes in the authority's stock, at http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/local/hipoi/index.htm. Should the hon. Member wish to consult individual business plans, they can be obtained from the authority concerned.

Rough Sleepers (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many recorded rough sleepers in the City of York there were in each year since it became a unitary authority. [46772]

Ms Keeble: Published rough sleeper count figures for the City of York since 1998 are as follows.

Year	*Number*
1998	12
1999	18
2000	6
2001	0

Council House Modernisation (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much central Government funding has been allocated to the City of York council for council house modernisation in each year since it became a unitary authority. [46770]

Ms Keeble: Total housing allocations made to the City of York council as annual capital guidelines, capital receipts initiative allocations (1997–98 to 1999–2000) and through the major repairs allowance (2001–02 onwards) are as follows:

	£000
1996–97	2,527
1997–98	1,859
1998–99	2,597
1999–2000	2,807
2000–01	5,093
2001–02	6,448
2002–03	6,344

Notes:
1. Except for the major repairs allowance, allocations are not made specifically for works to council housing.
2. From 2000–01, the annual capital guideline includes resources for private sector renewal that had previously been allocated separately, reflecting our policy of giving local authorities more opportunity to determine their expenditure priorities locally.
3. With the creation of the all-service single capital pot, first used for the allocations for 2002–03, only 95 per cent. of programme resources were allocated as annual capital guidelines, the remainder being in the single pot discretionary element, allocated on the basis of cross-service performance and the quality of capital strategies and asset management plans. The City of York obtained an allocation of £522k through this mechanism, which it is able to spend according to local priorities.

Housing Associations (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what grants have been made to housing associations providing housing in York by the Housing Corporation in each year since 1996. [46771]

Ms Keeble: The table shows the amounts approved under the Approved Development Programme (ADP) and Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) for housing associations in York for each year from 1996–97 to 2000–01; and the allocations made for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

	ADP	*LASHG*	*Total*
1996–97	2,134,060	0	2,134,060
1997–98	1,512,388	0	1,512,388
1998–99	2,142,886	802,879	2,945,765
1999–2000	1,574,396	127,000	1,701,396
2000–01	3,015,091	1,233,755	4,248,846
2001–02	2,722,361	0	2,722,361
2002–03	2,897,451	0	2,897,451

Affordable Homes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the funding for new affordable homes announced in the Social Exclusion Unit's National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal has been allocated, broken down by *(a)* the amount, *(b)* the recipient and *(c)* the purpose of each award. [46601]

Ms Keeble: The Government are investing an additional £872 million in affordable housing through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme over the three years from 2001–02 to 2003–04, as set out in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan.

The Housing Corporation's Investment Bulletin lists the amounts allocated to each registered social landlord receiving over £1 million in 2001–02 and states whether the grant was to provide accommodation for rent, home ownership or works to RSL stock (to bring units back into use). I have placed copies of the Bulletin in the Libraries of the House.

The Corporation's Investment Bulletin for the 2002–03 Approved Development Programme will be available shortly. I will arrange for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member as well as place copies of the 2002–03 Bulletin in the Libraries of the House.

The bidding round for 2003–04 will start in the summer.

Social Landlords

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what pilot schemes are in place to support the introduction of choice-based lettings policies by social landlords; and how much money has been spent on each of these schemes. [46604]

Ms Keeble: The Government are grant funding 27 local authority led pilot schemes to test different approaches to choice-based lettings policies for social housing. The pilot schemes are at various stages of development. The table sets out the amount of grant funding which each scheme (identified by its lead local authority) has received to date.

£

Lead authority	*Grant received to date*
Bath and NE Somerset	38,533
Blackburn with Darwen	24,485
Bolton	111,589
Bradford	23,259
Brighton and Hove	86,789
Camden	107,782
Coventry	88,325
Croydon	60,333
Derby	164,883
Ealing	268,466
Eastbourne	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	104,179
Harborough	118,255
Haringey	60,930
Herefordshire DC	29,798
Kennet	106,439
Lewisham	64,625
Manchester	179,088
Mansfield	92,510
Medway DC	25,085
New Forest	133,409
Newham	32,456
Restormel	66,640
Sandwell	647
Sheffield	172,716
Stockport	80,376
Sunderland	65,566
Total	2,307,163

Social Dwellings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 March 2002, ref. 46220, on social dwellings, if he will initiate discussions with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to achieve a common UK definition of a decent home. [47881]

Ms Keeble: The Government have no plans to initiate any process that could lead to changing the definition. It is important at this stage that social landlords have certainty about the definition of the standard so that they can carry through their plans to meet it.

It is a matter for the devolved Administrations whether they wish to use the decent home definition. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive are planning to assess their stock against the decent home standard when the results of their 2001 House Condition Survey are available. The Welsh Assembly Government have developed the 'Welsh Housing Quality Standard' for housing in Wales, starting with the social housing sector. In the medium term the Scottish Executive are likely to develop an index of housing quality for assessing the quality of the Scottish stock.

Home Standards

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by local authority the number of homes in each area which are not of a decent standard using the same criteria asset out in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [46995]

Ms Keeble: We do not have the requested information across all tenures, but some local authorities have estimated the number of homes within their own stock which were not of a decent standard at 1 April 2001. This information has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

All local authorities are working towards providing numbers of non-decent homes within their own stock at 1 April 2002 in their July 2002 Housing Revenue Account Business Plans.

Rate Relief

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to issue the draft of new guidance on mandatory and discretionary rate relief, referred to in Strong Local Leadership-Guiding Public Services. [47992]

Dr. Whitehead: We intend to issue the draft guidance for consultation in May.

Gap Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the changes to the level of the private sector in urban regeneration following the withdrawal of gap funding. [41763]

Ms Keeble: The closure of the PIP programme, which substantially restricted gap funding, has constrained the use of the private sector in urban regeneration. We are currently working on ways of removing these constraints.

The existing gap funding schemes enable the private sector to invest in regeneration schemes within defined limits. The Single Regeneration Budget, one of the Government's major regeneration programmes, is delivered through local regeneration partnerships and the private sector continues to be an important member of a large number of these. In addition, we have recently announced the English Cities Fund and support a number of urban regeneration companies in which the private sector are involved.

Parish Councils

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to monitor the impact on the vitality of parish councils of new requirements for members' disclosure of interest. [48206]

Dr. Whitehead: The whole of our modernisation agenda is focused on improving the vitality and effectiveness of local government including at parish council level. This includes the introduction of th new ethical framework, which will help to build confidence in the conduct of elected members. A research project to evaluate the impact of the new ethical framework will begin shortly.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the rules on the conduct of parish polls; and if he will make a statement. [47595]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 855W, and 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 984–85W. Our intention is to consult interested parties by the summer about parish polls.

Community Housing

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost is of the community housing task force in the current year; and what its projected cost is in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [46364]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The total expenditure for the community housing task force for the financial year 2001–02 was £725,427; projected spend for 2002–03—£915,000 and; 2003–04—£946,824.

Parish Councillors

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what duty parish councillors have to provide notification to the monitoring officer of the responsible local authority of all interests, including financial interests, membership of institutions, companies or public bodies, as laid out in paragraph 13 of The Parish Council (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2001; and if this requirement is subject to the limitation laid out in paragraph 1 (2) of the same Order. [47982]

Dr. Whitehead: All councillors covered by the Local Government Act 2000 are required under section 81(2) to register such financial and other interests as are specified in the mandatory provisions of the model code of conduct applicable to their authority. The requirements about the discharge of this duty are set out in paragraph 13 of the Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2001. The Code, except for paragraphs 4 and 5(a), does not have effect in relation to the activities of a member undertaken other than in an official capacity.

Planning

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many responses his Department received to the consultation on the Planning Green Paper; and when the results of the consultation will be published. [46965]

Mr. Byers: We have received over 13,000 responses to the consultation on the Planning Green Paper which we are now in the process of analysing. We will make a statement on the outcome of this exercise in due course.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to encourage planning bodies to give greater prominence to energy developments in planning guidance. [48691]

Ms Keeble: Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 22 on renewable energy provides local planning authorities with guidance on a range of issues that affect the siting of renewable energy developments. We have already initiated the process of reviewing this guidance before issuing a revised draft for consultation. In the meantime, we have pressed ahead with updating the PPG 22 technical guidance on photovoltaics. This is published today and copies are being sent to all local planning authorities. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Advice is also given on energy issues in PPG 11 (Regional Planning) and on utilities infrastructure in PPG 12 (Development Plans).

Correspondence

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, of 14 February concerning the consultation period for the PPP for the London Underground. [48294]

Mr. Jamieson: The letter you refer to was dated 19 February and I replied to it on 19 March.

Equal Opportunities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [46495]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department has developed a framework for the integrated appraisal of policy proposals. In addition to guiding policy makers through the economic, social and environmental considerations needing to be taken into account when assessing policy options, this framework ensures that distributional impacts, including by age, gender, disability, race, deprivation and income group, are addressed.

We have also recently established a new Equality and Diversity Unit, whose remit it is to support the Department in achieving diversity in policies, programmes and service delivery, and also in our own employment practices. The unit is presently engaged in an assessment of the Department's compliance with the terms of the Race Relations (Compliance) Act 2000.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the women's organisations which have been consulted over proposed legislation by his Department during *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [46493]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* A central consultation list detailing women's organisations is located on the DTLR(C) Equality and Diversity Unit website for use by DTLR Units in consulting over proposed policy and legislation. This central list is updated periodically, in consultation with the Cabinet Office Women and Equality Unit.

Outcomes from individual Unit consultations may be made available on their Unit websites. Records and outcomes of consultations in general are not held centrally and the cost of researching and listing them would be disproportionate. None have been published in the time period in question.

Gender Impact Assessment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [46483]

Dr. Whitehead: As an employer we monitor the impact on women of our recruitment, appraisal and promotion processes.

We are continuing to make use of consultations, research projects and disaggregated statistics to identify the impact of policy on women. Specific examples include consultation of various women's organisations on smoking in taxis and the development of a public transport gender audit, which was published in March 2000. Other initiatives include the requirement to promote social inclusion (including meeting the transport needs of women and other social groups) in the Department's assessment of provisional Local Transport Plans.

Our policies are subject to evaluation and will pick up differential impacts on specific groups, particularly where they are disadvantaged. Some policies do have intentional differential gender impacts; for example, the priority afforded to pregnant women and lone parent households (the majority of which are headed by women) in the allocation of council housing.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many press officers there are in his Department. [47042]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 220W.

Since then one press officer has rejoined the DTLR press office on return from maternity leave.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46806]

Dr. Whitehead: Due to changes in the functions and responsibilities of the Department it is not possible to answer the question in the form requested.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement; [45593]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45608]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My Department has let six public private partnership (including PFI) contracts in the last four years: National Air Traffic Services PPP, Vehicle Inspectorate MOT Computerisation, Highways Agency A13 Thames Gateway (which has transferred to Transport for London), Highways Agency Traffic Control Centre, Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust and Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust.

Information about bid prices and contract values in respect of the first four of these contracts cannot be provided for reasons of commercial confidentiality. It is not possible to provide the information for the Housing Action Trust PPPs because of their contract structure.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45230]

Dr. Whitehead: Secondments are defined as being a continuous interchange activity of three months or more, and are recorded on a financial year basis.

There were the following numbers of inward secondees in the years in question:

1999–2000: 50

2000–01: 62

2001–02: 104.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessor since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43380]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I have not appointed any unpaid advisers under paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

For details of unpaid appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I would refer the right hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 895W-96W.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45394]

Dr. Whitehead: No administrative manuals or internal guidance are currently published though certain material is available on request. Details of the Department's policy for handling public inquiries and the complaints procedure are published on the DTLR website.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the Permanent Secretary of his Department had received *(a)* oral and *(b)* written prior permission from Martin Sixsmith to refer to information which would ordinarily be exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in his statement of Monday 25 February; [40955]

(2) which aspects of the public statement made by the Permanent Secretary of his Department on Monday 25 February would ordinarily be exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; [40950]

(3) which aspects of his statement to the House on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 563, would ordinarily be exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; [41266]

(4) whether he received *(a)* oral and *(b)* written prior permission from Martin Sixsmith to refer to information which would ordinarily be exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in his oral statement to the House of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 563. [41265]

Mr. Byers: The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information does not require such permission to be obtained.

Each decision on the release of information is considered on its individual merits.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44844]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not maintain a separate record of the cost of rectifying incidents of criminal damage.

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many chartered engineers there are in his Department; and what grades they hold. [43586]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* Very few posts within DTLR(C) require Chartered Engineer status. Where this is the case, individuals are recruited on a job specific basis and the information is not collated centrally. There may be individuals with Chartered Engineer status employed in generalist jobs within DTLR(C).

Information on the number of Chartered Engineers employed by the Executive Agencies of my Department and in Government Offices is given as follows.

DTLR Government Offices

There are currently 17 chartered engineers at Special, Professional and Technical Grades (SPTO) in the Government Offices for the English Regions.

Highways Agency (HA)

The Highways Agency employs 541 engineers at the grades shown in the table. They may not all have chartered status as some may be graduates who are working towards it. For engineers who have achieved chartered status, the Agency does not pay professional fees and therefore has no record of whether the status has been retained.

	Pay Band 3	*Pay Band 4*	*Pay Band 5*	*Pay Band 6*	*Pay Band 7*	*Pay Band 8*	*SCS*	*Total*
Building & Civil Engineer Technician	0	1	6	12	1	0	0	20
Civil Engineer—Professional	0	5	40	197	124	35	15	416
Civil Engineer Design Technician	0	1	3	8	0	0	0	12
Civil Engineer—Highways	0	0	3	5	0	0	0	8
Electrical Engineer	0	3	16	36	12	4	0	71

	Pay Band 3	Pay Band 4	Pay Band 5	Pay Band 6	Pay Band 7	Pay Band 8	SCS	Total
Engineer—Electronic	0	0	0	1	0		0	1
Mechanical Engineer	1	1	6	2	3	0	0	13
Total	1	11	74	261	140	39	15	541

Planning Inspectorate (PINS)

The number of chartered engineers employed by PINS, by grade, is as follows:

	Number
Principal Housing and Planning Inspector	5
Senior Housing and Planning Inspector	10
Housing and Planning Inspector	7
Flexible Housing and Planning Inspector	1
	23

Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA)

The Vehicle Certification Agency has 15 Chartered Engineers in the following grades:

	Number
Grade 5	1
Grade 6	1
Grade 7	4
Grade S	6
Grade H	3

Vehicle Inspectorate (VI)

The Vehicle Inspectorate has six chartered engineers among its staff as follows:

G6: 1

G7: 4

SPTO: 1.

VI also employs many graduate engineers who have chosen not to apply for chartered status.

VI has this year launched a graduate mechanical engineer programme in line with the Institution of Mechanical Engineer's Monitored Professional Development Programme which takes new graduates through four years structured training and leaves them qualified for Chartered Status, should they wish to apply. VI will be taking on two this year following a recruitment campaign for which there were 90 applicants. 16 candidates will attend assessment centres in mid-April and successful candidates will take up post in September.

QE11 Conference Centre

The QE11 has two Chartered Engineers, they do not have grades but the job titles are:

Operations Director

Systems and Engineering Manager.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

The DVLA employs one Chartered Engineer at the Grade of Senior Executive Officer.

Driving Standards Agency (DSA) and The Fire Service College

Both these agencies have no Chartered Engineers.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the companies from which his Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43403]

Dr. Whitehead: Current data capture systems do not enable the information to be reported in the format requested. The Department is reviewing its management information systems with a view to capturing more specific information on timber and wood product purchases. In the meantime the following information is available from the Departments office furniture contracts:

Ashers Systems Furniture since 1997: £370,500.00

Flexiform Business Furniture since 1997: £941,000.00

Godfrey Syrett since 1997: £685,000.00

ROC since 1998: £22,300.00.

Most of the timber used in manufacture is either chipboard or multi density fibreboard (MDF). The use of hardwood lipping is minimal. All contractors have been subject to annual Environmental Audits since November 1997 and as part of the Departments procurement policy it will include contractors supplying certification that all timbers used come from sustainable sources.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43671]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42470]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 295W.

Digital Services

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48353]

Dr. Whitehead: DTLR subscribes to seven satellite TV packages for Ministers at a cost of £35 per month per subscription. The purpose is to ensure Ministers have easy access to news channels, including the parliamentary channel, so that they can keep abreast of events of the day that may be of interest to their areas of work within the Department.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48352]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is as follows:

(a) four, and *(b)* £436.

"Adapting to Change in Work and Society"

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has made to the European Commission concerning the proposals set out in "Adapting to Change in Work and Society". [48628]

Dr. Whitehead: I am currently awaiting the advice of the Health and Safety Commission on this document and its implications for the UK approach to health and safety at work. In the light of that, I will consider the terms in which any formal UK reaction should be conveyed to the Commission.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47797]

Dr. Whitehead: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47249]

Dr. Whitehead: Apart from the temporary introduction of the searching of bags and vehicles, my Department's existing protective measures were maintained and no new measures were considered necessary.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47725]

Dr. Whitehead: In its response to the Public Administration Committee's Second Report of Session 2001–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for new major single regeneration budget projects and New Deal for Communities projects will be met by 31 March; [47267]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target that by 2001–02 80 per cent. of written representation appeals should be decided within 16 weeks will be met; [47268]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the reduction in the incidence of fire-related deaths in the home will be met by March 2003; [47220]

(4) what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets; [47179]

(5) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to ensure that by December 2002 each council has agreed and put into operation a new constitution which is transparent, accountable and efficient will be met; [47274]

(6) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to reduce by two thirds the number of people sleeping rough will be met by 2002; [47227]

(7) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target that by 2001–02 80 per cent. of appeals by inquiry should be decided within 30 weeks will be met; [47270]

(8) if the PSA target for improvement in fire service efficiency will be met by the due date of March; [47239]

(9) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase the number of passenger miles travelled on national railways by 15 per cent. by 2001–02 will be met; [47264]

(10) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target that by 2001–02 80 per cent. of appeals should be decided by hearing within 22 weeks will be met; [47269]

(11) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase by 2001–02 the numbers of annual regulatory contacts by the HSE to at least 200,000 and the number of investigations to at least 35,000 will be met; [47271]

(12) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for 2001–02 for improvement in response time for all letters from hon. Members will be met; [47272]

(13) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to end the decline in the condition of UK motorways and trunk roads and restore the cuts in the maintenance of local authority principal local roads and bridges by 31 March will be met; [47265]

(14) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for reducing the backlog of council house repairs and providing new investment by 31 March will be met. [47217]

Dr. Whitehead: Information about progress on these PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental annual report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to reduce car dependency by 31 March will be met. [47263]

Dr. Whitehead: There is no such target.

Broadway and Pebworth Fire Stations

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the replacement of *(a)* Broadway and *(b)* Pebworth fire stations. [47598]

Dr. Whitehead: Responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service, including replacement of fire stations where this is deemed necessary, rests locally with the fire authority, in this case, the Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority.

Multi-modal Studies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will set out the role and remit of the regional assemblies in the multi-modal studies; [46375]

(2) when the regional assemblies are due to report to him their recommendations on each of the multi-modal studies. [46374]

Mr. Byers: The precise role of the regional chambers (or assemblies) in the multi-modal study process varies from region to region. Where the regional chamber is the regional planning body (North West, Yorkshire and Humber, South East, South West and, from April 1, North East) it will receive recommendations from the multi-modal study steering group, and in turn make recommendations to Ministers.

In addition, the North West Regional Assembly and South East England Regional Assembly are represented on their region's multi-modal study steering groups. It is for each regional planning body to decide when to make its recommendations to Ministers.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members of each of the multi-modal study steering groups. [46377]

Mr. Byers: Members of the multi-modal study steering groups have been drawn from representatives of various regional interests including local authorities, environmental groups, business organisations and public transport companies. Membership of the steering groups varies to reflect the different nature and scope of each study.

I have arranged for a list of organisations that are represented on each of the multi-modal study steering group to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

National Air Traffic Services

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes have taken place to pension provision for NATS staff in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [45653]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 741W.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes in staffing levels and positions have taken place within NATS over the last year; and if he will make a statement. [46340]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for National Air Traffic Services.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what skill monitoring has been conducted by his Department and National Air Traffic Services of the views of staff on the restructuring of NATS. [46338]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for National Air Traffic Services.

Air Travel Statistics

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how many people travelled through *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Stansted in each of the last three years. [47911]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of terminal passengers were as follows:

Million

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Heathrow	61.975	64.266	60.432
Gatwick	30.407	31.936	31.098
Stansted	9.420	11.854	13.650

Source:
BAA plc

Civil Aircraft Repairs

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what information he has *(a)* received and *(b)* sought from his Italian counterpart concerning the possible use in civil aircraft of (i) old and (ii) faulty spare parts falsely certified as being new; [46269]

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure that checks have been carried out on aircraft operated by UK airlines as to whether they may have been fitted with *(a)* old and *(b)* faulty spare parts falsely certified as being new. [46270]

Mr. Jamieson: All UK registered commercial aircraft are subject to regular airworthiness inspections by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), which also carries out systematic audits and ad hoc inspections of UK operators and aircraft Maintenance Organisations. The CAA is not complacent but is confident that the checks it carries out concerning the procurement of spare parts ensure that UK aviation standards are maintained at the highest level.

When the CAA became aware of recent media reports concerning the alleged supply of unapproved or counterfeit parts originating from Italy it immediately contacted the Italian aviation regulatory authority, the Ente Nazionale per l'Aviazione Civile (ENAC) for further information. The CAA was informed that a suspect Italian company was undergoing criminal investigation for distributing aircraft parts that were considered unairworthy. ENAC recommended that all aircraft owners, operators, maintenance organisations, manufacturers and distributors review their records and parts supplied by this company. The CAA accordingly wrote to all UK owners and operators of commercial aircraft on 7 February requiring the inspection of aircraft, aircraft parts and inventories of parts in accordance with the ENAC recommendations, and any suspect parts quarantined and notified to the Authority. To date no such notification has been received.

Air Proximity Incidents (Newcastle Airport)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to reduce the risk of air proximity incidents involving civilian and RAF aircraft in the vicinity of Newcastle airport, following the recommendations of the Air Investigation branch and the Airprox board. [45815]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's aviation safety regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), has introduced several initiatives aimed at reducing conflicts between civilian and military aircraft in the vicinity of Newcastle airport following the recommendations of the Air Accident Investigation branch and the UK Airprox board. Military jets on exercises in the area must carry and use a serviceable secondary radar transponder and communicate directly with Newcastle Air Traffic Control Unit (ATCU). During large-scale military exercises a temporary additional buffer zone is placed around Newcastle and a military liaison officer is deployed to the Newcastle ATCU. The airport also provides CAA and MOD with monthly reports on issues of concern and appropriate remedial action is taken. The CAA and MOD have also jointly reviewed the airspace arrangements around Newcastle and are satisfied with them in the short and medium term, and are continuing to work towards further long-term improvements.

Airport Capacity (South-East)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the recommendations put forward by the South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study reference group regarding airport capacity in south-east England. [46290]

Mr. Jamieson: The role of the SERAS reference group is advisory. The group has not considered specific options for the location of airport capacity. However the group has provided a great deal of useful advice and guidance on the approach and methodology of the SERAS study, and that advice has very largely been taken on board.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings took place between his Department and the South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study Reference Group in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 to discuss airport capacity in south-east England. [46291]

Mr. Jamieson: The SERAS Reference Group, comprising almost 50 members covering a wide range of interests, met in full session on four occasions in 2000 and three times in 2001.

Throughout the study smaller meetings of Reference Group members considered specific issues of interest in detail.

Aggregates

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Aggregates Levy on the demand for marine dredging. [45740]

Ms Keeble: The Regulatory Impact Assessment published with the proposal for an Aggregates Levy indicated that

> "a best estimate of the impact of a £1.60 Levy on the demand for aggregates would be a reduction of around 10 per cent."

The Aggregates Levy is set at the same level—£1.60 per tonne—for rock and sand and gravel dug from the land and sand and gravel dredged from the sea. Any overall change in demand for aggregates is likely to affect both in a broadly similar way so no separate estimate has been made for the marine dredging sector.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which regulations limit noise, dirt and visual intrusion in aggregates quarrying; how many complaints about a possible breach of these regulations have been made in the last 12 months; and how many prosecutions have resulted from breaches of these regulations. [45741]

Ms Keeble: Noise, dirt and visual intrusion in aggregates quarrying are controlled through planning conditions imposed by the relevant Minerals Planning Authority (MPA). The MPA is responsible for enforcing such conditions and, together with Environmental Health Officers, is likely to receive any complaints from the public about the environmental performance of individual site operators. Statistics for complaints and enforcement actions resulting from breaches of planning conditions are not collected centrally.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to tighten the present regulations governing environmental standards in the quarry industry. [46405]

Ms Keeble: My Department has no current plans to tighten regulations governing environmental standards in the quarrying industry. Regulation in respect of environmental matters is essentially for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which is responsible for transposing the relevant European directives into UK law.

My Department would need to reflect any relevant changes to environmental standards in guidance for Minerals Planning Authorities in preparing development plans and appropriate planning conditions in respect of both reviews of existing permissions and new permissions.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the amount of aggregates waste that will be stockpiled in quarries as a result of the aggregates levy. [46404]

Ms Keeble: The additional amount of aggregates waste that will be stockpiled in quarries as a result of the aggregates levy will depend on the nature and circumstances of the local market for aggregates.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the projected lifespans are of the UK reserves of *(a)* sand, *(b)* gravel and *(c)* rock aggregates at the present rate of consumption. [46476]

Ms Keeble: Statistics on permitted reserves of aggregate minerals are available for England and Wales. However figures for sand and gravel are not available separately because both often occur in the same deposits. Comparison of these figures with recent annual sales statistics provides rough estimates of the theoretical period over which reserves would be completely depleted if demand remains at current levels.

Permitted mineral reserves compared with sales, England and Wales

	Sand and gravel	*Rock*	*Total*
Permitted reserves in million tonnes[1]	921	6,353	7,274
Annual production in million tonnes[2]	65	109	174
Permitted reserves divided by annual production (years)	14.2	58.3	41.8

Notes:

[1] From DETR 2000 Collation of the 1997 aggregate minerals survey for England and Wales. British Geological Survey (Keyworth).

[2] From British Geological Survey 2001 UK Minerals Yearbook 2000. British Geological Survey (Keyworth) .

Statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Office respectively.

International Load Line Convention

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to secure the review of the International Load Line Convention 1966. [47568]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom is taking a leading role in negotiations within the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to revise the International Load Line Convention 1966 as modified by its protocol of 1988. Test result data have already been made available to the relevant subcommittee of the IMO.

MV Derbyshire

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish MARIN test findings on the sinking of the MV Derbyshire. [47567]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) have placed the MARIN Phase 1 report, the test specification and the statistical analysis results on their Formal Safety Assessment website (www.fsa.mcga.gov.uk). Succeeding phases of the MARIN test data will be available on request using compact discs.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is the Government's intention to appeal against the court's decision to award costs to the owners of the MV Derbyshire, Lloyd's Register and British Shipbuilders. [47569]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the reopened formal investigation into the loss of the MV Derbyshire, in his judgment of May 2001 Mr. Justice Colman awarded costs on a proportionate basis.

In all the circumstances of that judgment, the Department decided not to appeal against the award of costs. An appeal is now in any event time-barred.

Bulk Carrier Ships

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many bulk carriers have been sunk at sea worldwide since the MV Derbyshire sank in 1980; and how many lives have been lost. [47573]

Mr. Jamieson: The database of casualty statistics maintained by Lloyd's Register shows that, since 1980, 244 bulk carriers of all flags and 1,574 lives have been lost. Losses vary from year to year but this represents an average death rate internationally of 75 per year.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will urge the International Marine Organisation to provide for legislation to ensure that the loading rates for bulk carrier ships are age-related and take account of fatigue and corrosion. [47570]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom played an active part in developing the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes which was adopted by the International Maritime Organisation by Resolution A.434 (XI), as amended.

Amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 (SOLAS) highlighted specific responsibilities placed on terminal operators, which were incorporated into United Kingdom legislation by the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 336), coming into force on 15 March 1999. More generally, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are leading in the IMO on a comprehensive Formal Safety Assessment (FSA) of bulk carriers that should clarify the need for future legislation.

Ferry Services (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions she is having with the Scottish Executive about specifications for future ferry services in the West Coast area and the Highlands and Islands. [47389]

Mr. Jamieson: The service specification is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Shipping

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he

will press the International Maritime Organisation to require the protection of the jobs of seafarers who whistleblow. [48317]

Mr. Jamieson: Employment rights fall outside the International Maritime Organisation's remit on this matter. The UK is, however, taking forward relevant recommendations of public inquiries such as the Derbyshire reopened formal investigation to promote a safety culture.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will press the International Maritime Organisation to require of member countries that the loss at sea of a marine vessel registered with them should be subjected to an investigation as rigorous as that for the loss of a civil aircraft during active service. [48313]

Mr. Jamieson: Administrations that have ratified the convention for the safety of life at sea are obliged by Regulation 21 to conduct an investigation of any casualty occurring to any of its ships when it judges such an investigation may assist in determining what changes in the present regulations might be desirable. A similar obligation is required by Article 94 of the United Nations convention on law of the sea.

The UK discharges its obligation by implementing the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999. These provide powers to investigate accidents involving UK registered vessels wherever they might be and to investigate accidents involving foreign flagged vessels in UK waters.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will press the International Maritime Organisation to require the retrofitting of Voyage Data recorders to ships at sea. [48316]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK has argued with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for retrofitting Voyage Data Recorders to ships at sea, with the result that passenger ships will be retrofitted in a phased programme between July 2002 and January 2004. Extension to include retrofitting to cargo ships is currently under study in the IMO, which is looking at practicability, standards and costs/benefits. The study is intended to be completed by the end of 2003.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce legislation to ensure that the loss of UK registered marine vessels at sea is subjected to an investigation as rigorous as that for the loss of a civil aircraft during active service. [48312]

Mr. Jamieson: The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999 already enable the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents to conduct a rigorous investigation to establish the cause of any accident involving the loss of UK registered vessels.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will press the International Maritime Organisation *(a)* to review the competence of classification societies and *(b)* to set minimum standards expected of them, with sanctions for those that fall below those standards. [48311]

Mr. Jamieson: The authorisation of classification societies as "recognised organisations" is the responsibility of each flag state. International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Resolution A.739(18), adopted in November 1993, lays down guidelines for granting this authorisation, verification and monitoring, and minimum standards, and urges notification to the IMO of each authorisation and information regarding implementation of the resolution. The IMO reviews and improve these guidelines as necessary.

If an organisation is not fulfilling the minimum standards set out in Resolution A.739(18), the relevant flag state can withdraw its "recognised" status and notify the IMO accordingly.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will press the International Maritime Organisation to require that member countries contribute to a global ships database giving the full history of all ships at sea. [48310]

Mr. Jamieson: An international database, co-funded by the UK and known as EQUASIS, provides a single point of access to information concerning the safety and quality of the world's merchant ships. It records Port State Control detentions and information provided by shipowners' organisations, insurers, classification societies and seafaring unions.

In addition, the UK is co-sponsoring a submission to the IMO's Flag State Implementation Sub-Committee which proposes that each ship should have a "Continuous Synopsis Record" which would provide a traceable and transparent history of the principal parties associated with the ship.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will introduce legislation to require shipowners to insure crews fully against accidents at work; [48314]

(2) if he will press the International Maritime Organisation to require shipowners to insure crews fully against accidents at work. [48315]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government believe that all shipowners should ensure they have the financial security to meet in full all their potential liabilities, including those to their employees.

In November 1999, following an initiative by the UK, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) agreed guidelines to shipowners on the provision of effective insurance or other means of financial security to meet internationally agreed limits of liability. The Government have issued a Marine Guidance Note (no 135, March 2000) to all UK registered shipowners, operators and others responsible for the operation of ships about compliance with the IMO guidelines.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W, on Shoreham Harbour, when he expects to announce future appointments to Shoreham Port Authority. [47562]

Mr. Jamieson: The date of any announcement will be dependent upon the results of the interviews for these vacancies, which are yet to be held.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, on Shoreham Harbour, what form the proposed consultation on the proposed Harbour Revision Order for Shoreham Harbour will take; and who will be consulted. [47561]

Mr. Jamieson: There is a statutory requirement of Harbour Revision Orders to be advertised once in the London Gazette and for two successive weeks in one or more local newspapers circulating in the locality of the harbour or the town in which the harbour is situated. There is then a 42 day objection period when any interested party can put their objections to the proposed order to the Secretary of State. Any other consultation in respect of this proposed order will be a matter for the Shoreham Port Authority, not my Department.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 13 and 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1090W and 37W, on Shoreham Harbour, for what reason no applicants for the vacant places on the Shoreham Port Authority Board have been interviewed. [47560]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently considering the recommended shortlist of candidates to be invited to interview.

Passenger Numbers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the *(a)* passengers in excess of capacity and *(b)* total number of passengers was for each London commuting service train operator, and in total, broken down into (i) am peak, (ii) pm peak and (iii) total as measured in the annual survey of (1) autumn 1999 and (2) early 2001; [40266]

(2) what the total number was of peak passengers into London for *(a)* am peak, *(b)* pm peak and *(c)* in total for each London commuting service train operator (i) recorded in 1989, as referred to on page 18 of the SRA annual report 2000–01 and (ii) in previous or subsequent years for which these data have been collected. [40267]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is available for 1990 onwards and has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Railway (Lewes and Uckfield)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had regarding the possible reopening of the railway line between Lewes and Uckfield; what assessment he has made of the benefits which would derive; and if he will make a statement. [48006]

Mr. Jamieson: The Minister of State for Transport met the Wealden Line Group on 6 March to hear their case for reinstating the line between Lewes and Uckfield. The Heads of Terms for a new South Central franchise committed GoVia to produce a feasibility study for the Strategic Rail Authority. The new franchise agreement is currently being negotiated. The feasibility study will test the viability, affordability and value for money of the case for reinstatement of the Wealden line.

East-West Rail Link

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent estimate he has made of the impact on congestion on East-West London Underground routes during the 10-year plan period if a new Crossrail-type scheme is not opened as described in the background document to the 10-year plan. [48179]

Mr. Jamieson: The Background Analysis to the 10-year plan published in July 2000 reports, at Figure 12, page 25, my most recent estimate of the impact a Crossrail type scheme on passenger overcrowding on the London Underground.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the fees that will be incurred by Network Rail in establishing its banking facilities. [47513]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Network Rail.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has received state aid approval from the European Commission for his proposed grant of £300 million to Network Rail. [46885]

Mr. Jamieson: If Network Rail's offer for Railtrack plc's shares is successful any financial support provided to the company by Government would be notified to the European Commission as a potential state aid.

Railways

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reliability and punctuality of *(a)* Thames Trains and *(b)* First Great Western Services on the Cotswold line between Worcester and Oxford in each year since 1997. [47597]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority publish performance figures for each of the train operating companies entire network in their bi-annual publication "On Track". This is placed in the Libraries of the House. Statistics for specific routes are not held centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future role of an independent economic regulator for the railways. [46969]

Mr. Byers: Independent economic regulation is and will continue to be an important element of the regulatory framework for the railways.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) who is responsible for deciding on the metallurgical composition of the railway track laid in the UK; [44310]

(2) what information his Department holds on the training procedures in place for length examiners of the rail network. [44355]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for Railtrack.

Rail Freight

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investment is planned to allow the increase in rail freight movements to Northern Ireland via Stanraer and Cairnryan ports. [45306]

Mr. Jamieson: I am not aware of any such plans.

Rail Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the schedule is of *(a)* contractually and *(b)* provisionally agreed grants and other financial contributions from the public sector to the rail industry during the 10-year plan period. [48182]

Mr. Jamieson: The profile of public sector support was set out in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W.

Within this total support, the profile of network grants to Railtrack and its successor is set out in Appendix D of the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and in the appendices to the Regulator's letter to Railtrack of 9 April. Payments to the CTRL relate to the 1998 restructured deal with London and Continental Railways. Other grant payments, such as freight grants and the Rail Passenger Partnership fund are discussed in the SRA Strategic Plan and in the SRA Annual Report 2000–01.

Rail Speed Restrictions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed restrictions are in force in the UK rail system; and what the equivalent figure was for September 2001. [47515]

Mr. Jamieson: At the end of March 2002 there were 663 temporary speed restrictions on the network. For the second part of the question I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 869–70W.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the closure arrangements are for his Department's contract with Arthur Andersen for advice on matters relating to Railtrack. [45447]

Mr. Byers: The Department currently has two contracts with Arthur Andersen on matters relating to Railtrack, which can be terminated by either party at any time.

DVLA (Lost Documents)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many personal documents went missing from the DVLA in the last year for which records are available. [48190]

Mr. Jamieson: During the financial year 2000–01 the number of compensation claims met as a result of a customer not having received documentation, such as a passport or birth certificate, returned by DVLA in support of a driving licence application were 3,474 or 0.06 per cent. of the 5.4 million licences issued in the same period.

Of these claims Royal Mail accepted responsibility for the loss of 70 per cent. and reimbursed DVLA accordingly.

HGV Operating Licences

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make parish councils statutory consultees in consultations on the grant of HGV operating licences. [47596]

Mr. Jamieson: The most effective way for parish councils to comment on applications for a heavy goods vehicle operator's licence is to work with local authorities who have a statutory right to object. In our consultation paper "Quality town and parish councils" published in November 2001 we set out our proposals for improved partnership working between local authorities and local parish and town councils to give them a stronger voice in decisions that affect people's lives. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation paper.

Transport (Deprived Areas)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities that have implemented policies to improve public transport provision in deprived areas as part of their full local transport plans, giving details of the provision in each case. [46603]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available in the form requested.

Our guidance to local authorities on full local transport plans (LTPs) made clear that authorities need to consider the transport needs of their area as a whole. In doing so authorities should develop local policies for integrated transport within the framework of the Government's over-arching objectives for transport, namely to improve safety, to promote accessibility, to contribute to an efficient economy, to promote integration and to protect the environment.

We also made clear that LTPs should reflect local circumstances, so where public transport provision in deprived areas is a locally-identified problem we would expect authorities to develop measures aimed at tackling such issues. The annual progress reports for the first year of full local transport plans are due to be submitted at the end of July this year. We have asked authorities to report examples of their efforts in reducing social exclusion through measures in their LTPs.

The Social Exclusion Unit is currently looking at how transport issues can contribute to social exclusion and what can be done to deliver improvements. We will be

considering the recommendations of their report in terms of local transport plans following its publication in the summer.

Inter-urban Congestion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 March, Ref. 46194, if he will publish estimates of inter-urban congestion for 1999. [47132]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimates of inter-urban congestion in 2000 will be a baseline against which we will monitor progress towards our PSA target to reduce congestion below 2000 levels by 2010. The speed surveys from which they are derived were designed specifically to enable the estimation of congestion for 2000. The data from previous surveys are insufficient to establish robust congestion figures and the Department therefore does not intend to publish congestion figures for years before 2000.

Driving (Drug Use)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will issue guidance on the levels of cannabis consumption for which it would be considered safe to drive; [46259]

(2) what research he has evaluated on the effect on driving ability of various drugs; [46257]

(3) what research he has evaluated on the safe level of cannabis in the body for driving; [46258]

(4) what assessment he has made of recent research from the Transport Research Laboratory on the effect of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* cannabis consumption on driving ability. [46260]

Mr. Jamieson: A report into the effects of cannabis on driving was published in December 2000. A report on the effects of cannabis and alcohol on driving is expected shortly. A review on the effects of over-the-counter medicines, published in June 2001, concluded that there was a potential for sleepiness in drivers and made recommendations on labelling and guidance to patients. A study into antidepressants and driving is in progress and should be concluded in the summer.

The cannabis research found that there are measurable effects on driver performance and that drivers can be impaired. There are no grounds for specifying a safe level of use of cannabis while driving and no plans to do so.

The issue for road safety is impairment of driving. The Department has therefore been supporting the police in their training of officers in recognising the signs of drug use and in tests to help them judge whether a suspect may be impaired due to drugs.

M4

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the studies initiated by his Department and other Government agencies covering all or part of the M4. [46376]

Mr. Byers: The three transport studies currently under way which cover part or most of the M4 are the London to South West and Wales Study, the Thames Valley and the Orbit multi modal studies. In addition, the Highways Agency are undertaking a Route Management Strategy for Junctions 1 to 15 of the M4 and a further 28 smaller-scale studies into specific issues beyond junction 15.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* the remit of the Highways Agency's M4 Route Management Strategy and *(b)* the date for completion of the exercise is. [46967]

Mr. Byers: The M4 Junctions 1–15 Route Management Strategy will, in close consultation with local communities, address the specific needs of this section of the M4 and develop an action plan for its management. By contract the Thames Valley Multi Modal Study aims to identify the wider transport and land use problems and opportunities throughout the Thames Valley and develop an overall investment strategy for this transport corridor. This will provide opportunities for integrated transport and will allow more sustainable development in the future.

An interim Route Management Strategy for the M4 from Junction 1 to Junction 15 will be in place this summer. The Route Management Strategy will be finalised in 2003, when the outcome of the Thames Valley Multi Modal Study is known.

A449

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for improving road safety on the A449 at Hartlebury. [47593]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Peter Luff, dated 10 April 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the A449 at Hartlebury.

We consulted the public last November about proposals for a scheme to improve safety at Waresley Turn, Hartlebury and we are now considering the responses.

We hope to take a final decision on the scheme this summer and start work in 2003.

If you require any further information, Dennis Wheeler, the Route Manager for this section of the A449, would be pleased to help. He can be contacted at the Agency's offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL or by telephone on 0121 678 8126.

M27

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans there are to resurface the M27 between junctions 5 and 11; [48024]

(2) what representations he has received on resurfacing the M27 between junctions 5 and 11. [48025]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Mark Hoban, dated 10 April 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the M27 between Junctions 5 and 11.

Since July 2001, we have received a number of representations from people asking when the M27 between Junctions 5 and 11 will be resurfaced.

The Government's 10 Year Plan for Transport tasked the Agency with installing quieter surfaces on over 60% of the network, including all concrete stretches, by 31 March 2011.

The programme to achieve this will include the concrete section of the M27 between junctions 5 and 7. Junctions 7 to 8 and 10 to 11 are surfaced with a bituminous material and, when re-surfacing is carried out for operational reasons, a low noise surface will be used. The section between junctions 8 and 10 has already been resurfaced with a low noise surface.

If you would like any further information, the Agency's Area Manager, John Rylett will be pleased to help you. He can be contacted on 01306 878251.

Traffic Speed

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average traffic speed in *(a)* central London, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* Essex, *(d)* Kent, *(e)* Warwickshire, *(f)* North Yorkshire, *(g)* Lancashire, *(h)* Cornwall, *(i)* Cardiff and *(j)* Glasgow was in the last year for which figures are available. [46297]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates are available for average traffic speeds in London, from speed surveys conducted for Transport for London. The following estimates are based on surveys in 2000 for central London and between 1997–2000 for the whole of Greater London.

Average traffic speeds, mph

	am peak	*Daytime off-peak*	*pm peak*
Central London (2000)	9.9	9.0	9.6
Greater London (1997–2000)	15.9	18.5	16.2

Estimates for the other areas listed are not available. DTLR conducts surveys of speed on the trunk roads network and in large urban areas in England, but results for individual counties or for urban areas outside England are not available.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many representations his Department has received for reductions in local speed limits; and how many representations have resulted in reduction in speed limits in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [47956]

Mr. Jamieson: None. Responsibility for setting local speed limits rests solely with the local authority concerned.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria are used in assessing whether a speed limit should be *(a)* 40, *(b)* 30 and *(c)* 20 miles per hour; and what criteria are used when considering representations for reductions in speed limits. [47938]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department issues guidance in the form of Circular Roads 1/93 for setting local speed limits. For 20mph zones and speed limits Circular 05/99 is used. Responsibility for setting local speed limits rests solely with the local authority concerned.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras there are in Surrey; and how many people were convicted as a result of their use in the most recent year for which information is available. [47516]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Road Maintenance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if trunk roads maintenance contractors have been found in breach of their obligations in respect of their duties in relation to the trunk road network in the last 12 months. [47939]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no firms in significant default of obligations in the last 12 months. If small failings in terms of achieving specific levels of service or in defects in work occur the Highways Agency require firms to rectify them and demonstrate how they will be prevented from happening again. Provided firms respond appropriately to these failings then they would not be considered to be in overall breach of contract.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what default notices have been issued to trunk roads maintenance contractors in the last 12 months. [47937]

Mr. Jamieson: No default notices have been issued in the last 12 months.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the provision of his Department's contracts with trunk roads maintenance contractors concerning the company's failure to perform its obligations have been made public; and what the reasons are for his policy. [47942]

Mr. Jamieson: The provisions concerning the company's failure to perform its obligations, contained in the Conditions of Contract, have not been made public because no requests for such information have been received. Standard terms and conditions covering non-performance can be made available.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what statutory powers he possesses under trunk roads maintenance contracts to issue directions, orders or instructions to the maintenance companies in respect of fulfilling obligations under the contract with particular reference to instructions to use more equipment and materials. [47936]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency acting on behalf of the Secretary of State has contractual powers rather than statutory powers to instruct changes. These powers

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are limited by the European directives aimed at ensuring fair competition, but the Highways Agency can instruct changes within the scope of the contract.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the contracts with trunk roads maintenance contractors have been reviewed after they were awarded; and what penalties his Department may incur should it decide to cancel a contract on the grounds of non-performance. [47944]

Mr. Jamieson: Contracts have been reviewed since their award and will continue to be so on a regular basis. If a contractor failed to perform and was in significant breach of their obligations then the contract could be terminated without any compensation, although in most cases the Highways Agency would expect to work with the contractor to remedy any concerns before resorting to termination.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if provisions of its contract with trunk roads maintenance contractors are made public. [47940]

Mr. Jamieson: Provisions of contracts with trunk road maintenance contractors, which are commercially confidential, are not made public. Generic documents (model contract) including standard terms and conditions can be made available.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many workers working on roads and motorways have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured by vehicles in each of the last five years. [45955]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of injuries to workers hit by vehicles occurring in the processes of road repairs and surfacing, and in street cleaning and verge maintenance, 1996–97 to 2000–01[1].

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[1]
Fatal injuries					
Road repairs/surfacing/maintenance	3	2	2	2	5
Road verge maintenance	—	—	—	—	1
Major injuries					
Road repairs/surfacing/maintenance	14	10	12	14	10
Road verge maintenance	1	2	—	1	—
Over three day injuries					
Road repairs/surfacing/maintenance	23	20	19	23	19
Road verge maintenance	—	3	1	2	2

[1] Provisional

Note:

The question seeks injuries to workers on roads and motorways. These statistics relate to workers which includes employees and self-employed people.

Traffic Accidents

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on traffic accident *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* serious injuries for each of the last five years. [47425]

Mr. Jamieson: The casualty statistics for Great Britain for 2001 are still being compiled. The numbers of people killed and seriously injured in the five previous years were as follows:

	Killed	*Seriously injured*
1996	3,598	44,499
1997	3,599	42,984
1998	3,421	40,834
1999	3,423	39,122
2000	3,409	38,155

One of the targets in the Government's road safety strategy "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone" is to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries by 40 per cent. compared with the average for the years 1994 to 1998. The 41,564 deaths and serious injuries in 2000 is 13 per cent. less than the average. We shall be reviewing our targets next year to ensure that they remain both achievable and challenging.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road traffic accidents there were in Herefordshire in the last five years that led to fatalities and serious injuries; and if he will make a statement. [46553]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

Herefordshire

	Serious injury	*Fatal*
1997	270	16
1998	208	24
1999	179	13
2000	172	12
2001	179	19

The number of killed and seriously injured (KSI) casualties continued to fall to 2000 but there was a slight increase in 2001. The KSI trend is on track to at least meet, if not exceed the national target set for 2010 of a 40 per cent. reduction from the 1994–98 baseline average.

Road Safety

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* schools and *(b)* local groups benefited from a local authority-run (i) pedestrian and (ii) cycle training courses in 2001. [45664]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of his Department's road safety publicity budget was spent on producing television filler advertisements in 2001; and how much it intends to spend on producing television filler advertisements in 2002. [46236]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department committed approximately £230,000 to producing television filler advertisements in 2001–02; these will be aired from 2002 onwards. It intends to commit approximately £200,000 in 2002–03, covering, among other things, horse riding, mobile phones and bad weather.

Employer's Liability Insurance

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the change in premiums for employers' liability insurance *(a)* in the last five years and *(b)* since 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [46301]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The terms, conditions and price of insurance products change constantly in response to market conditions.

I am not aware of any significant changes directly attributable to 11 September, except in the availability of insurance against terrorism risk.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns her Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and, for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) England, (B) Wales and (C) Northern Ireland. [37415]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not target Wales and Northern Ireland (or Scotland) with its advertising. This means that regional media outside England is not used for departmental advertising. However, our campaigns do unavoidably receive some coverage in Wales and Northern Ireland through the use of national newspapers, satellite television and other national media which reaches outside England.

It is not possible to provide the information as requested by parliamentary Session, except at disproportionate cost. The figures by financial year are as follows:

	£000
1997–98	
New Deal	4,621
National Traineeships	800
Modern Apprenticeships	650
Small Business Consultation	521
National Training Awards	391
1998–99	
New Deal	4,772
Reading and Literacy	3,648
Disability Discrimination	1,924
National Traineeships	1,502
Learning Direct	1 619

	£000	Start date	End date
1999–2000			
Disability Discrimination	2,643	April	March
Maths Year 2000	2,322	January	March
Age Diversity	1,128	February	March
National Traineeships	1,077	April	March
One	873	June	February
2000–01			
Don't Quit Now	2,700	July	October
New Deal 50 plus	2,400	September	March
ICT Employability	2,011	February	March
Childcare Recruitment	1,821	June	February
Disability Discrimination	1,242	October	March
2001–02[1]			
Adult Basic Skills "Get On"	4,680	September	March
Childcare Recruitment	2,504	July	October
Science Year 2001–02	1,843	October	March
Modern Apprenticeships	1,780	April	March
Excellence Challenge	1,750	February	December

[1] To date

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39127]

Margaret Hodge: My Department has been responsible for the implementation of one directive in the past four years. My officials are currently working on the implementation of a second. The details are as follows:

Title:

Directive 2000/5/EC of 25 February 2000 amending Annexes C and D of Directive 92/51/EEC on general system for the recognition of professional education and training to supplement Directive 89/48/EEC.

Purpose:

The amendment obliges UK authorities to take account of new training introduced in Austria for certain health professions and obliges other member states' authorities to take account of changes to training in UK.

Costs:

The UK's transposition in respect of Directive 2000/5/EC was SI 2001/200 came into force on 27 February 2001. This measure had no cost to public funds or businesses.

Title:

Directive 2001/19/EC of 14 May 2001 amends Directive 89/48/EEC and Directive 92/51/EEC on the general system for the recognition of professional qualifications and Council Directives 77/452/EEC, 77/453/EEC, 78/686/EEC, 78/687/EEC, 78/1026/EEC, 78/1027/EEC, 80/154/EEC, 80/155/EEC, 85/384/EEC, 85/432/EEC 85/433/EEC and 93/16/EEC concerning the professions of nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, midwife, architect, pharmacist and doctor.

Purpose:

This directive amends a number of directives. Its purpose is to oblige member states to take account of post-qualification professional experience as part of the recognition process.

Costs:

The transposition date for this directive is 1 January 2003. There will be no cost to the public funds or businesses.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42490]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Staff in the Department can take 13 weeks parental leave, or 18 weeks in the case of a disabled child. As parental leave is unpaid, there has been no direct financial cost to the Department.

Parental leave and other flexible working policies help to enable the Department to get the most from staff with a wide range of responsibilities outside work.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying

expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [41035]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Running cost information for the Department for Education and Skills, created in June 2001, is not yet available. The information given in the table refers to the Department's predecessor, the Department for Education and Employment.

£ million

	(a) Ministers' private offices		*(b) Department*[1]
	Total	*Of which staff*	
2000–01	2.3	1.5	261
1999–2000	2.0	1.3	264
1998–99	1.9	1.2	252
1997–98	[2]—	[2]—	237

[1] Net amounts within the Departmental Expenditure Limit and from the Employment Opportunities Fund
[2] Not held in the format requested

Staff: Pupil Ratios

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many classroom and teaching assistants and nursery nurses are employed in England; and what the ratio was to pupil numbers in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [42091]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

Full-time equivalent teaching assistants and ratios of teachers, adults and teaching assistants to pupils in schools in England, as at January each year

	FTE teaching assistants[1,2]		*Pupil:teacher ratio*[3]		*Pupil: adult ratio*[4,5]		*Pupil:teaching assistant ratio*[6]	
	1996	*2001*	*1996*	*2001*	*1996*	*2001*	*1996*	*2001*
Nursery	2,098	2,323	19.2	17.7	8.2	6.0	14.5	11.4
Primary[7]	37,318	63,176	23.2	22.9	18.0	15.0	113.4	67.3
Secondary[7]	6,434	15,467	16.6	17.1	14.6	14.0	467.9	209.0
Special[8]	10,609	14,227	6.5	6.4	3.1	2.0	9.1	6.6
Pupil referral units	234	623	4.3	4.4	3.4	3.0	29.4	14.9

[1] Includes both full-time and the full-time equivalent of part-time teaching assistants.
[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and non-teaching assistants.
[3] The pupil:teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in schools.
[4] The pupil:adult ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers and education support staff employed in schools.
[5] Education support staff includes instructors and student teachers, foreign language assistants, unqualified teachers, graduate or registered teachers, teachers entitled to qualify by service, teachers not recognised as qualified and all non-teaching staff excluding administrative and clerical staff.
[6] The pupil:teaching assistant ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent teaching assistants employed in schools.
[7] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[8] Includes non-maintained special schools and special and general hospital schools.
Source:
Annual schools census.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members of staff in her Department are members of the territorial forces; and if she has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the territorial forces. [44073]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department does not hold this information centrally and could provide it only at disproportionate cost.

The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) requires Departments and agencies to allow members of the Reserve Forces, Territorial Army or Cadet Forces time off work. My Department demonstrates its support to serving employees by allowing them special leave with pay to undertake training.

Staff (Locally Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members of staff at her Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44543]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department does not hold this information centrally and could provide it only at disproportionate cost.

Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1996 requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) also requires Departments to allow time off for attendance required by section 50 of the ERA 1996. My Department demonstrates its support to employees who are elected representatives by allowing them special leave with pay to perform the duties associated with their office.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how the money was allocated; and if she will make a statement. [44594]

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Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department is contributing a total of £1 million towards education elements of the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival, which is linked to the Queen's Golden Jubilee, and £80,000 to other Jubilee-related projects. Spending to date by my Department in the last three financial years, is as follows:

1999–2000

No expenditure.

2000–01

£110,000 to the Youth Sports Trust to support various elements of the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival.

£125,000 to the Commonwealth Institute to support various elements of the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival.

2001–02

£200,000 to the Youth Sports Trust to support various elements of the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival.

£445,000 to the Commonwealth Institute to support various elements of the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival.

£39,200 towards a Jubilee national poetry competition for schools in conjunction with Buckingham Palace and the Poet Laureate.

£40,000 to the Millennium Tapestry Company to fund the exhibition of the millennium children's tapestry of hope at various venues.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45060]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights dimension.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people employed by her Department under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [45089]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We do not monitor new dealers who leave the Department.

Over the past four years, 22 new deal participants have secured unsubsidised employment with this Department.

School Census

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will examine the security of the school census information to ensure that no external bodies can gain access to the information; [45103]

(2) if she will examine Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 in connection with the keeping of records by the Department on children of school age. [45104]

Mr. Timms: Stringent safeguards are in place to prevent unauthorised access to Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data, or other data held by the Department, from which individual pupils could be identified. These safeguards comply with or exceed guidance in the Cabinet Office Manual of Protective Security, and the British Standard for information security. An audit of the arrangements for PLASC, carried out in February 2002, confirmed compliance. These arrangements are being kept under regular review in the light of advice from the Information Commissioner and other developments.

Certain limited disclosures of PLASC data, with pupil names, may however take place provided these comply with the Data Protection Act 1988 and other legislative requirements. For further details I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 109–11W to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

We are satisfied that PLASC and the proposed central pupil database are compatible with Article 8 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and so with the Human Rights Act 1988.

Sports Days

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the desirability of requiring each school to hold an annual sports day. [45106]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no direct discussions with DCMS Ministers specifically about school sports days. The Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport work closely together in order to maximise the benefits of PE and school sport for all pupils. Our White Paper "Schools: achieving success" includes a commitment that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality PE and school sport a week, within and outside the curriculum. School sports days, of course, have an important role to play as part of an overall package of PE and sport opportunities for all children. One of the key aims of our School Sports Co-ordinators programme is to increase the amount of inter and intra-school competitive sport. Work being undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority suggests that the vast majority of schools do not hold an annual sports day or a similar event.

School Curriculum

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with Ofsted regarding the content of the biology curriculum and the teaching of evolution. [45236]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets the Chief Inspector of Ofsted to discuss matters relating to the curriculum and teaching in schools, including the teaching of science (where biology and evolution are taught).

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with Ofsted regarding the teaching of creationism in state schools. [45237]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets the Chief Inspector of Ofsted to discuss matters relating to the curriculum and teaching in schools but has never discussed the specific issue of teaching creationism in state schools.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidelines she has given to schools regarding the place of creationism in the curriculum. [45238]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All state-funded schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils. Statutory and non-statutory guidelines are available to support teachers. The schemes of work for Religious Education produced by the QCA offer guidance for teachers who want to address the issue of creationism during RE lessons.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent guidance she has issued to schools regarding the teaching of creationism in the curriculum. [48240]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All state-funded schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils. Statutory and non-statutory guidelines are available to support teachers. The schemes of work for Religious Education produced by the QCA offer guidance for teachers who want to address the issue of creationism during RE lessons.

University Funding

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for a sustained and targeted increase in funding to universities to cover the costs of recruiting and retaining students from less well off backgrounds. [45266]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is currently reviewing the additional funding it allocates to higher education institutions to recognize the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds (the 'postcode premium'), and will be consulting on widening participation, including the basis on which the postcode premium is allocated, later in the spring.

Plans for spending in future years will depend upon the outcome of the Spending Review.

IT Skills

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans she has for addressing the skills shortage in programming and systems analysis; what assessment she has made of the extent of that skills shortage; and if she will make a statement; [45359]

(2) what plans she has to meet with computer training companies to discuss provision for higher level skills training in the information and communications technology sector; [45360]

(3) if she will develop, alongside a replacement individual learning account scheme, a project focused more directly upon the identified skills shortages of British industry, with particular reference to the information and communications technology sector. [45383]

John Healey: The information is as follows.

Action on ICT skills

The Government recognise the importance of the ICT sector to the economy and are working closely with partners in education and industry to tackle the skills shortages. There are no quick fixes. We have committed £8 million between 2000–03 to a joint DfES/DTI work programme aimed at improving:

the image of ICT and encouraging more people to pursue a career in the sector. This aims to show people that ICT jobs are rewarding and can provide valued career paths.

links between education and industry to ensure that new recruits have the skills employers require and that there is an on-going dialogue about skill needs, training priorities and the respective roles and responsibilities of business and providers.

understanding of the labour market, changing skill needs and skills deficiencies within ICT and improving the quality of our intelligence available for planning education and training provision and alleviating skills problems.

Examples of specific projects include:

An employer-led project to create accessible, industry-wide careers information.

A new labour market forecasting model, which can inform partners of skill needs on an on-going basis.

Help for companies to broaden their recruitment practices to encourage more candidates from under represented groups, and graduates from other disciplines into the industry. Major employers of ICT professionals have supported the project.

Developing a co-ordinated campaign to promote the positive aspects of careers in ICT occupations. The e-skills NTO has established an Employers Charter for companies committed to supporting the campaign. Activities include work on:

Development of work experience opportunities for students and women returners

Feasibility of establishing school computer clubs for girls

Identification of positive role models from industry.

ICT Labour Market Information

The Department has recently sponsored and supported the largest survey of employers of ICT professionals undertaken. The recently published report (e-skills NTO, 2001) reports on hard-to-fill vacancies, skill shortage vacancies and skill gaps among IT professionals both within and outside the IT sector. Some of the information is reported by job role, where there is sufficient information to do so, eg the survey reports an estimated 3,000 hard-to-fill vacancies among software development professionals in the UK. Occupations and job roles assessed within the survey do not specifically match those cited in the question.

The Department has also funded a comprehensive review and assessment of the evidence on the supply of and demand for skills in Information and Communication Technology. This includes assessment of specific skills required and shortages of, earnings trends and scenarios of the likely future balance of the demand for, and supply of, employment in the sector.

The Department recognises the rapid rate of change in the sector and among these professionals and is supporting the development of a quarterly e-skills

bulletin. The bulletin will update the above information by reporting on data from the Labour Force Survey and other published sources to assess trends of skill needs.

ILA Replacement Scheme

There will be a replacement ILA-type scheme building on the strengths of the ILA and taking into account the findings of the current stakeholder consultation exercise which are due in early April. At this stage it is too early to say what the curriculum focus of the replacement scheme will be.

The Secretary of State has no plans to meet with computer training companies.

Industrial Training (Train Drivers)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many train drivers *(a)* are working in the industry, *(b)* are being trained, *(c)* have been trained since November 1998, *(d)* have been trained and have begun working in the industry since November 1998 and *(e)* have left the rail industry since November 1998. [45422]

John Healey: The employment of drivers and their training is the responsibility of train operating companies. The Progress Report on Delivering the Framework for Skills in the Rail Industry, published in December 2001, shows that in July 2001 there were 19,000 train drivers working in the industry. Government do not hold information on the training of drivers and their turnover rates centrally. To collect the information could be achieved only by incurring disproportionate cost.

Skill Shortages (Railway Industry)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to address skill shortages within the railway industry. [45423]

John Healey: In October 2000 my predecessor the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning wrote to the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) proposing that we work together to push skills up the agenda of the rail industry. In March 2001 a joint working group published the "Framework for Skills for the Rail Industry" setting out a strategy for skills. In December 2001 the working group published a progress report setting out challenging targets for the uptake of Investors in People, National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs and SVQs) and Modern Apprenticeships. In February 2002 I announced Government funding of £500,000 for new "Adult Apprenticeships" to be piloted in the rail industry to tackle significant skill shortages. The joint working group will publish a further report on progress in June 2002.

School Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on the maximum distance a child in Key Stage 2 should travel to school. [45424]

John Healey: There is no maximum specified for the distance a child in any of the Key Stages should travel to school. Parents have a right to express a preference for any school; their preferences are not restricted by distance.

School Absences

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many authorised absences there were in *(a)* maintained primary schools and *(b)* maintained secondary schools, broken down by each local education authority, in each year since 1996–97. [45589]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of half days missed due to authorised absences in *(a)* maintained primary schools and *(b)* maintained secondary schools by each local education authority in England since 1996–97 are shown in the following table.

Number of half days missed due to authorised absence in maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools 1997–2001

Thousand

	Maintained primary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
London, City of	4.1	1.3	2.6	3.2	3.1
Camden	185.8	192.8	183.8	180.2	188.9
Greenwich	285.2	294.5	287.8	281.1	288.2
Hackney	320.8	291.6	252.6	257.9	277.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	147.8	134.9	147.9	149.1	147.7
Islington	255.7	239.7	220.4	214.2	219.8
Kensington and Chelsea	103.6	96.7	101.2	85.5	109.3
Lambeth	265.5	306.9	268.7	244.1	258.7
Lewisham	283.9	307.7	264.4	276.9	278.4
Southwark	305.9	305.9	270.9	257.6	281.7
Tower Hamlets	356.6	312.8	271.1	303.3	320.4
Wandsworth	275.4	262.8	250.1	263.0	257.3
Westminster, City of	153.2	176.9	149.0	131.8	154.4
Barking and Dagenham	261.2	269.5	261.6	248.8	264.3
Barnet	366.8	364.6	345.2	329.0	366.9
Bexley	308.2	331.2	312.1	285.7	322.9
Brent	260.2	278.7	307.0	308.4	323.4
Bromley	348.2	348.6	336.6	318.5	337.5
Croydon	438.7	451.5	450.5	431.5	479.2
Ealing	416.0	406.1	401.5	389.2	395.1
Enfield	397.4	380.0	356.2	334.8	353.6
Haringey	269.3	279.6	271.0	247.0	280.8
Harrow	318.1	325.7	299.3	287.4	305.1

Number of half days missed due to authorised absence in maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools 1997–2001

Thousand

	Maintained primary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Havering	325.6	316.4	307.8	297.2	322.2
Hillingdon	358.0	322.2	318.6	330.9	342.5
Hounslow	306.3	326.9	309.0	273.6	269.8
Kingston upon Thames	151.1	150.5	147.8	132.9	158.6
Merton	220.7	230.6	238.5	231.0	230.6
Newham	416.2	389.1	363.6	365.2	386.6
Redbridge	312.7	315.3	316.5	291.7	330.8
Richmond upon Thames	155.6	162.8	161.4	152.6	173.2
Sutton	211.0	209.5	199.3	195.2	202.0
Waltham Forest	334.1	337.9	329.3	303.6	332.4
Birmingham	2,046.8	1,825.7	1,716.9	1,566.8	1,615.7
Coventry	452.5	482.8	438.3	429.6	453.8
Dudley	437.8	454.4	449.6	411.3	433.4
Sandwell	529.8	519.9	508.4	487.0	522.9
Solihull	341.4	328.2	314.9	258.1	269.9
Walsall	426.8	460.7	400.4	398.6	437.4
Wolverhampton	464.9	409.2	401.6	383.2	389.0
Knowsley	304.8	292.1	281.5	259.1	266.0
Liverpool	764.3	730.2	707.9	677.5	691.9
St. Helens	318.6	257.2	284.7	262.3	271.0
Sefton	392.0	409.3	398.2	364.6	377.0
Wirral	411.0	446.9	444.4	423.5	442.6
Bolton	397.4	392.2	387.5	338.3	353.4
Bury	239.7	244.2	241.4	208.5	222.3
Manchester	799.8	788.9	790.3	672.7	667.5
Oldham	381.4	393.1	367.2	331.2	368.6
Rochdale	306.3	336.7	348.0	297.1	315.1
Salford	319.6	352.3	347.4	315.6	340.0
Stockport	326.5	365.9	348.7	316.0	337.8
Tameside	356.2	373.3	352.8	308.3	314.6
Trafford	274.1	310.0	274.4	248.3	243.0
Wigan	451.5	465.9	464.9	407.8	435.9
Barnsley	300.7	316.9	335.0	290.9	305.3
Doncaster	453.1	472.6	455.8	456.6	450.4
Rotherham	361.7	392.2	383.1	361.0	369.4
Sheffield	609.8	666.7	630.0	646.5	681.1
Bradford	510.0	498.5	479.6	537.0	671.5
Calderdale	266.6	282.5	258.3	238.2	266.1
Kirklees	478.5	493.5	478.1	440.2	471.2
Leeds	896.8	978.6	965.3	875.1	926.6
Wakefield	421.7	462.4	420.9	418.1	442.2
Gateshead	249.3	248.8	254.9	223.3	241.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	309.6	297.9	283.1	275.9	291.2
North Tyneside	208.8	207.8	195.3	189.5	211.3
South Tyneside	206.8	214.6	209.0	195.9	213.9
Sunderland	455.2	442.5	429.7	382.7	427.4
Isles of Scilly	2.2	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.8
Bath and North East Somerset	159.7	169.5	166.3	158.2	168.8
Bristol, City of	476.0	480.0	501.9	461.1	515.4
North Somerset	188.0	201.2	196.2	200.6	219.8
South Gloucestershire	285.8	301.1	308.6	288.6	336.9
Hartlepool	150.7	150.0	140.9	121.4	137.2
Middlesbrough	244.5	248.1	250.1	215.9	226.1
Redcar and Cleveland	232.3	241.5	222.8	188.2	210.7
Stockton on Tees	289.5	290.6	273.0	237.0	279.7
Kingston upon Hull, City of	417.9	487.3	378.2	371.1	358.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	339.2	361.8	333.2	343.6	366.2
North East Lincolnshire	231.9	255.2	226.8	214.2	229.4
North Lincolnshire	185.4	212.2	203.5	185.1	194.5
North Yorkshire	539.3	596.8	551.4	537.7	601.6
York, City of	166.4	182.5	175.3	152.3	171.4
Bedfordshire	300.1	342.6	304.5	296.2	328.7
Luton	306.6	298.3	289.9	266.6	317.2
Buckinghamshire	633.1	615.3	555.5	488.2	507.6
Milton Keynes	359.1	363.9	337.4	330.6	344.6
Derbyshire	798.8	864.8	840.9	830.9	860.4
Derby City	271.0	315.1	290.9	295.8	311.2
Dorset	339.1	382.1	340.0	320.7	343.5
Poole	222.3	176.1	163.2	156.6	167.6
Bournemouth	171.3	208.1	151.9	143.5	160.8

Number of half days missed due to authorised absence in maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools 1997–2001

Thousand

	Maintained primary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Durham	704.6	759.0	707.4	659.3	687.5
Darlington	168.1	155.6	158.9	142.3	172.5
East Sussex	484.4	521.0	511.6	542.4	579.8
Brighton and Hove	257.8	270.0	261.4	256.5	302.3
Hampshire	1,370.2	1,373.7	1,303.9	1,237.1	1,356.9
Portsmouth	262.6	277.8	242.0	217.9	227.1
Southampton	278.5	292.2	296.4	259.3	306.7
Leicestershire	731.7	787.2	713.0	659.2	720.7
Leicester City	597.6	561.3	530.4	434.6	457.4
Rutland	29.7	35.6	28.0	27.9	27.8
Staffordshire	953.6	933.7	928.2	891.0	934.9
Stoke on Trent	366.6	368.1	352.8	317.3	315.0
Wiltshire	430.4	429.1	449.6	466.8	456.3
Swindon	229.7	267.5	239.6	241.8	238.1
Bracknell Forest	n/a	130.4	124.9	102.9	125.1
Windsor and Maidenhead	n/a	123.2	110.1	110.1	112.4
West Berkshire	n/a	164.5	151.9	145.3	163.5
Reading	n/a	159.7	160.2	155.9	151.1
Slough	n/a	170.9	173.3	175.5	176.8
Wokingham	n/a	160.7	152.9	138.1	156.8
Cambridgeshire	n/a	551.9	575.9	551.9	648.6
Peterborough City	n/a	250.5	236.7	205.0	239.0
Cheshire	n/a	721.5	720.0	647.3	728.4
Halton	n/a	184.2	177.1	166.1	179.5
Warrington	n/a	248.1	242.8	225.1	237.5
Devon	n/a	814.8	824.0	748.5	832.9
Plymouth	n/a	320.8	317.3	278.8	302.1
Torbay	n/a	155.0	153.0	141.3	155.2
Essex	n/a	1,621.7	1,585.2	1,507.6	1,629.3
Southend-on-Sea	n/a	196.4	203.9	201.7	227.0
Thurrock	n/a	206.5	210.7	208.3	223.0
Herefordshire	n/a	203.2	187.3	188.7	216.4
Worcestershire	n/a	555.0	518.6	491.6	538.6
Kent	n/a	1,657.3	1,555.1	1,525.9	1,654.6
Medway	n/a	364.8	372.0	359.1	353.9
Lancashire	n/a	1,467.0	1,445.5	1,387.1	1,382.4
Blackburn with Darwen	n/a	262.5	248.2	232.1	236.3
Blackpool	n/a	208.7	201.1	188.8	197.2
Nottinghamshire	n/a	880.6	856.7	820.5	870.4
Nottingham City	n/a	410.5	411.8	397.9	406.8
Shropshire	n/a	303.3	297.7	291.4	336.5
Telford and Wrekin	n/a	227.3	208.8	207.0	216.4
Cornwall	586.8	613.8	596.5	585.3	625.4
Cumbria	582.0	615.9	619.8	568.4	597.4
Gloucestershire	653.3	636.7	601.1	573.9	615.2
Hertfordshire	1,046.9	1,129.5	1,137.6	1,059.7	1,163.4
Isle of Wight	109.0	125.1	110.5	111.8	113.1
Lincolnshire	674.4	709.5	716.4	713.4	717.7
Norfolk	914.8	959.1	963.3	948.0	978.7
Northamptonshire	652.6	696.6	651.8	617.1	707.2
Northumberland	223.3	254.6	232.6	217.0	247.2
Oxfordshire	566.2	640.6	615.6	604.1	653.6
Somerset	541.6	533.6	526.0	507.0	571.9
Suffolk	573.0	586.4	545.5	552.9	620.8
Surrey	1,020.2	1,102.3	1,061.6	984.2	1,083.6
Warwickshire	601.0	638.4	577.9	564.8	578.8
West Sussex	854.3	945.1	868.9	836.7	922.8
England	61,521.2	63,422.8	60,926.5	57,702.8	61,738.9

	Maintained secondary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
London, City of	—	—	—	—	—
Camden	242.8	208.6	209.3	205.2	207.4
Greenwich	354.9	324.8	313.2	332.1	354.5
Hackney	176.2	172.1	174.8	157.8	180.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	139.3	114.9	143.8	123.4	155.9
Islington	186.9	184.2	182.1	181.9	195.1

	Maintained secondary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Kensington and Chelsea	65.9	64.4	61.6	59.7	59.0
Lambeth	177.8	176.0	177.6	174.0	179.7
Lewisham	255.1	258.7	251.0	252.3	263.7
Southwark	230.1	228.5	228.3	229.9	239.9
Tower Hamlets	281.4	264.1	281.6	254.0	266.0
Wandsworth	197.5	203.4	204.3	218.3	221.7
Westminster, City of	133.4	156.5	144.5	153.7	170.1
Barking and Dagenham	234.1	232.1	247.9	245.9	265.2
Barnet	379.7	377.2	410.5	359.6	400.6
Bexley	314.4	346.2	350.6	378.0	408.9
Brent	258.2	250.8	246.5	258.3	256.5
Bromley	357.6	364.0	394.6	388.9	433.7
Croydon	363.1	403.7	399.8	370.6	448.5
Ealing	279.2	275.1	302.1	302.1	313.6
Enfield	375.7	380.7	356.5	366.1	400.1
Haringey	210.4	235.8	231.1	218.7	222.5
Harrow	197.3	211.9	200.7	203.7	213.7
Havering	321.9	278.5	327.1	334.2	364.8
Hillingdon	304.6	301.5	299.4	308.2	356.8
Hounslow	308.3	327.4	296.0	303.6	307.3
Kingston upon Thames	154.9	159.2	156.6	146.0	162.1
Merton	186.3	170.0	185.2	194.5	203.1
Newham	371.6	346.8	317.9	314.7	316.2
Redbridge	340.6	306.3	329.6	314.6	309.2
Richmond upon Thames	210.8	181.5	193.4	187.4	194.4
Sutton	224.7	218.6	235.6	226.5	255.2
Waltham Forest	275.2	261.3	283.2	294.3	267.8
Birmingham	1,763.0	1,624.9	1,664.1	1,487.9	1,505.7
Coventry	478.2	470.8	467.9	489.6	503.6
Dudley	432.1	352.5	432.7	434.9	463.7
Sandwell	526.4	511.4	530.0	538.4	580.4
Solihull	279.4	301.1	319.7	297.0	324.3
Walsall	545.7	494.2	500.2	492.6	517.0
Wolverhampton	423.8	368.5	377.8	385.6	392.5
Knowsley	302.7	278.2	296.3	279.7	291.0
Liverpool	908.5	905.2	897.8	873.4	862.9
St. Helens	270.9	283.2	268.7	257.0	288.0
Sefton	459.8	445.2	453.8	431.5	442.6
Wirral	509.5	549.4	573.1	541.5	537.5
Bolton	395.7	414.8	408.6	398.6	410.8
Bury	254.0	231.5	273.8	252.5	269.7
Manchester	847.3	822.1	835.5	757.5	806.4
Oldham	436.5	406.7	409.3	384.4	386.6
Rochdale	341.8	337.7	356.7	326.0	376.9
Salford	399.5	392.0	392.4	364.6	394.5
Stockport	364.3	322.8	367.3	359.8	372.9
Tameside	333.1	357.3	369.4	352.8	364.7
Trafford	283.9	303.9	306.4	285.0	263.3
Wigan	525.6	512.0	529.5	500.7	512.3
Barnsley	348.1	320.1	351.8	350.8	374.1
Doncaster	530.7	556.0	525.8	517.1	516.3
Rotherham	435.8	445.2	465.0	436.2	447.6
Sheffield	734.7	729.4	730.4	759.3	743.1
Bradford	999.1	969.4	948.7	811.5	708.6
Calderdale	315.3	320.0	314.7	303.7	322.1
Kirklees	594.0	550.6	557.2	509.3	520.9
Leeds	1,009.1	1,006.7	1,031.2	1,011.4	1,042.7
Wakefield	451.7	482.9	467.0	456.3	509.3
Gateshead	318.8	290.2	299.8	282.9	276.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	500.2	503.7	491.4	462.3	466.3
North Tyneside	311.2	307.9	293.3	278.3	295.7
South Tyneside	267.0	277.9	293.7	278.4	299.4
Sunderland	528.0	512.5	490.1	484.3	506.6
Isles of Scilly	1.4	1.8	1.5	1.4	2.4
Bath and North East Somerset	200.0	212.5	241.1	231.6	244.0
Bristol, City of	470.9	469.7	531.0	475.5	498.8
North Somerset	226.0	219.7	230.1	235.3	258.9
South Gloucestershire	293.2	279.9	315.3	283.2	308.6
Hartlepool	148.9	120.3	138.9	142.2	151.7
Middlesbrough	304.7	258.2	278.0	261.2	274.0
Redcar and Cleveland	293.6	226.6	271.1	237.2	269.4
Stockton on Tees	312.6	311.0	298.6	276.9	300.3
Kingston upon Hull, City of	564.0	526.5	517.7	486.9	478.4
East Riding of Yorkshire	381.1	432.0	429.2	432.9	449.7

	Maintained secondary schools				
	1996–97[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
North East Lincolnshire	279.9	289.2	302.7	275.5	301.2
North Lincolnshire	231.0	226.6	248.2	253.4	239.6
North Yorkshire	665.4	641.0	693.0	700.5	790.7
York, City of	202.7	136.3	152.1	155.6	189.3
Bedfordshire	603.9	613.6	635.6	647.3	723.7
Luton	244.8	223.9	276.4	258.9	299.0
Buckinghamshire	456.2	431.5	534.5	541.5	540.1
Milton Keynes	279.0	271.8	279.3	276.4	304.8
Derbyshire	893.9	833.5	926.1	913.2	997.5
Derby City	318.4	311.8	341.7	327.4	330.6
Dorset	530.0	515.3	525.6	540.3	591.1
Poole	159.1	161.6	161.4	143.8	157.3
Bournemouth	194.1	190.9	195.2	191.2	220.1
Durham	855.5	803.2	777.5	745.9	760.0
Darlington	160.6	160.3	133.7	135.9	160.5
East Sussex	555.5	510.0	586.4	578.1	623.4
Brighton and Hove	278.2	234.2	244.2	212.3	282.5
Hampshire	1,375.0	1,262.3	1,374.2	1,339.9	1,475.6
Portsmouth	274.3	262.0	252.5	249.7	280.9
Southampton	312.3	276.3	295.7	304.3	315.1
Leicestershire	857.8	821.3	847.7	784.7	819.6
Leicester City	481.7	413.4	419.2	341.1	387.5
Rutland	42.4	45.3	39.3	40.2	44.6
Staffordshire	1,179.3	1,141.8	1,176.9	1,187.0	1,216.0
Stoke on Trent	409.1	370.3	396.1	366.5	346.8
Wiltshire	491.6	511.4	519.3	509.9	546.5
Swindon	284.4	282.3	291.5	279.9	302.3
Bracknell Forest	n/a	81.7	126.0	115.4	123.7
Windsor and Maidenhead	n/a	169.4	175.1	185.8	196.2
West Berkshire	n/a	179.6	202.9	199.5	214.8
Reading	n/a	112.4	127.0	128.8	132.0
Slough	n/a	115.1	135.8	150.1	142.0
Wokingham	n/a	167.7	178.5	173.5	191.7
Cambridgeshire	n/a	624.6	635.1	623.6	687.0
Peterborough City	n/a	274.4	275.0	274.7	284.5
Cheshire	n/a	827.4	827.8	809.9	881.7
Halton	n/a	208.4	225.2	208.9	227.5
Warrington	n/a	262.1	277.1	286.0	307.6
Devon	n/a	793.5	817.2	835.1	910.9
Plymouth	n/a	337.8	360.5	372.9	397.7
Torbay	n/a	198.7	192.5	177.9	179.1
Essex	n/a	1,642.9	1,734.1	1,763.8	1,862.0
Southend-on-Sea	n/a	216.2	229.3	227.3	229.5
Thurrock	n/a	208.4	215.2	205.1	216.9
Herefordshire	n/a	203.0	190.9	183.9	219.1
Worcestershire	n/a	784.3	793.8	785.2	857.6
Kent	n/a	1,718.2	1,810.9	1,768.4	1,854.5
Medway	n/a	384.6	417.7	392.2	413.6
Lancashire	n/a	1,514.9	1,717.6	1,666.7	1,710.1
Blackburn with Darwen	n/a	248.9	261.3	228.4	232.0
Blackpool	n/a	196.8	215.7	213.3	232.2
Nottinghamshire	n/a	1,023.9	1,106.7	1,087.9	1,051.6
Nottingham City	n/a	376.0	365.0	384.7	414.6
Shropshire	n/a	317.5	330.0	333.7	375.8
Telford and Wrekin	n/a	249.4	254.7	231.7	253.8
Cornwall	669.5	669.0	727.2	697.2	788.0
Cumbria	686.9	692.3	726.4	663.3	712.3
Gloucestershire	720.3	749.6	722.2	692.0	755.4
Hertfordshire	1,299.7	1,254.4	1,335.7	1,309.7	1,421.4
Isle of Wight	232.2	258.4	248.4	253.2	263.4
Lincolnshire	796.5	740.3	800.7	819.8	888.4
Norfolk	976.8	883.4	971.9	919.6	1,018.0
Northamptonshire	918.7	932.4	960.5	964.8	1,096.7
Northumberland	591.7	560.0	567.1	551.4	607.2
Oxfordshire	425.7	708.5	660.0	670.1	701.1
Somerset	601.0	601.4	632.5	653.7	691.6
Suffolk	916.9	878.6	927.7	958.3	1,085.3
Surrey	1,006.2	1,050.9	1,056.2	1,048.0	1,065.3
Warwickshire	629.6	650.3	644.5	631.1	670.9
West Sussex	829.2	781.8	841.1	834.8	938.5
England	67,469.6	65,791.2	68,326.9	66,536.6	70,476.2

[1] As a result of local government reorganisation in 1998, figures for the new areas are not available for 1996–97, although the totals are included in the England figures.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by her and her predecessors since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43387]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* No unpaid appointments, as defined in paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code, have been made in this Department or its predecessors since June 1997.

For details of unpaid appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Education (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will place the draft education development plan for 2002–03 onwards that she has received from Newcastle upon Tyne city council in the Library. [45755]

Mr. Timms: I am placing a copy of the plan submitted by Newcastle upon Tyne city council on 31 January in the Library as my hon. Friend requests. The plan was approved by the Secretary of State on 25 March.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* reading, *(b)* writing and *(c)* maths achievement was to level 2 at Key Stage 1, what the level 4 attainments were at Key Stage 2 and what the level 5 achievement at Key Stage 3, in the city of Newcastle in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and what the national average figures were for those years. [45747]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table shows the percentage of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 tests in Newcastle upon Tyne LEA and England in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

	1999		*2000*		*2001*[1]	
	Newcastle	*England*	*Newcastle*	*England*	*Newcastle*	*England*
Key Stage 1—Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 or above						
Reading	81	82	82	83	81	84
Writing	81	83	84	84	84	86
Maths	87	87	90	90	89	91
Key Stage 2—Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above						
English	61	71	68	75	65	75
Reading	69	78	78	83	71	82
Writing	47	54	47	55	51	58
Mathematics	60	69	65	72	62	71
Science	72	78	81	85	82	87
Key Stage 3—Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above						
English[2]	52	64	53	64	57	64
Mathematics	52	62	54	65	56	66
Science	43	55	47	59	56	66

[1] 2001 data are provisional
[2] Reading and writing are not separately assessed at Key Stage 3, so the overall figure for English is provided

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Ofsted reports for schools, the LEA and other agencies in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne for *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and what programme of Ofsted reports has been agreed for (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003. [45752]

Mr. Timms: These are matters for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of students achieved *(a)* five GCSE grades A to C, *(b)* one grade A to C and *(c)* one graded A to E and average GCSE point score in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001; and what the equivalent national average achievements were for those years. [45753]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentages of pupils that achieved the stated qualifications are as follows.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Newcastle-upon-Tyne				
Percentage of 15-year-old pupils that achieved:				
5 or more grades A*-C	31.0	33.6	35.0	36.8
1 or more grades A*-C	55.7	57.1	58.7	60.4
1 or more grades A*-E	81.0	81.6	81.8	81.2
Average GCSE/GNVQ point score	29.5	30.5	31.5	32.1
England				
Percentage of 15-year-old pupils that achieved:				
5 or more grades A*-C	46.3	47.9	49.2	50.0
1 or more grades A*-C	71.4	72.6	73.6	74.0
1 or more grades A*-E	89.3	90.0	90.6	90.6
Average GCSE/GNVQ point score	37.0	38.1	38.9	39.3

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the education budget for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne *(a)* was in 2000–01, *(b)* was in 2001–02 and *(c)* will be for 2002–03; what the education SSA was for that local education authority in those years; and in each case what the budget is as a percentage of SSA. [45754]

Mr. Timms: The following table provides the latest available information:

	2000–01	2001–02
Budget (£ million)	111.5	117.5
SSA (£ million)	114.6	118.0
Budget as percentage of SSA	97	100

Notes:
1. 2001–02 Budget data obtained from s52 Budget statement table. Budget figures are net of grant income and also include capital expenditure from the revenue account (CERA).

Information for 2002–03 is not yet available and it is not possible to give a projection of what it may be.

Faith Schools

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on which faiths should be permitted to set up state schools. [45255]

Mr. Timms: We do not have, nor would it be appropriate to have, a policy on which faiths should be permitted to set up state schools. Any promoter can bring forward statutory proposals to set up a maintained school. Faith school promoters have to go through the same procedures and satisfy the same conditions as others. The decision whether to accept proposals rests with the local School Organisation Committee, or with the Schools Adjudicator if the committee cannot agree. In addition, under the Education Bill, it will be possible for proposals for a new faith school to be among those brought forward in response to a notice from the LEA inviting proposals for an additional secondary school and any such proposals would be decided by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State, Schools Organisation Committees and the Schools Adjudicator will want to see evidence of clear local agreement for a proposal. The White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success" made clear that decisions to establish faith schools should take account of the interests of all sections of the community.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what inspections take place to ensure that faith schools teach about faiths other than their own. [45761]

Mr. Timms: Inspections of faith schools under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 cover religious education except in the case of those voluntary and foundation schools which are designated as having a religious character and provide denominational education. Section 23 of the Act requires those schools to arrange a separate inspection of denominational education. There is no requirement that reports of those inspections refer to the extent to which schools provide education about faiths other than their own.

From September, citizenship education, including teaching about different faiths and cultures, will become a statutory part of the secondary school curriculum. As now, inspectors will be required to evaluate and report on whether schools meet their statutory requirements.

School Places

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the availability of school places at schools in the Ribble Valley. [45792]

Mr. Timms: The supply of school places in the Ribble Valley is a matter for Lancashire local education authority (LEA). LEAs have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available for children in their areas. Where LEAs can demonstrate a need for additional places they can apply to the Department for support.

Lancashire LEA plans additional secondary places in the area, in particular through a new 10-classroom block at Ribblesdale High School, which has a planned opening date of September 2002.

Teacher Recruitment

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers her Department aims to recruit from countries where *(a)* the majority of the population live on less than $1 a day and *(b)* the majority of the population live on less than $2 a day. [45796]

Mr. Timms: None. The Government do not themselves recruit teachers, so they do not seek any particular level of overseas recruitment.

Local education authorities, schools and supply teacher agencies in the private sector may recruit from overseas, although we do not encourage it in developing nations where there is likely to be an adverse effect on the economy. My Department shares the aspirations of the Department for International Development outlined in their White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor".

Overseas-trained teachers who do choose to come and work in our schools make an important contribution. Many will stay for limited periods, and can in any event teach for no more than four years here without acquiring Qualified Teacher Status. They may then return, taking back with them to their home country valuable practical teaching experience.

Stress

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she has taken to combat work-related stress in the teaching profession. [45830]

Mr. Timms: We have taken a number of steps designed to ease the work pressures of teachers. We have asked the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) to make recommendations on workload by the end of April, taking into account the independent study of workload we commissioned last year from PricewaterhouseCoopers. The STRB report will cover a range of possible contractual changes, including whether it is possible to move to a meaningful guarantee of professional time for teachers and headteachers.

Extra money in school budgets will provide 10,000 more teachers, 20,000 more support staff and 1,000 more trained bursars over the lifetime of this Parliament. We have announced a £4 million project for 30 schools to try new approaches to the deployment of teachers, support staff and ICT to reduce workload. We have also allocated an extra £50 million for capital projects to improve staff workspaces.

We recognise that poor behaviour is a major contributor to teacher stress. We are developing a number of measures to tackle this—including a consultation on new guidance

on exclusions that will lead to improvements that could remove a significant barrier to effective teaching and learning.

We have supported the setting-up of an independent 24-hour telephone counselling helpline for teachers, operated by the "teacher support network".

Disability Discrimination Act

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to schools on the implications for them of the Disability Discrimination Act 1999. [45832]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Part IV of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the SEN and Disability Act 2001, will apply to schools from September 2002. The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has produced a Code of Practice for the schools sector to help those affected by the new legislation understand their rights and responsibilities. The DRC consulted on a draft Code last year and, subject to Parliamentary approval, it is expected that the code will be published in early summer.

The Department is producing guidance for schools and local education authorities on the duty to plan to increase over time the accessibility of schools to disabled pupils. the Department has consulted on draft guidance and the final guidance will be published in early summer.

School Transport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department will issue guidance on the age at which children can be expected to use public transport unaccompanied to travel to school. [45855]

John Healey: It would not be appropriate for the Secretary of State to issue guidance on the age at which children can be expected to use public transport to travel unaccompanied to school. This is a decision which parents are best placed to make, taking into consideration local circumstances.

Sixth Forms

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on balancing arrangements for the new structure for sixth-form funding proposed by county councils; and which authorities have made similar proposals. [45856]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Many LEAs are still finalising their arrangements for funding in 2002–03. We require all LEAs to ensure that school sixth forms that stand to gain from the LSC's funding formula receive at least one third of the difference between their real terms guarantee figure and their actual LSC allocation.

Surrey county council has received approval for an "additional arrangement" which follows these requirements but also includes transitional arrangements to provide a cash guarantee related to the funding which would have been payable under Surrey's own funding formula.

Truancy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children were found to be truant each year since 1997; if she will make a statement on truancy and measures planned and introduced to combat it; and what is done with children that are consistently truant from school despite action taken. [46169]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The table gives the number of children who had one or more sessions (half-days) of unauthorised absence in each year since 1997. Unauthorised absence includes all absences that the school has decided not to approve.

Thousand

Academic year[1]	*Number of pupils with at least one session of unauthorised absence*	*Total number of compulsory school age pupils*
1996–97	1,015.0	7,011.8
1997–98	1,065.2	6,977.3
1998–99	1,114.4	7,071.6
1999–2000	1,124.7	7,102.3
2000–01	1,171.2	7,176.2

[1] Information is collected from schools for the period from September to May

We have put into place a package of measures that help schools to set a tough clear policy on truancy including all of the measures recommended in the Social Exclusion Unit's report 'Truancy and School Exclusion' in 1998. We are providing more support than ever before to schools and local education authorities to tackle attendance and behaviour problems; over three years we have provided in excess of £500 million to support local projects.

Improving school attendance is a key aim for the new Connexions Service; personal advisers provide support to young people disengaged from education, helping to reduce barriers to attending school regularly. Learning Mentors in Excellence in Cities areas have an important role in securing good relations between school and home, fostering a positive attitude to learning on the part of families and helping them to support their children.

Policy Making

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the results of the consultation of young people will be taken into cross-departmental policy making processes. [46327]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have involved young people in many of the Department's initiatives including consulting pupils on the Education White Paper and engaging young people in the development of the Connexions Service. We are currently consulting them on our 14–19 proposals. Involving children and young people is an important part of the Department's commitment to understanding its customers and supporting better delivery of its policies and services. We will launch an action plan at the end of May, reflecting that commitment and the core principles on participation published by the Children and Young People's Unit in "Learning to Listen". We are putting in place a central point of advice as a focus for raising awareness, sharing practice and promoting the benefits of participation across the whole Department.

Youth Work

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will be announcing the next stages of implementing 'Transforming Youth Work'. [46324]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Implementation of the Transforming Youth Work agenda is already under way. A series of measures were outlined at the Association of Principal Youth and Community Officer's Annual Conference in October 2001. This announcement followed the Government's 'Transforming Youth Work' consultation on the future of the youth service.

Ministers will make a full and published response to the 'Transforming Youth Work' consultation in July 2002.

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessments she has made of the role youth work plays in the personal and social development of young people identified by Ofsted as missing from the school system. [46329]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government's long-term strategy for the Youth Service is described in the March 2001 publication 'Transforming Youth Work'. This set out the Government's view of the Youth Service in England and outlined a programme of modernisation.

Both the statutory and voluntary youth sectors will play a key role in providing support and personal development for young people. They will continue to work with the education system to provide suitable development opportunities for school pupils.

The personal and social development provided by the youth services will be particularly important for those who are at risk or who have lost contact with formal education.

Citizenship

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Department is considering ways of extending the requirements for citizenship in the national curriculum to include the Youth Service curriculum. [46330]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Youth Service does not have a specific curriculum. In its consultation document, "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards", the Government have proposed that all young people should participate in active citizenship, wider interests and work-related learning. As part of their agenda for youth services in England, "Transforming Youth Work—Developing Youth Work for Young People", the Government aim to develop innovative youth work projects designed to enhance the engagement of young people in local democratic processes.

School Governance

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to schools as to the role of pupils in school governance. [46373]

Mr. Timms: We have given no guidance to schools on the role of pupils in school governance because under current legislation it is not possible for young people under the age of 18 to become school governors. A young person over the age of 18 may become a governor but under existing regulations cannot be co-opted to serve as a governor at the school they attend. We are currently reviewing our policy in this area, in the light of new regulations we will be drawing up on school governance following the Education Bill.

Employment Rights

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the protection of employment rights for teachers who will transfer to new Private Finance Initiative secondary schools; and if she will make a statement. [46432]

Mr. Timms: There is no change to teachers' pay and conditions if their school is included within the scope of a Private Finance Initiative project. Teaching staff do not transfer to the private sector at these schools; they continue to be employed by the local authority or governing body, according to the status of the school.

Examination Papers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the companies involved in marking examination papers made errors in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many students were affected by mistakes made by examination boards; and how much examination work remains untraced. [46450]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The accuracy of the five examination boards (AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJC, and CCA) has been assessed for the summer 2000 A level and GCSE examination series.

The figures are as follows:

Out of 774,380 candidate entries at A-level there were 4,505 marking errors discovered during inquiries about results—0.6 per cent. of all papers.

Out of 5,532,411 candidate entries at GCSE, 6,368 had marking errors discovered during inquiries about results—0.1 per cent. of all papers.

There are no reliable figures for untraced examination work.

City Academy, Newcastle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions her officials have had with promoters of a City Academy in the City of Newcastle area; how many promoters have approached her; and whether those discussions are continuing. [46616]

Mr. Timms: Discussions have taken place, and are continuing, with a number of potential sponsors to establish City Academies across the country. There has been no formal approach from a partnership (comprising a sponsor and the local education authority) for a City Academy in the City of Newcastle area.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list the total amount of money spent by Ministers in her Department since its creation on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes; [47215]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46847]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The total cost of entertainment for each of the last five years for this Department is set out as follows:

Year	*£000*
1997–98	21
1998–99	31
1999–2000	21
2000–01	20
2001–02[1]	11

[1] Provisional

Note:
To provide the more detailed information requested would incur disproportionate cost.

Classics

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the maintained secondary schools which offered *(a)* Latin and *(b)* Greek at (i) GCSE and (ii) A level in each of the last five years. [48235]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The list of maintained secondary schools where pupils had taken *(a)* Latin and *(b)* Greek at (i) GCSE and (ii) A level in each of the last five years can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Examinations

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities were in the *(a)* first and *(b)* tenth decile for results at (i) Key Stage 2, (ii) Key Stage 3 and (iii) GCSEs in each year since 1997. [48250]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of pupils in England achieving GCSEs in *(a)* mathematics and *(b)* English achieved grades A or above in (i) the best performing local education authority and (ii) the worst performing local education authority in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [48261]

Mr. Timms: *(a)* The percentage of pupils in England achieving GCSEs in mathematics that achieved grades A or above are:

(i) The best performing local education authority based on five or more grades A*-C GCSE or GNVQ equivalents is 23 per cent.

(ii) The worst performing local education authority based on five or more grades A*-C GCSE or GNVQ equivalents is 2.6 per cent.

(b) The percentages of pupils in England achieving GCSEs in English that achieved grades A or above are:

(i) The best performing local education authority based on five or more grades A*-C GCSE or GNVQ equivalents is 21.5 per cent.

(ii) The worst performing local education authority based on five or more grades A*-C GCSE or GNVQ equivalents is 4.3 per cent.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of students achieved each grade in GCSE *(a)* science, *(b)* English, *(c)* mathematics and *(d)* foreign languages examinations prior to reaching school year 11, for every year since 1997. [47880]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentage of students in schools in England that achieved grade in GCSE *(a)* science, *(b)* English, *(c)* Mathematics and *(d)* foreign languages examinations prior to reaching final year of compulsory education are shown in the table.

Percentage of pupils that achieved stated grades in GCSE

	*A**	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*U*	*X*
Science										
1996–97	19	25	28	14	7	4	1	1	0	1
1997–98	20	23	27	15	8	3	2	1	1	1
1998–99	19	25	22	18	7	3	2	1	1	1
1999–2000	21	24	22	19	7	3	2	1	1	0
2000–01	22	25	18	18	8	3	2	1	1	1
English										
1996–97	11	30	33	19	3	2	1	0	0	1
1997–98	12	29	31	19	4	2	1	1	0	1
1998–99	13	30	30	19	3	2	2	1	0	1
1999–2000	14	31	29	18	4	2	[illegible]	0	0	0
2000–01	14	29	30	17	4	2	[illegible]	1	0	0
Mathematics										
1996–97	21	37	24	12	2	1	[illegible]	0	0	1
1997–98	20	39	22	11	3	1	[illegible]	0	0	1
1998–99	20	38	23	12	3	2	[illegible]	1	1	0
1999–2000	20	35	23	14	4	2	[illegible]	1	1	0
2000–01	21	29	21	15	5	3	[illegible]	1	1	0
Foreign Languages										
1996–97	30	42	13	7	3	1	[illegible]	0	0	1
1997–98	29	41	14	7	3	2	1	1	0	1
1998–99	38	34	14	7	3	1	1	0	0	1
1999–2000	40	32	15	7	3	1	1	0	0	1
2000–01	42	29	15	8	3	1	1	0	0	1

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 782W, when she will publish the findings of the inquiry into the early release of the 2001 Key Stage results; and if she will make a statement. [48169]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1006W.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average number of exams taken by *(a)* an 11-year-old, *(b)* a 14-year-old, *(c)* a 16-year-old and *(d)* and 18-year-old throughout their school career to that point, in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47482]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All local education authority maintained schools in England are required to administer the national curriculum tasks/tests for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 and tests for pupils at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Schools may, at their discretion, choose to administer other non-statutory tests in addition to the statutory requirements.

For GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A/AS/Advanced GNVQ, schools enter pupils for the appropriate subjects; the number of exam papers will vary according to subject and awarding body.

The table shows the total number of statutory national curriculum test papers in English, mathematics and science which will have been taken by most pupils in the relevant age group; and the average number of GCSE and GCE A/AS and GNVQ examination entries for those age groups. (All ages are at the end of the academic year.)

	11-year-old	*14-year-old*	*16-year-old*	*18-year-old*
1997	13 NC test papers	7 NC test papers	7 NC test papers and 8.2 GCSEs	7 NC test papers and 11.3 GCSEs and GCE A/AS and GNVQs
1998	13 NC test papers	20 NC test papers	7 NC test papers and 8.2 GCSEs	7 NC test papers and 11.3 GCSEs and GCE A/AS and GNVQs
1999	13 NC test papers	20 NC test papers	7 NC test papers and 8.2 GCSEs	7 NC test papers and 11.3 GCSEs and GCE A/AS and GNVQs
2000	13 NC test papers	20 NC test papers	20 NC test papers and 8.2 GCSEs	7 NC test papers and 11.3 GCSEs and GCE A/AS and GNVQs
2001	13 NC test papers	20 NC test papers	20 NC test papers and 8.2 GCSEs	7 NC test papers and 11.3 GCSEs and GCE A/AS and GNVQs

Notes:
1. Key Stage 1 tests for 7-year-olds were introduced nationally in 1991.
Key Stage 2 tests for 11-year-olds were introduced nationally in 1995.
Key Stage 3 tests for 14-year-olds were introduced nationally in 1993.
2. The number of papers taken for GCSE and GCE A/AS and GNVQ vary for each subject.
3. The increase in the number of national curriculum tests from seven to 20 for 14-year-olds and from seven to 20 for 16-year-olds reflects the fact that they were the cohort who took the first Key Stage 2 tests in 1994–95.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children sat the GCSE *(a)* science, *(b)* English and *(c)* mathematics examination prior to reaching school year 11 in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47487]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of pupils that sat the GCSE *(a)* science, *(b)* English, *(c)* mathematics prior to reaching their final year of compulsory education in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority in England, are shown in the table:

Number of pupils[1] that sat GCSEs in science, English and mathematics prior to reaching final year of compulsory education. Maintained secondary schools, including maintained special schools and city technology colleges

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Science					
Camden	15	24	11	17	12
Greenwich	1	4	5	8	4
Hackney	5	10	21	9	6
Hammersmith and Fulham	6	10	6	5	2
Islington	1	7	6	7	2
Kensington and Chelsea	2	0	4	2	1
Lambeth	3	4	12	4	2
Lewisham	5	3	4	6	3
Southwark	6	14	21	9	43
Tower Hamlets	15	15	13	6	8
Wandsworth	9	9	10	11	6
Westminster	7	8	10	10	9
Barking and Dagenham	1	0	1	2	2
Barnet	21	28	23	17	18
Bexley	14	11	13	12	10
Brent	11	6	3	4	9
Bromley	11	11	7	10	5
Croydon	4	7	4	6	3
Ealing	10	2	5	3	6
Enfield	173	155	129	141	220
Haringey	2	6	9	15	14
Harrow	4	6	2	4	4
Havering	0	3	20	18	3
Hillingdon	3	2	2	3	11
Hounslow	11	10	5	11	8
Kingston upon Thames	4	5	4	3	2
Merton	9	5	3	8	13
Newham	9	1	2	2	1
Redbridge	0	0	3	0	3
Richmond upon Thames	2	5	2	4	2
Sutton	6	3	4	8	9
Waltham Forest	2	14	0	4	1
Birmingham	5	25	49	70	72
Coventry	1	2	21	2	3

Number of pupils[1] that sat GCSEs in science, English and mathematics prior to reaching final year of compulsory education. Maintained secondary schools, including maintained special schools and city technology colleges

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Dudley	6	1	4	6	4
Sandwell	0	0	1	0	51
Solihull	1	0	2	0	1
Walsall	0	1	1	0	4
Wolverhampton	2	1	2	1	1
Knowsley	3	1	2	1	34
Liverpool	1	8	89	139	106
St. Helens	0	3	0	0	2
Sefton	2	2	5	2	2
Wirral	1	1	4	0	3
Bolton	5	1	26	21	27
Bury	0	3	2	1	3
Manchester	26	61	41	68	62
Oldham	2	2	0	0	2
Rochdale	3	3	1	6	2
Salford	1	1	1	0	0
Stockport	0	4	0	1	1
Tameside	0	1	0	1	3
Trafford	2	2	7	7	4
Wigan	22	28	28	28	26
Barnsley	0	0	1	0	1
Doncaster	1	1	1	0	0
Rotherham	1	1	4	1	4
Sheffield	32	4	29	21	19
Bradford	12	2	5	6	2
Calderdale	17	14	3	3	1
Kirklees	2	12	12	8	6
Leeds	5	5	2	10	4
Wakefield	0	2	0	1	3
Gateshead	0	0	0	0	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	0	1	1	22
North Tyneside	2	1	5	1	0
South Tyneside	0	2	1	2	2
Sunderland	1	3	0	1	15
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	2	3	4	3	1
City of Bristol	0	4	3	4	5
North Somerset	4	2	2	4	2
South Gloucestershire	6	4	0	1	3
Hartlepool	0	0	0	1	0
Middlesbrough	0	1	34	39	69
Redcar and Cleveland	1	2	2	1	3
Stockton on Tees	0	2	1	4	3
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0	3	1	3	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	1	0	1	2	3
North East Lincolnshire	3	3	0	1	1
North Lincolnshire	0	1	17	8	20
North Yorkshire	17	17	27	24	10
York	3	4	4	3	3
Bedfordshire	14	15	12	7	18
Luton	14	1	2	0	0
Buckinghamshire	30	20	29	23	28
Milton Keynes	19	1	1	1	3
Derbyshire	14	9	14	31	8
City of Derby	4	8	1	7	1
Dorset	16	16	8	8	8
Poole	3	5	5	12	10
Bournemouth	8	2	7	5	12
Durham	4	2	2	2	4
Darlington	0	0	2	0	0
East Sussex	23	14	12	20	15
Brighton and Hove	2	19	19	27	27
Hampshire	107	105	140	264	226
Portsmouth	78	51	55	26	29
Southampton	4	6	2	0	2
Leicestershire	8	11	16	3	5
Leicester City	14	3	6	3	1
Rutland	1	0	2	1	0
Staffordshire	13	6	20	16	16
Stoke-on-Trent	4	20	2	58	32
Wiltshire	20	17	21	45	64
Swindon	4	4	6	0	1

Number of pupils[1] that sat GCSEs in science, English and mathematics prior to reaching final year of compulsory education. Maintained secondary schools, including maintained special schools and city technology colleges

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Bracknell Forest	[2]—	2	2	5	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	[2]—	3	7	4	0
Newbury	[2]—	9	13	13	3
Reading	[2]—	9	7	5	1
Slough	[2]—	3	15	6	6
Wokingham	[2]—	0	3	2	1
Cambridgeshire	[2]—	30	31	34	34
Peterborough	[2]—	3	9	5	0
Cheshire	[2]—	11	15	4	5
Halton	[2]—	1	0	1	0
Warrington	[2]—	146	145	129	165
Devon	[2]—	17	22	19	17
Plymouth	[2]—	5	4	4	4
Torbay	[2]—	4	7	6	4
Essex	[2]—	46	58	57	72
Southend	[2]—	8	6	1	7
Thurrock	[2]—	0	1	15	0
Herefordshire	[2]—	5	5	6	4
Worcestershire	[2]—	24	50	33	38
Kent	[2]—	43	37	35	40
Rochester and Gillingham	[2]—	3	8	6	13
Lancashire	[2]—	12	17	20	17
Blackburn	[2]—	3	0	0	1
Blackpool	[2]—	0	1	0	1
Nottinghamshire	[2]—	22	40	6	10
Nottingham City	[2]—	2	1	5	2
Shropshire	[2]—	7	44	61	48
The Wrekin	[2]—	33	35	1	21
Cornwall	36	32	21	20	39
Cumbria	20	12	166	12	18
Gloucestershire	16	21	24	20	25
Hertfordshire	28	44	46	36	47
Isle of Wight	5	3	3	2	7
Lincolnshire	12	11	18	43	65
Norfolk	19	21	27	21	21
Northamptonshire	13	18	116	122	106
Northumberland	14	21	7	1	2
Oxfordshire	30	29	30	27	28
Somerset	18	29	15	11	16
Suffolk	13	12	14	16	8
Surrey	72	38	43	28	31
Warwickshire	11	10	7	10	2
West Sussex	18	15	17	11	19
Total England	1,791	1,734	2,331	2,298	2,519

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
English					
Camden	6	19	6	11	9
Greenwich	24	3	4	4	4
Hackney	11	14	7	24	13
Hammersmith and Fulham	34	33	29	36	29
Islington	2	7	6	3	3
Kensington and Chelsea	3	0	3	2	1
Lambeth	4	4	4	4	3
Lewisham	24	3	5	10	5
Southwark	13	17	5	28	12
Tower Hamlets	2	5	5	5	5
Wandsworth	45	24	37	46	7
Westminster	8	8	11	12	9
Barking and Dagenham	1	0	44	29	26
Barnet	113	26	21	16	19
Bexley	2	2	3	2	4
Brent	18	5	4	4	8
Bromley	10	11	7	10	5
Croydon	3	7	2	5	2
Ealing	37	24	34	35	36
Enfield	2	4	7	7	4
Haringey	2	8	9	7	1
Harrow	5	6	1	3	3

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Havering	0	3	1	1	3
Hillingdon	3	2	2	3	5
Hounslow	11	9	5	7	8
Kingston upon Thames	4	5	3	3	2
Merton	3	4	2	5	7
Newham	9	2	2	2	1
Redbridge	0	0	3	0	1
Richmond upon Thames	2	5	2	4	1
Sutton	6	3	4	8	8
Waltham Forest	2	1	0	2	3
Birmingham	12	31	53	53	108
Coventry	1	1	0	2	3
Dudley	5	1	3	6	4
Sandwell	14	9	1	0	1
Solihull	1	0	0	0	2
Walsall	0	1	3	0	5
Wolverhampton	2	1	3	0	1
Knowsley	3	1	2	1	3
Liverpool	2	8	7	6	2
St. Helens	0	2	0	0	2
Sefton	2	2	4	2	2
Wirral	1	1	1	0	3
Bolton	5	1	2	0	3
Bury	0	3	2	1	2
Manchester	8	30	11	5	4
Oldham	2	1	0	0	2
Rochdale	2	3	17	0	2
Salford	1	1	1	0	0
Stockport	0	4	1	1	1
Tameside	0	1	1	1	3
Trafford	2	2	5	6	4
Wigan	0	1	0	0	1
Barnsley	1	0	1	3	0
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	0
Rotherham	1	1	3	1	3
Sheffield	6	4	9	7	34
Bradford	11	4	29	4	2
Calderdale	1	6	3	6	12
Kirklees	29	11	11	8	6
Leeds	6	11	2	10	17
Wakefield	0	2	0	1	3
Gateshead	0	30	30	30	31
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	0	2	2	2
North Tyneside	2	1	5	1	0
South Tyneside	0	2	0	2	2
Sunderland	106	75	0	1	1
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	31	31	4	3	6
City of Bristol	8	1	3	6	10
North Somerset	4	2	2	4	2
South Gloucestershire	5	4	0	1	3
Hartlepool	0	0	0	1	0
Middlesbrough	0	1	3	1	0
Redcar and Cleveland	1	2	2	1	1
Stockton on Tees	0	1	1	0	3
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0	3	1	3	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	1	0	1	2	3
North East Lincolnshire	8	5	0	0	0
North Lincolnshire	0	1	1	2	0
North Yorkshire	43	20	47	51	9
York	3	4	4	3	5
Bedfordshire	14	16	9	7	16
Luton	1	0	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	31	20	27	22	28
Milton Keynes	4	45	59	40	59
Derbyshire	13	10	33	39	42
City of Derby	30	42	15	5	0
Dorset	16	16	8	36	33
Poole	3	5	5	12	10
Bournemouth	7	2	6	5	12
Durham	5	2	2	2	3
Darlington	0	0	2	0	0
East Sussex	19	12	11	18	14
Brighton and Hove	17	87	34	1	5

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Hampshire	65	36	39	21	56
Portsmouth	3	1	3	1	0
Southampton	3	6	2	0	2
Leicestershire	9	14	12	3	5
Leicester City	3	2	1	4	0
Rutland	1	0	2	1	0
Staffordshire	13	6	18	17	19
Stoke-on-Trent	4	1	2	2	16
Wiltshire	36	17	19	38	52
Swindon	4	4	3	0	1
Bracknell Forest	[2]—	2	1	5	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	[2]—	3	7	4	0
Newbury	[2]—	9	13	13	4
Reading	[2]—	8	7	7	1
Slough	[2]—	23	6	5	5
Wokingham	[2]—	0	3	2	1
Cambridgeshire	[2]—	19	16	8	7
Peterborough	[2]—	3	9	61	52
Cheshire	[2]—	12	13	28	30
Halton	[2]—	17	0	1	0
Warrington	[1]—	1	0	1	2
Devon	[2]—	143	44	33	17
Plymouth	[2]—	2	5	5	4
Torbay	[2]—	4	7	6	4
Essex	[2]—	19	23	18	56
Southend	[2]—	8	6	1	7
Thurrock	[2]—	0	0	0	0
Herefordshire	[2]—	5	3	5	2
Worcestershire	[2]—	10	11	53	4
Kent	[2]—	34	42	30	45
Rochester and Gillingham	[2]—	3	8	3	11
Lancashire	[2]—	146	15	19	24
Blackburn	[2]—	4	0	0	1
Blackpool	[2]—	0	1	0	1
Nottinghamshire	[2]—	3	6	6	9
Nottingham City	[2]—	2	1	4	1
Shropshire	[2]—	7	5	1	3
The Wrekin	[2]—	31	19	36	50
Cornwall	35	32	20	22	18
Cumbria	21	28	36	24	19
Gloucestershire	26	18	23	20	25
Hertfordshire	41	44	34	25	26
Isle of Wight	38	3	3	2	39
Lincolnshire	12	19	15	46	19
Norfolk	19	31	43	41	35
Northamptonshire	12	31	43	40	11
Northumberland	5	2	4	1	1
Oxfordshire	30	26	30	27	29
Somerset	16	29	15	6	12
Suffolk	15	33	47	16	61
Surrey	71	38	41	38	30
Warwickshire	11	10	7	10	3
West Sussex	15	16	18	11	17
Total England	1,920	1,813	1,522	1,486	1,631

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Mathematics					
Camden	18	26	23	26	43
Greenwich	5	4	4	4	6
Hackney	10	13	12	5	12
Hammersmith and Fulham	33	33	30	40	30
Islington	3	7	11	8	20
Kensington and Chelsea	11	14	16	4	1
Lambeth	8	12	9	9	22
Lewisham	34	37	16	68	71
Southwark	18	14	33	27	11
Tower Hamlets	16	16	93	12	13
Wandsworth	21	25	49	15	17
Westminster	9	9	15	42	21
Barking and Dagenham	3	33	17	17	3
Barnet	72	78	22	23	25

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Bexley	2	8	10	2	4
Brent	43	39	38	28	38
Bromley	9	21	7	10	8
Croydon	60	38	11	34	36
Ealing	10	9	13	7	10
Enfield	84	37	77	92	84
Haringey	6	15	20	12	14
Harrow	8	20	53	48	42
Havering	28	31	1	1	6
Hillingdon	28	45	50	39	70
Hounslow	30	10	7	27	11
Kingston upon Thames	8	5	7	5	3
Merton	7	6	2	4	7
Newham	9	2	4	10	3
Redbridge	0	1	5	0	1
Richmond upon Thames	3	9	3	4	1
Sutton	54	60	55	63	69
Waltham Forest	2	1	0	5	1
Birmingham	50	54	76	78	102
Coventry	8	10	5	10	2
Dudley	30	24	26	26	28
Sandwell	23	19	11	23	23
Solihull	23	17	28	5	7
Walsall	46	54	38	47	89
Wolverhampton	4	3	3	0	9
Knowsley	3	3	3	8	6
Liverpool	37	49	62	85	92
St. Helens	0	2	2	0	2
Sefton	5	11	6	27	18
Wirral	40	48	36	44	37
Bolton	6	1	2	1	53
Bury	15	12	17	2	8
Manchester	28	22	31	19	48
Oldham	42	37	34	44	58
Rochdale	2	7	4	3	6
Salford	1	2	1	0	4
Stockport	0	4	1	11	1
Tameside	13	11	10	9	12
Trafford	2	2	5	6	4
Wigan	0	1	0	0	7
Barnsley	0	0	1	5	9
Doncaster	1	2	1	0	6
Rotherham	3	3	3	2	5
Sheffield	7	7	11	13	9
Bradford	38	40	31	34	38
Calderdale	1	7	8	5	6
Kirklees	3	11	13	9	8
Leeds	89	81	91	119	141
Wakefield	0	1	0	1	4
Gateshead	0	21	23	24	24
Newcastle upon Tyne	7	5	12	23	21
North Tyneside	3	2	9	6	7
South Tyneside	0	1	0	33	3
Sunderland	13	11	3	24	10
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	27	35	29	29	26
City of Bristol	4	3	3	7	9
North Somerset	24	27	30	29	19
South Gloucestershire	5	5	0	1	3
Hartlepool	0	0	1	3	30
Middlesbrough	0	1	5	1	5
Redcar and Cleveland	1	2	2	1	2
Stockton on Tees	1	2	3	7	4
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2	18	7	3	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	1	0	1	4	2
North East Lincolnshire	4	2	18	18	19
North Lincolnshire	1	2	2	1	0
North Yorkshire	76	17	28	22	11
York	16	8	3	8	8
Bedfordshire	38	37	46	45	36
Luton	2	3	6	32	86
Buckinghamshire	107	95	117	106	122
Milton Keynes	6	8	2	14	36
Derbyshire	73	70	72	79	73

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
City of Derby	23	0	2	6	0
Dorset	38	21	13	11	14
Poole	4	5	5	12	11
Bournemouth	9	3	7	5	12
Durham	5	2	4	2	5
Darlington	0	0	2	0	0
East Sussex	13	17	18	16	20
Brighton and Hove	1	8	4	7	9
Hampshire	209	231	211	253	225
Portsmouth	27	7	8	13	10
Southampton	10	23	55	35	52
Leicestershire	13	2	17	30	48
Leicester City	3	2	4	5	2
Rutland	1	1	3	1	0
Staffordshire	64	74	117	86	104
Stoke-on-Trent	10	80	11	13	12
Wiltshire	68	61	50	73	60
Swindon	19	48	54	34	55
Bracknell Forest	[2]—	21	3	5	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	[2]—	29	7	29	1
Newbury	[2]—	29	31	35	3
Reading	[2]—	31	34	15	21
Slough	[2]—	6	6	6	8
Wokingham	[2]—	25	29	29	26
Cambridgeshire	[2]—	93	57	53	34
Peterborough	[2]—	3	41	26	3
Cheshire	[2]—	129	155	148	76
Halton	[2]—	30	2	1	2
Warrington	[2]—	14	13	23	23
Devon	[2]—	39	27	35	30
Plymouth	[2]—	4	7	10	8
Torbay	[2]—	4	8	7	4
Essex	[2]—	117	123	153	200
Southend	[2]—	13	6	28	39
Thurrock	[2]—	0	9	0	1
Herefordshire	[2]—	30	52	58	77
Worcestershire	[2]—	63	44	26	32
Kent	[2]—	340	342	299	414
Rochester and Gillingham	[2]—	4	9	8	65
Lancashire	[2]—	38	17	31	38
Blackburn	[2]—	8	5	4	7
Blackpool	[2]—	2	10	3	7
Nottinghamshire	[2]—	56	93	88	114
Nottingham City	[2]—	44	51	40	72
Shropshire	[2]—	20	23	24	13
The Wrekin	[2]—	31	22	5	9
Cornwall	35	32	19	21	36
Cumbria	22	26	12	15	16
Gloucestershire	65	65	99	70	84
Hertfordshire	85	91	79	60	51
Isle of Wight	4	4	3	83	70
Lincolnshire	65	90	87	138	113
Norfolk	52	57	59	72	28
Northamptonshire	66	34	65	65	62
Northumberland	5	1	5	1	2
Oxfordshire	81	72	62	46	53
Somerset	20	38	46	41	40
Suffolk	22	15	15	18	24
Surrey	86	63	74	54	167
Warwickshire	38	37	35	33	35
West Sussex	48	16	29	14	23
Total England	3,858	3,985	4,111	4,369	4,877

[1] Information is not available by year group and so numbers relates to pupils that sat their examinations prior to reaching their final year of compulsory education.
[2] Indicates that due to LEA reorganisation, the figures for these LEAs are not available.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many requests there were for an exam paper to be re-marked for each exam paper offered by each of the exam boards; and what percentage this represented of the papers taken in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47484]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on requests for examination papers to be re-marked has been monitored by QCA since 1999 for each qualification. The small numbers involved make it impracticable to report on each specification, subject or local education authority.

Data are collected from the following awarding bodies:

Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA),

Edexcel Foundation (Edexcel),

Oxford, Cambridge, and RSA Examination Board (OCR),

Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment—Northern Ireland (CCEA),

Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

Data for 2001 include results of the GCE A-levels; both the new Advanced Subsidiary and old Advanced Supplementary examinations; for the new VCE advanced and AS examinations; and for the GCSE full and short courses. The new examinations were not available in previous years.

Details are in the tables.

Inquiries upon examinations in summer 2001

Awarding body	*Total number of candidates*	*Number of candidates involved in inquiries*	*Candidates involved in an inquiry as a percentage of total candidates*
GCE A-level			
AQA	368,988	9,107	2.4
CCEA	19,022	862	4.5
EDEXCEL	151,107	4,343	3.0
OCR	210,194	5,074	3.0
WJEC	27,011	274	1.0
Total	776,322	20,568	2.7
GCE Advanced Supplementary level			
AQA	10,546	67	1
CCEA	361	5	1.3
EDEXCEL	8,093	269	3.3
OCR	8,312	42	0.5
WJEC	927	4	0.4
Total	28,239	387	1.4
GCE Advanced Subsidiary level			
AQA	327,565	10,498	3.2
CCEA	9,243	668	7.2
EDEXCEL	205,594	2,520	1.2
OCR	198,549	5,659	3
WJEC	30,942	151	0.5
Total	771,893	19,496	2.5
VCE—A-level			
AQA	1,117	[1]—	[1]—
CCEA	0	[1]—	[1]—
EDEXCEL	9,817	5	0.1
OCR	1,239	155	13
WJEC	0	[1]—	[1]—
Total	12,173	160	1.3
VCE—AS-level			
AQA	1,394	17	1.2
CCEA	0	[1]—	[1]—
EDEXCEL	2,939	[1]—	[1]—
OCR	1,437	11	0.8
WJEC	0	[1]—	[1]—
Total	5,770	28	0.5

Inquiries upon examinations in summer 2001

Awarding body	*Total number of candidates*	*Number of candidates involved in inquiries*	*Candidates involved in an inquiry as a percentage of total candidates*
GCSE			
AQA	3,170,636	29,239	1.0
CCEA	136,191	2,742	2.0
EDEXCEL	942,520	4,551	0.5
OCR	1,126,820	7,385	0.7
WJEC	296,600	976	0.3
Total	5,672,767	44,893	0.8
GCSE short courses			
AQA	106,690	852	0.8
CCEA	1,618	4	0.2
EDEXCEL	73,566	118	0.2
OCR	105,471	782	0.7
WJEC	31,237	54	0.2
Total	318,582	1,810	0.6

[1] No inquiries

Inquiries upon examinations in summer 2000

Awarding body	*Total number of candidates*	*Number of candidates involved in inquiries*	*Candidates involved in an inquiry as a percentage of total candidates*[1]
GCE A-level			
AQA	372,776	12,350	3.31
CCEA	19,352	1,004	5.19
EDEXCEL	147,971	5,664	3.83
OCR	206,745	10,164	4.92
WJEC	27,536	458	1.66
Total	774,380	29,640	3.83
GCE AS-level			
AQA	32,850	597	1.82
CCEA	396	1	0.25
EDEXCEL	16,749	381	2.27
OCR	24,155	163	0.67
WJEC	2,277	7	0.31
Total	76,427	1,149	1.50
GCSE full courses			
AQA	3,096,733	30,962	1.00
CCEA	140,599	3,057	2.17
EDEXCEL	892,349	7,569	0.85
OCR	1,099,251	15,538	1.41
WJEC	303,479	646	0.21
Total	5,532,411	57,772	1.04
GCSE short courses			
AQA	102,871	829	0.8
CCEA	0	[2]—	—
EDEXCEL	63,611	161	0.3
OCR	97,873	2,247	2.3
WJEC	16,591	27	0.2
Total	280,946	3,264	1.2

[1] Rounded to two decimal places

[2] No inquiries

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Inquiries upon examinations in summer 1999

Awarding body	*Total number of candidates*	*Number of candidates involved in inquiries*	*Candidates involved in an inquiry as a percentage of total candidates*
GCE			
AQA	378,304	12,258	3.01
CCEA	20,144	1,546	7.67
EDEXCEL	151,471	6,021	4.0
OCR	211,199	6,195	2.93
WJEC	26,614	660	2.48
Total	787,732	26,680	3.39
GCSE			
AQA	3,207,688	5,086	0.16
CCEA	146,326	1,964	1.34
EDEXCEL	918,869	8,814	0.96
OCR	1,190,240	12,344	1.04
WJEC	293,156	674	0.23
Total	5,756,279	28,882	0.50

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of compulsory AS levels on examination timetables in *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* sixth form colleges; and if she will make a statement. [48258]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Joint Council for General Qualifications is responsible for devising the A level common timetable, in consultation with centres, and reviews its effectiveness after each examination series. The Secretary of State is closely monitoring centres' experiences of the common timetable.

Rural Schools Fund

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools have been assisted by the Rural Schools Fund initiative since its inception; [45976]

(2) how many schools have been assisted by the Rural Schools Grant Fund; and what is the total amount awarded since its inception. [46977]

John Healey *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Department does not fund a Rural Schools Fund. However, rural schools in England can benefit from a number of programmes, including the Small Schools Fund. This Fund, part of the simplified Standards Fund, was set up in 2001 by the merging of two previous grants (the Administrative Support Fund for Small Schools and the Small School Support Fund). The Small Schools Fund is worth a total of £80 million a year, guaranteed until 2004. It is allocated to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) according to the number of their primary and special schools with 200 pupils or less, and secondary schools with 600 pupils or less. An allowance is also made for nursery schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Using the Department's thresholds, based on the January 2000 school census, 9,982 schools, nurseries and PRUs were able to benefit from the total Small School Fund allocation to LEAs for 2001–02. LEAs have to devolve at least 95 per cent. of the funding to schools. However, LEAs can concentrate funding on fewer schools in their area by setting their own, lower thresholds should they so wish.

School Conditions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have been substantially repaired in 2001–02. [46116]

John Healey *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* We do not hold information in the form requested. Much capital support is allocated to local education authorities and schools on a formulaic basis. Records of how it is utilised for specific projects are held locally.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when evaluation of education maintenance allowances will be completed; if resources for the continuation of EMAs will be included in her departmental budget for the future; and if she will make a statement. [46662]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The evaluation of the EMA pilots will continue into 2003; but a rich seam of evaluation findings will become available during 2002. So far we have published a report on the effect of EMA on participation rates for the first of the two cohorts which the independent researchers are studying. This showed an increase in participation of five percentage points among the target group. During 2002 we expect to publish reports on the impact of EMA on drop out rates and end-of-course attainment for this first cohort. We also expect to publish the first reports on the second cohort of EMA recipients this year. We have always made clear that all of the EMA evaluation reports will be made public.

There is provision in our budgets to fund all young people who now receive an EMA until their entitlement expires. There is similar provision to fund new EMAs for young people in the pilot areas who begin post-compulsory education in September 2002. Wider decisions on the future of EMAs will be taken in the 2002 Spending Review.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47152]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1543W. The country visited was China.

Details of special adviser travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible in the new financial year.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47201]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information will be available in the departmental annual report, which is due to be published in May. This details progress against our PSA targets and reports on key initiatives undertaken by the Department in the last financial year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of those aged 16 years who achieve one or more GCSEs at grade C, or equivalent, to 95 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47891]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The relevant national learning target for 16-year-olds is that 95 per cent. of 16-year-olds should achieve one or more GCSE or equivalent by 2002. The target does not specify that the grade should be C or above. In 2001, 94.5 per cent. of pupils achieved this target compared with 94.4 per cent. in 2000. Although the target is challenging we do not believe it is unattainable.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of those aged 16 years who achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C to 50 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47892]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I am pleased to report that in 2001 exactly 50.0 per cent. achieved at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE or the GNVQ equivalent compared with 49.2 per cent. in 2000. We were delighted that the target was achieved a year early.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the target of successful establishment of a system of inspection of the new Connexions strategy and framework for inspection by March has been met. [47898]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target on school truancies will be met by 2002. [47278]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report, which should be published in May.

Analysis of last year's data shows that the level unauthorised absence in primary schools has decreased between 1998–99 and 2000–01 in 44 LEAs and remained steady in a further 71 LEAs. The level of unauthorised absence in secondary schools has decreased in 60 LEAs and remained steady in a further 31 LEAs.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the target of successful establishment of a system of joint inspections of further education institutions falling into the remit of Ofsted by March has been achieved. [47897]

Margaret Hodge: Yes. The Learning and Skills Act 2000 required there to be a common set of principles for the inspection of post-16 non-higher education and training. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (the ALI) jointly published these principles in the Common Inspection Framework in February 2001. Since April 2001, Ofsted have directed the programme of joint inspections of further education institutions against this Common Inspection Framework.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target of an increase in the proportion of those aged 19 years who have achieved national vocational qualification level 2 or equivalent to 85 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47893]

Mr. Timms: While we have made good progress in increasing the achievement of level 2 by 19-year-olds, it is apparent on current trends that the 2002 target will not be reached. We are working closely with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure maximum progress is being made by implementing specific local and innovative approaches to improving level 2 attainment. A number of measures proposed by the Government in our recently published Green Paper "14 to 19—Extending Opportunities; Raising Standards" will contribute to higher attainment at age 19 subsequently.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the target of 93 per cent. of inspection reports reviewed meeting HM Chief Inspector's standard by March will be achieved. [47895]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of those aged 11 meeting the numeracy standard for that age from 62 per cent. to 75 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47277]

Mr. Timms: In last year's Key Stage 2 mathematics tests 71 per cent. of pupils achieved the expected standard for their age. This represents a 10 per cent. points increase since 1997. The National Numeracy Strategy continues to raise standards in primary schools and we remain committed to achieving our 2002 target of 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieving the expected standard.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase provision of nursery places for three-years-olds from 34 per cent. to 66 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47275]

Margaret Hodge: On 27 February 2002, my noble Friend the Minister for Education and Skills in the Lords announced that two-thirds of all three-year-olds in

England now have access to a free, part-time, early education place. The Government are committed to increasing this to all three-year-olds by September 2004.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the target to complete benchmarking work for schools by December will be met. [47894]

Mr. Timms: The target will be met. All schools will be able to enter their expenditure data on the Audit Commission benchmarking website and compare them with a range of similar schools. All schools have been given full details of the Consistent Financial Reporting framework so that they can ensure a standard classification of expenditure.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of those aged 11 meeting the literacy standard for that age from 63 per cent. to 80 per cent. by 2002 will be met. [47276]

Mr. Timms: In last year's Key Stage 2 English tests 75 per cent. of pupils achieved the expected standard for their age. This represents a 12 per cent. increase since 1997. The National Literacy Strategy continues to raise standards in primary schools and we remain committed to achieving our 2002 target of 80 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieving the expected standard.

Teaching Vacancies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated with regard to the number of (i) head teacher and (ii) teacher vacancies; and if she will make a statement. [47479]

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she proposes to publish the 2002 Census of Teachers undertaken in January; and if she will make a statement. [48227]

Mr. Timms: The annual Form 618g survey of teacher numbers and vacancies was conducted on 17 January 2002. I expect the provisional results of the survey to be published in late April or early May.

Green Paper

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the responses received as part of the consultation exercise linked to the publication of the Green Paper 14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards. [47486]

Mr. Timms: It is not usual practice to publish all the individual responses to an official consultation. In line with Cabinet Office guidelines, we intend to make widely available analysis of the responses to the Green Paper later this year alongside announcement of decisions taken following consultation.

In line with established open Government practices, we would also expect to make available, on request, copies of responses from individuals and organisations who have not specifically asked that their response be kept confidential.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* title, *(b)* subject and *(c)* associated funding of each (i) project, (ii) scheme, (iii) initiative and (iv) policy announced by the Department for Education and Employment since 1997, on a monthly basis. [47497]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information is not held in the format requested and generating it would incur disproportionate cost.

I refer the hon. Member to the Departmental Report (April 2000) for information on the Government's policies on education and associated expenditure.

Research

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated with regard to the number of teachers in secondary schools who are teaching a subject in which they are not specifically trained; and if she will make a statement. [47480]

Mr. Timms: This information is collected as part of the Secondary Schools Curriculum and Staffing Survey. Preparations for the next survey are in hand.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47719]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Learning Support Units

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding each learning support unit has attracted for each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47740]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Funding for learning support units is allocated to local education authorities through the Standards Fund and the Excellence in Cities Programme. Decisions on the amount made available for each unit are made at the local level, this information is not held centrally. The tables show the funding available for each local education authority for learning support units.

Table 1 shows the funding available for learning support units and learning mentors for each authority in the Excellence in Cities programme—which commenced

in 1999. The table also includes those authorities with schools taking part in the Excellence Clusters programme. Funding for learning support units is made available alongside complementary support for learning mentors, it is not possible therefore to disaggregate this funding.

Since April 2000 funding has been available for authorities outside the Excellence in Cities programme to set up and run secondary school learning support units, including capital funding in the first two years. Table 2 shows the funding available for each authority.

Table 1: Funding made available to local education authorities for learning mentors and learning support units as part of the Excellence in Cities programme

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
201 City of London	—	6,000	10,000	10,000
202 Camden	345,033	1,102,900	1,316,9000	1,404,027
203 Greenwich	543,479	1,791,000	2,210,000	2,324,551
204 Hackney	395,438	1,422,300	1,792,300	1,868,779
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	235,290	789,000	975,000	1,035,888
206 Islington	368,499	1,315,600	1,646,600	1,720,802
207 Kensington and Chelsea	137,743	826,800	1,143,800	1,173,608
208 Lambeth	339,617	1,347,900	1,744,900	1,811,866
209 Lewisham	527,111	1,752,800	2,166,800	2,271,569
210 Southwark	544,656	1,870,400	2,342,400	2,451,420
211 Tower Hamlets	775,891	2,400,100	2,915,100	3,088,501
212 Wandsworth	385,498	1,311,100	1,615,100	1,689,983
213 Westminster	315,512	640,900	640,900	797,227
301 Barking and Dagenham	—	448,000	768,000	768,000
304 Brent	—	580,000	994,000	994,000
306 Croydon	—	—	274,500	470,500
307 Ealing	—	631,000	1,082,000	1,082,000
308 Enfield	—	—	893,000	1,522,000
309 Haringey	652,517	1,609,800	2,023,800	2,129,796
313 Hounslow	—	—	674,000	1,149,000
316 Newham	773,793	2,539,900	3,121,900	3,290,486
320 Waltham Forest	508,202	1,682,300	2,073,300	2,174,202
330 Birmingham	2,660,963	8,511,400	10,474,400	11,045,215
331 Coventry	—	—	300,500	515,000
331 Sandwell	—	—	991,000	1,689,000
334 North Solihull	—	68,110	272,440	272,440
335 Walsall	—	—	344,500	591,000
336 Wolverhampton	—	—	714,000	1,216,000
340 Knowsley	507,285	1,682,500	2,076,500	2,175,852
341 Liverpool	1,344,798	4,211,800	5,122,800	5,415,053
342 St. Helens	—	534,000	915,000	1,192,000
343 Sefton	—	308,000	528,000	528,000
343 Sefton	—	—	560,000	954,000
344 Wirral	—	1,035,000	1,774,000	1,774,000
352 Manchester	1,080,735	3,603,400	4,499,400	4,722,977
353 Oldham	—	—	815,000	1,390,000
354 Rochdale	—	626,000	1,073,000	1,073,000
355 Salford	478,338	1,615,700	2,002,700	2,091,173
357 Tameside	—	—	264,500	453,500
370 Barnsley	—	—	702,000	1,197,000
371 Doncaster	—	—	904,000	1,541,000
372 Rotherham	589,083	1,844,600	2,233,600	2,351,711
373 Sheffield	1,009,575	3,235,800	3,973,800	4,166,982
380 Bradford	1,212,970	3,846,000	4,688,000	4,936,502
382 Kirklees	—	—	662,500	914,000
383 Leeds	1,363,727	4,434,200	5,440,200	5,734,182
390 Gateshead	—	524,000	898,000	898,000
391 Newcastle	—	746,000	1,279,000	1,279,000
392 North Tyneside	—	490,000	840,000	840,000
393 South Tyneside	—	508,000	871,000	871,000
394 Sunderland	—	966,000	1,656,000	1,656,000
801 Bristol	—	734,000	1,258,000	1,258,000
805 Hartlepool	—	312,000	535,000	535,000
806 Middlesbrough	—	528,000	906,000	906,000
807 Redcar and Cleveland	—	512,000	877,000	877,000
808 Stockton on Tees	—	557,000	955,000	955,000
810 Kingston upon Hull	—	770,000	1,320,000	1,320,000
821 Luton	—	—	646,000	1,103,000
851 Portsmouth	—	—	327,000	560,500
856 Leicester City	—	798,000	1,368,000	1,368,000
861 Stoke on Trent	—	676,000	1,159,000	1,159,000

Table 1: Funding made available to local education authorities for learning mentors and learning support units as part of the Excellence in Cities programme

£

	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
876 Halton	—	408,000	699,000	699,000
886 Kent	—	—	265,500	455,500
888 Lancashire	—	—	460,000	787,500
889 Blackburn	—	—	526,000	896,000
890 Blackpool	—	—	376,000	641,000
892 Nottingham	—	810,000	1,389,000	1,389,000
909 Cumbria	—	—	221,500	380,000
Totals	17,095,753	68,963,310	102,588,140	188,647,203

Table 2: Funding made available for secondary school learning support units for each local education authority

	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
302 Barnet	104,444	207,923	108,190
303 Bexley	76,737	152,715	81,528
305 Bromley	90,269	179,604	94,134
306 Croydon	100,082	199,316	106,336
308 Enfield	119,215	188,351	—
310 Harrow	45,413	90,434	50,894
311 Havering	65,796	130,886	70,137
312 Hillingdon	76,440	152,159	82,275
313 Hounslow	95,421	150,758	—
314 Kingston upon Thames	31,778	63,163	33,983
315 Merton	43,599	86,832	42,277
317 Redbridge	96,398	191,959	93,204
318 Richmond upon Thames	39,925	79,494	40,502
319 Sutton	49,359	98,091	53,657
331 Coventry	115,993	231,034	124,845
332 Dudley	98,173	195,418	105,061
333 Sandwell	119,787	189,254	—
334 Solihull	67,243	133,715	—
335 Walsall	116,652	232,322	—
336 Wolverhampton	98,045	154,904	—
350 Bolton	95,230	189,593	102,415
351 Bury	56,231	111,921	61,366
353 Oldham	103,701	163,839	—
356 Stockport	80,302	159,840	83,543
357 Tameside	87,637	174,581	96,388
358 Trafford	85,793	170,873	83,443
359 Wigan	105,864	210,763	107,635
370 Barnsley	88,805	140,304	—
371 Doncaster	122,531	193,589	—
381 Calderdale	75,753	150,835	79,471
382 Kirklees	144,503	287,786	151,874
384 Wakefield	109,727	218,492	118,907
420 Isles of Scilly	—	—	392
800 Bath and North East Somerset	45,092	89,627	45,831
802 North Somerset	44,148	87,728	45,925
803 South Gloucestershire	61,608	122,428	60,108
811 East Riding of Yorkshire	85,826	170,622	87,239
812 North East Lincolnshire	66,098	131,666	74,804
813 North Lincolnshire	50,594	100,688	52,216
815 North Yorkshire	134,399	266,958	138,731
816 York	39,597	78,739	39,560
820 Bedfordshire	152,770	303,827	153,500
821 Luton	82,306	130,036	—
825 Buckinghamshire	109,791	218,114	113,024
826 Milton Keynes	57,230	113,916	53,464
830 Derbyshire	189,424	376,667	206,061
831 Derby City	88,322	175,933	90,822
835 Dorset	99,050	196,781	99,169
836 Poole	29,569	58,761	29,254
837 Bournemouth	41,625	82,798	42,071
840 Durham	176,300	351,084	185,379
841 Darlington	32,795	65,316	32,183
845 East Sussex	126,839	252,431	132,758

Table 2: Funding made available for secondary school learning support units for each local education authority

	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
846 Brighton and Hove	65,765	131,003	67,828
850 Hampshire	234,510	465,798	247,385
851 Portsmouth	51,031	101,608	55,268
852 Southampton	65,209	129,861	69,736
855 Leicestershire	150,121	298,210	156,217
857 Rutland	—	—	7,200
860 Staffordshire	239,668	476,522	243,660
865 Wiltshire	92,951	184,629	97,282
866 Swindon	47,619	94,711	47,057
867 Bracknell Forest Borough Council	19,681	39,070	18,762
868 Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	32,904	65,333	33,197
869 West Berkshire District Council	34,899	69,266	91,245
870 Reading	28,655	57,017	30,023
871 Slough Borough Council	38,650	76,948	40,802
872 Wokingham District Council	32,338	51,092	33,257
873 Cambridgeshire County Council	114,898	228,378	115,592
874 Peterborough City Council	72,818	145,039	71,452
875 Cheshire County Council	183,633	365,125	191,476
877 Warrington Borough Council	58,325	116,015	57,882
878 Devon County Council	152,674	303,558	167,370
879 City of Plymouth	91,556	182,248	90,946
880 Torbay Borough Council	43,682	86,964	42,559
881 Essex County Council	347,601	691,295	358,723
882 Southend-on-Sea Borough Council	54,138	107,769	54,222
883 Thurrock Council	42,824	85,281	43,083
884 Herefordshire Council	34,041	67,639	37,144
885 Worcestershire County Council	151,530	301,190	170,226
886 Kent County Council	398,629	792,974	381,112
887 Medway Council	82,329	163,760	80,705
888 Lancashire County Council	390,057	776,668	388,755
889 Blackburn with Darwen	68,849	108,778	—
890 Blackpool Borough Council	47,634	75,257	—
891 Nottinghamshire County Council	257,798	513,072	257,438
893 Shropshire	63,846	126,891	67,111
894 Telford and Wrekin	58,582	116,643	63,814
908 Cornwall	142,179	282,906	146,578
909 Cumbria	151,123	300,689	156,601
916 Gloucestershire	135,010	268,288	135,549
919 Hertfordshire	268,889	534,290	272,923
921 Isle of Wight	63,727	126,915	64,298
925 Lincolnshire	158,323	314,666	169,582
926 Norfolk	178,895	355,771	192,023
928 Northamptonshire	214,490	426,692	211,403
929 Northumberland	137,478	273,534	138,617
931 Oxfordshire	143,022	284,270	154,613
933 Somerset	115,142	228,875	123,694
935 Suffolk	217,129	431,838	224,560
936 Surrey	187,352	372,133	191,804
937 Warwickshire	116,483	231,479	120,896
938 West Sussex	153,803	305,654	151,043
Totals	10,752,719	20,988,480	9,987,270

Note:
Includes capital and recurrent funding in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been provided to each learning support unit in each year since their creation, broken down by local education authority. [48274]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply provided earlier today to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green).

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning support units in England *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47745]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are unable to provide a full breakdown of how many learning support units per local education authority have opened or closed since 1997 as we do not collate this information centrally.

However, the table does show a breakdown of the learning support units that are funded through Excellence in Cities as at 1 February 2002, including those proposed as part of the pilot set up for EiC Phase 1 Primary schools. Not all are up and running yet, the figures reflect the numbers and LEA location for approved learning support unit plans.

Number of LSUs funded through the Excellence in Cities programme

	Secondary	Primary
Barking and Dagenham	8	—
Barnsley	9	—
Birmingham	10	4
Blackburn with Darwen	4	—
Blackpool	8	—
Bradford (2)	14	4
Brent (2)	6	—
Bristol	4	—
Camden	2	2
Corp of London	—	—
Doncaster	17	—
Ealing (2)	4	—
Enfield	6	—
Gateshead	6	—
Greenwich	14	7
Hackney	8	2
Halton	9	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	5	1
Haringey	5	2
Hartlepool	6	—
Hounslow	7	—
Islington	7	2
Kensington and Chelsea	4	1
Kingston upon Hull	9	—
Knowsley	11	2
Lambeth	6	2
Leeds	15	5
Leicester City	4	—
Lewisham	12	2
Liverpool	6	5
Luton	12	—
Manchester	20	3
Middlesbrough	6	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	12	—
Newham	15	3
North Tyneside	4	—
Nottingham	21	—
Oldham	8	—
Redcar and Cleveland	4	—
Rochdale	14	—
Rotherham	17	2
Salford	6	2
Sandwell	7	—
Sefton (2)	12	—
Sheffield	9	3
Solihull	3	—
Southwark	7	2
South Tyneside (2)	11	—
Stockton-on-Tees	5	—
Stoke on Trent	11	—
St. Helens (2)	5	—
Sunderland (2)	6	—
Tower Hamlets	14	2
Waltham Forest	8	4
Wandsworth	4	2
Westminster	8	1
Wirral (2)	16	—
Totals	491	65

National School Leadership College/ General Teaching Council

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been received by the *(a)* National School Leadership College and *(b)* General Teaching Council from her Department in each year since its creation. [47741]

Mr. Timms: Grant in aid funding provided by this Department to the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the General Teaching Council (GTC) is as follows:

£

	NCSL	GTC
2000–01	[1]0	[2]4,000,000
2001–02	27,797,000	9,880,000
2002–03	60,000,000	2,911,000

[1] Grant in aid payments to the NCSL began in April 2001.
[2] Grant in aid payments to the GTC began in September 2000. Funding in 2000–01 therefore covered the period September 2000 to March 2001 inclusive.

Excellence in Cities Projects

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Excellence in Cities projects in England opened in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47746]

Mr. Timms: Phase 1 of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) project was launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the then Secretary of State in March 1999. Phase 2 was announced in March 2000 together with a primary pilot extending EiC to primary schools in the Phase 1 areas. In October 2000, Phase 3 and new Excellence Clusters, targeting smaller pockets of social deprivation within LEAs not included in the main programme, were announced. The areas covered by EiC partnerships, ie local education authorities working with their schools, are consistent with LEA boundaries. Excellence Clusters, however, are clusters of schools within an LEA boundary.

Excellence in Cities Phase 1 implemented from September 1999

Birmingham
Bradford
Camden
Corporation of London
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
Rotherham
Salford
Sheffield
Southwark
Tower Hamlets

Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster

Excellence in Cities Phase 2 implemented from September 2000

Barking and Dagenham
Brent
Bristol
Ealing
Gateshead
Halton
Hartlepool
Kingston Upon Hull
Leicester City
Middlesbrough
Newcastle Upon Tyne
North Tyneside
City of Nottingham
Redcar and Cleveland
Rochdale
Sefton (seven Bootle schools only)
Solihull (three North Solihull schools only)
South Tyneside
St. Helens
Stockton on Tees
Stoke on Trent
Sunderland
Wirral

Excellence in Cities Phase 3 implemented from September 2001

Barnsley
Blackburn with Darwin
Blackpool
Doncaster
Enfield
Hounslow
Luton
Oldham
Sandwell
Sefton (the part not included in Phase 2)
Wolverhampton

Excellence Clusters implemented from September 2001 (cluster names in brackets)

Coventry
Croydon
Kirklees (Dewbury and Batley)
Lancashire (East Lancashire)
Kirklees (Huddersfield)
Portsmouth
Kent (Shepway)
Tameside
Walsall
Cumbria (West Cumbria)
Lancashire (West Lancashire)

Excellence Cluster implemented in January 2002

Thurrock (Tilbury and Chadwell).

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been provided to each Excellence in Cities project in each year since its creation, broken down by local education authority. [48273]

Mr. Timms: Excellence in Cities (EiC) now covers 58 local education authority areas.

The tables show details of the funding provided to LEAs for EiC Phase 1, 2, and 3 partnerships, and the 12 Excellence Clusters.

Allocations to LEAs for EiC Phase 1 partnerships which started from September 1999

£000

LEA	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Birmingham	4,372	20,157	21,824	46,353
Bradford	2,283	8,780	10,767	21,930
Camden	848	2,781	3,579	7,208
City of London	5	8	52	65
Greenwich	1,139	4,115	6,453	11,707
Hackney	879	3,419	4,957	9,255
Hammersmith and Fulham	340	1,777	2,912	5,029
Haringey	835	3,002	4,297	8,134
Islington	508	2,296	4,659	7,463
Kensington and Chelsea	406	1,744	2,586	4,736
Knowsley	769	3,806	6,420	10,995
Lambeth	627	2,048	4,211	6,886
Leeds	2,410	9,838	13,322	25,570
Lewisham	738	3,328	4,006	8,072
Liverpool	2,358	9,971	13,053	25,382
Manchester	1,943	9,507	10,987	22,437
Newham	1,479	4,850	5,491	11,820
Rotherham	1,168	6,396	5,879	13,443
Salford	743	5,348	4,883	10,974
Sheffield	1,984	7,760	13,029	22,773
Southwark	784	2,778	4,753	8,315
Tower Hamlets	1,229	4,522	5,434	11,185
Waltham Forest	866	3,423	3,849	8,138
Wandsworth	954	3,883	4,003	8,840
Westminster	530	1,048	1,297	2,875

Allocations to LEAs for EiC Phase 2 partnerships which started from September 2000

£000

LEA	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Barking and Dagenham	1,078	3,335	4,413
Brent	1,245	4,881	6,126
Bristol	1,424	5,201	6,625
Ealing	1,442	3,752	5,194
Gateshead	2,005	5,511	7,516
Halton	868	3,483	4,351
Hartlepool	1,104	2,442	3,546
Kingston Upon Hull	1,670	5,068	6,738
Leicester City	2,403	5,128	7,531
Middlesbrough	889	3,193	4,082
Newcastle	1,976	4,739	6,715
North Tyneside	1,329	3,668	4,997
Nottingham	1,522	5,274	6,796
Redcar and Cleveland	926	3,035	3,961
Rochdale	1,408	4,815	6,223
St. Helens	1,746	4,594	6,340
Sefton	819	2,944	3,763
Solihull	366	667	1,033
South Tyneside	1,090	2,990	4,080
Stockton on Tees	1,582	4,982	6,564
Stoke on Trent	1,441	4,984	6,425
Sunderland	1,900	6,365	8,265
Wirral	1,931	6,197	8,125

Allocations to LEAs for EiC Phase 3 partnerships which started from September 2001

£000

LEA	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Barnsley	20	1,298	1,318
Blackburn	20	1,306	1,326
Blackpool	20	936	956
Doncaster	20	1,555	1,575

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Allocations to LEAs for EiC Phase 3 partnerships which started from September 2001

£000

LEA	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Enfield	20	1,584	1,604
Hounslow	20	1,456	1,476
Luton	20	1,291	1,311
Oldham	20	1,851	1,871
Sandwell	20	1,973	1,993
Sefton	20	2,522	2,542
Wolverhampton	20	1,982	2,002

Allocations to LEAs for Excellence Clusters which started from September 2001

£000

LEA	Cluster	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Coventry	Coventry	10	611	621
Croydon	Croydon	10	559	569
Cumbria	West Cumbria	10	454	464
Kent	Shepway	10	542	552

Allocations to LEAs for Excellence Clusters which started from September 2001

£000

LEA	Cluster	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Kirklees	Dewsbury and Batley	10	688	698
Kirklees	Huddersfield	10	658	668
Lancashire	West Lancashire	10	399	409
Lancashire	East Lancashire	10	540	550
Portsmouth	Portsmouth	10	663	673
Tameside	Tameside	10	540	550
Thurrock	Tilbury and Chadwell	—	229	229
Walsall	Walsall	10	399	409

Education Action Zones

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many education action zones in England *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47747]

Mr. Timms: All 73 of the statutory Education Action Zones (EAZs) that have been opened are still in operation. The table shows when each of the EAZs were opened.

EAZ	LEA	Date zone started
Barnsley	Barnsley	September 1998
Blackburn	Blackburn with Darwen	September 1998
Lambeth	Lambeth	September 1998
Leicester	Leicester City	September 1998
Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	September 1998
New Addington (Croydon)	Croydon	September 1998
Newcastle	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	September 1998
Newham	Newham	September 1998
Next Steps (Grimsby)	North-east Lincolnshire	September 1998
North Somerset (Weston)	North Somerset	September 1998
Salford and Trafford	Salford/Trafford	September 1998
Herefordshire	Herefordshire	December 1998
Aston (Birmingham)	Birmingham	January 1999
Brighton	Brighton and Hove	January 1999
East Basildon	Essex	January 1999
Halifax	Calderdale	January 1999
Kingston-upon-Hull	City of Kingston-upon-Hull	January 1999
Leigh (Wigan)	Wigan	January 1999
North Southwark	Southwark	January 1999
Nottingham	City of Nottingham	January 1999
Plymouth	City of Plymouth	January 1999
Shard End/Kitts Green (Birmingham)	Birmingham	January 1999
Sheffield North-east	Sheffield	January 1999
South Tyneside	South Tyneside	January 1999
Thetford (Norfolk)	Norfolk	January 1999
Greenwich	Greenwich	September 1999
Oxford	Oxfordshire	September 1999
Dudley	Dudley	December 1999
East Manchester	Manchester	December 1999
Hackney	Hackney	December 1999
Hastings	East Sussex	December 1999
Kent Somerset	Kent/Somerset	December 1999
NE Derbyshire (Coalfields)	City of Derby	December 1999
North Islington	Islington	December 1999
Preston	Lancashire	December 1999
Slough	Slough	December 1999
Southend	Southend on Sea	December 1999
Telford and Wrekin	Telford and Wrekin	December 1999
Wednesbury	Sandwell	December 1999
Wythenshawe	Manchester	December 1999
Ashington	Northumberland	January 2000
Barrow	Cumbria	January 2000
Bedford	Bedfordshire	January 2000
Breightmet and Tonge (Bolton)	Bolton	January 2000
Bridgewater	Somerset	January 2000
Cambourne Pool Redruth	Cornwall	January 2000
Clacton and Harwich	Essex	January 2000

EAZ	LEA	Date zone started
Corby	Northamptonshire	January 2000
Coventry	Coventry	January 2000
Dingle Granby Toxteth	Liverpool	January 2000
Downham and Bellingham	Lewisham	January 2000
Easington and Seaham	Easington and Seaham	January 2000
East Cleveland	Redcar and Cleveland	January 2000
Ellesmere Port (Epicentre Leap)	Cheshire	January 2000
Gillingham	Medway	January 2000
Gloucester	Gloucester	January 2000
Leigh Park (Hampshire)	Hampshire	January 2000
Peterlee	Durham	January 2000
South Bra[illegible]rd	Bradford	January 2000
Speke Garst[illegible]	Liverpool	January 2000
Stoke on Trent (Rainbow Zone	Stoke-on-Trent	January 2000
Sunderland	Sunderland	January 2000
Wakefield	Wakefield	January 2000
Withernsea	East riding of Yorkshire	January 2000
Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton	January 2000
City of Bristol	City of Bristol	April 2000
Derby NE (City of)	Derby	April 2000
Great Yarmouth	Norfolk	April 2000
North Stockton	Stockton-on-Tees	April 2000
NW Shropshire	Shropshire	April 2000
Sheffield SE	Sheffield	April 2000
South East Virtual	Essex and Bromley	April 2000
Westminster	Westminster	May 2000

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding each education action zone has attracted for each year since 1997. [47506]

Mr. Timms: The Government grant to each statutory education action zone (EAZ) has been as follows:

EAZ	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Ashington	0.00	76,133.13	641,138.71	1,059,839.00	1,777,110.84
Aston (Birmingham)	317,709.35	877,239.43	772,750.00	734,000.00	2,701,698.78
Barnsley	507,500.00	887,635.86	866,326.23	951,163.82	3,212,625.91
Barrow	0.00	10,000.00	714,000.00	721,000.00	1,445,000.00
Bedford	0.00	35,000.00	1,011,222.30	789,000.00	1,835,222.30
Blackburn	613,635.00	960,814.86	909,000.00	738,000.00	3,221,449.86
Breightmet and Tonge (Bolton)	0.00	10,000.00	800,183.76	881,000.00	1,691,183.76
Bridgewater	0.00	19,710.68	570,927.20	706,000.00	1,296,637.88
Brighton	226,124.00	795,193.01	877,790.12	736,000.00	2,635,107.13
Cambourne Pool Redruth	0.00	127,892.54	712,600.00	852,604.17	1,693,096.71
City of Bristol	0.00	0.00	628,000.00	837,990.15	1,465,990.15
Clacton and Harwich	0.00	52,706.94	909,500.00	859,000.00	1,821,206.94
Corby	0.00	0.00	781,000.00	844,000.00	1,625,000.00
Coventry	0.00	41,500.00	721,683.00	1,019,000.00	1,782,183.00
Derby North East (City of)	0.00	0.00	583,000.00	798,000.00	1,381,000.00
Dingle Granby Toxteth	0.00	35,000.00	726,347.77	947,991.15	1,709,338.92
Downham and Bellingham	0.00	10,000.00	659,587.00	811,000.00	1,480,587.00
Dudley	0.00	108,500.00	700,000.00	914,000.00	1,749,500.00
Easington and Seaham	0.00	47,005.82	639,000.00	1,074,000.00	1,760,005.82
East Basildon	367,500.00	918,304.02	823,798.25	695,000.00	2,804,802.27
East Cleveland	0.00	111,108.66	860,906.73	1,009,000.00	1,981,015.39
East Manchester	0.00	234,076.05	765,981.00	808,998.00	1,809,055.05
Ellesmere Port (Epicentre Leap)	0.00	34,741.92	667,032.19	757,500.00	1,459,274.11
Gillingham	0.00	1,867,704.62	743,671.12	897,000.00	1,827,375.74
Gloucester	0.00	25,000.00	831,000.00	1,066,000.00	1,922,000.00
Great Yarmouth	0.00	0.00	684,000.00	975,000.00	1,659,000.00
Greenwich	0.00	496,567.76	898,000.00	1,048,000.00	2,442,567.76
Hackney	0.00	86,415.16	728,720.67	909,000.00	1,724,135.83
Halifax	255,000.00	872,025.63	849,817.29	1,082,555.70	3,059,398.62
Hastings	0.00	19,000.00	867,100.00	861,387.94	1,747,487.94
Herefordshire	605,000.00	862,485.51	871,000.00	683,800.00	3,021,485.51
Kent Somerset	0.00	6,460.16	653,834.08	858,000.00	1,518,294.24
Kingston upon Hull	365,048.00	876,127.25	916,121.15	836,708.00	2,994,004.40
Lambeth	587,500.00	876,363.17	876,446.76	815,106.48	3,155,416.41
Leicester	617,500.00	876,201.00	813,266.00	872,561.61	3,179,528.61
Leigh (Wigan)	252,500.00	829,179.61	878,898.41	837,000.00	2,797,578.02
Leigh Park (Hampshire)	0.00	37,500.00	710,551.00	878,600.00	1,626,651.00
Middlesbrough	517,500.00	866,664.52	837,121.56	847,297.00	3,068,583.08

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EAZ	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total
North East Derbyshire (Colfirlds)	0.00	108,552.53	832,043.62	890,000.00	1,830,596.15
New Addington (Croydon)	517,500.00	832,884.38	827,188.47	753,127.00	2,930,699.85
Newcastle	592,166.50	947,381.87	890,330.27	788,000.00	3,217,878.64
Newham	617,500.00	913,853.24	869,000.00	894,000.00	3,294,353.24
Next Steps (Grimsby)	613,457.73	916,885.00	858,991.94	896,708.00	3,286,042.67
North Islington	0.00	10,000.00	934,000.00	918,000.00	1,862,000.00
North Somerset (Weston)	512,500.00	871,639.87	841,745.90	708,200.00	2,934,084.87
North Southwark	356,472.00	861,652.13	884,002.00	809,000.00	2,911,126.13
North Stockton	0.00	0.00	445,000.00	1,000,000.00	1,445,000.00
Nottingham	267,500.00	818,487.33	910,085.18	881,000.00	2,877,072.51
North West Shropshire	0.00	10,000.00	544,250.00	654,000.00	1,208,250.00
Oxford	0.00	324,190.17	820,000.00	819,000.00	1,963,190.17
Peterlee	0.00	35,240.98	540,000.00	969,000.00	1,544,240.98
Plymouth	262,500.00	828,387.04	875,730.00	755,251.76	2,721,868.80
Preston	0.00	73,681.91	534,830.00	1,106,387.00	1,714,898.91
Salford and Trafford	617,500.00	854,864.40	856,523.40	857,000.00	3,185,887.80
Shard End/Kitts Green (Birmingham)	267,500.00	805,119.67	835,303.59	747,000.00	2,654,923.96
Sheffield North East	312,500.00	906,328.02	917,880.22	817,000.00	2,953,708.24
Sheffield South East	0.00	4,500.00	550,000.00	559,000.00	1,113,500.00
Slough	0.00	168,635.54	529,494.00	869,090.00	1,567,217.54
South Bradford	0.00	197.59	712,000.00	1,004,121.00	1,716,318.59
South East Virtual	0.00	0.00	864,400.00	978,000.00	1,824,400.00
South Tyneside	367,500.00	863,210.34	921,957.00	744,655.98	2,897,323.32
Southend	0.00	230,000.00	716,000.00	848,000.00	1,794,000.00
Speke Garston	0.00	25,000.00	712,345.00	659,306.00	1,396,651.00
Stoke on Trent (Rainbow Zone)	0.00	251,607.02	753,000.00	757,791.26	1,762,398.28
Sunderland	0.00	85,225.00	473,469.00	807,551.00	1,366,245.00
Telford and Wrekin	0.00	130,525.83	685,377.36	854,000.00	1,669,903.19
Thetford (Norfolk)	267,500.00	779,567.64	824,384.87	829,000.00	2,700,452.51
Wakefield	0.00	36,000.00	690,600.00	822,024.00	1,548,624.00
Wednesbury	0.00	51,857.88	929,663.00	632,100.00	1,613,620.88
Westminster	0.00	0.00	493,000.00	699,000.00	1,192,000.00
Withernsea	0.00	92,318.51	910,622.00	1,008,655.00	2,011,595.51
Wolverhampton	0.00	137,155.32	637,802.00	930,327.22	1,705,284.54
Wythenshawe	0.00	37,604.00	789,000.00	879,000.00	1,705,604.00

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been provided to each education action zone in each year since its creation, broken down by local education authority. [48272]

Mr. Timms: The Government grant to each statutory education action zone (EAZ) has been as follows:

EAZ	LEA	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Ashington	Northumberland	0.00	76,133.13	641,138.71	1,059,839.00	1,777,110.84
Aston (Birmingham)	Birmingham	317,709.35	877,239.43	772,750.00	734,000.00	2,701,698.78
Barnsley	Barnsley	507,500.00	887,635.86	866,326.23	951,163.82	3,212,625.91
Barrow	Cumbria	0.00	10,000.00	714,000.00	721,000.00	1,445,000.00
Bedford	Bedfordshire	0.00	35,000.00	1,011,222.30	789,000.00	1,835,222.30
Blackburn	Blackburn with Darwen	613,635.00	960,814.86	909,000.00	738,000.00	3,221,449.86
Breightmet and Tonge (Bolton)	Bolton	0.00	10,000.00	800,183.76	881,000.00	1,691,183.76
Bridgewater	Somerset	0.00	19,710.68	570,927.20	706,000.00	1,296,637.88
Brighton	Brighton and Hove	226,124.00	796,193.01	877,790.12	736,000.00	2,635,107.13
Cambourne Pool Redruth	Cornwall	0.00	127,892.54	712,600.00	852,604.17	1,693,096.71
City of Bristol	City of Bristol	0.00	0.00	628,000.00	837,990.15	1,465,990.15
Clacton and Harwich	Essex	0.00	52,706.94	909,500.00	859,000.00	1,821,206.94
Corby	Northamptonshire	0.00	0.00	781,000.00	844,000.00	1,625,000.00
Coventry	Coventry	0.00	41,500.00	721,683.00	1,019,000.00	1,782,183.00
Derby NE (City of)	Derby	0.00	0.00	583,000.00	798,000.00	1,381,000.00
Dingle Granby Toxteth	Liverpool	0.00	35,000.00	726,347.77	947,991.15	1,709,338.92
Downham and Bellingham	Lewisham	0.00	10,000.00	659,587.00	811,000.00	1,480,587.00
Dudley	Dudley	0.00	108,500.00	700,000.00	914,000.00	1,749,500.00
Easington and Seaham	Easington and Seaham	0.00	47,005.82	639,000.00	1,074,000.00	1,760,005.82
East Basildon	Essex	367,500.00	918,504.02	823,798.25	695,000.00	2,804,802.27
East Cleveland	Redcar and Cleveland	0.00	111,108.66	860,906.73	1,009,000.00	1,981,015.39
East Manchester	Manchester	0.00	234,076.05	765,981.00	808,998.00	1,809,055.05
Ellesmere Port (Epicentre Leap)	Cheshire	0.00	34,741.92	667,032.19	757,500.00	1,459,274.11
Gillingham	Medway	0.00	1,867,704.62	743,671.12	897,000.00	1,827,375.74
Gloucester	Gloucester	0.00	25,000.00	831,000.00	1,066,000.00	1,922,000.00
Great Yarmouth	Norfolk	0.00	0.00	684,000.00	975,000.00	1,659,000.00
Greenwich	Greenwich	0.00	496,567.76	898,000.00	1,048,000.00	2,442,567.76
Hackney	Hackney	0.00	86,415.16	728,720.67	909,000.00	1,724,135.83
Halifax	Calderdale	255,000.00	872,025.63	849,817.29	1,082,555.70	3,059,398.62
Hastings	East Sussex	0.00	19,000.00	867,100.00	861,387.94	1,747,487.94

EAZ	LEA	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total
Herefordshire	Herefordshire	605,000.00	862,485.51	871,000.00	683,800.00	3,021,485.51
Kent Somerset	Kent/Somerset	0.00	6,460.16	653,834.08	858,000.00	1,518,294.24
Kingston upon Hull	City of Kingston upon Hull	365,048.00	876,127.25	916,121.15	836,708.00	2,994,004.40
Lambeth	Lambeth	587,500.00	876,363.17	876,446.76	815,106.48	3,155,416.41
Leicester	Leicester City	617,500.00	876,201.00	813,266.00	872,561.61	3,179,528.61
Leigh (Wigan)	Wigan	252,500.00	829,179.61	878,898.41	837,000.00	2,797,578.02
Leigh Park (Hampshire)	Hampshire	0.00	37,500.00	710,551.00	878,600.00	1,626,651.00
Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough	517,500.00	866,664.52	837,121.56	847,297.00	3,068,583.08
NE Derbyshire (Colfirlds)	City of Derby	0.00	108,552.53	832,043.62	890,000.00	1,830,596.15
New Addington (Croydon)	Croydon	517,500.00	832,884.38	827,188.47	753,127.00	2,930,699.85
Newcastle	Newcastle upon Tyne	592,166.50	947,381.87	890,330.27	788,000.00	3,217,878.64
Newham	Newham	617,500.00	913,853.24	869,000.00	894,000.00	3,294,353.24
Next Steps (Grimsby)	North East Lincolnshire	613,457.73	916,885.00	858,991.94	896,708.00	3,286,042.67
North Islington	Islington	0.00	10,000.00	934,000.00	918,000.00	1,862,000.00
North Somerset (Weston)	North Somerset	512,500.00	871,639.87	841,745.00	708,200.00	2,934,084.87
North Southwark	Southwark	356,472.00	861,652.13	884,002.00	809,000.00	2,911,126.13
North Stockton	Stockton on Tees	0.00	0.00	445,000.00	1,000,000.00	1,445,000.00
Nottingham	City of Nottingham	267,500.00	818,487.33	910,085.18	881,000.00	2,877,072.51
NW Shropshire	Shropshire	0.00	10,000.00	544,250.00	654,000.00	1,208,250.00
Oxford	Oxfordshire	0.00	324,190.17	820,000.00	819,000.00	1,963,190.17
Peterlee	Durham	0.00	35,240.98	540,000.00	969,000.00	1,544,240.98
Plymouth	City of Plymouth	262,500.00	828,387.04	875,730.00	755,251.76	2,721,868.80
Preston	Lancashire	0.00	73,681.91	534,830.00	1,106,387.00	1,714,898.91
Salford and Trafford	Salford/Trafford	617,500.00	854,864.40	856,523.40	857,000.00	3,185,887.80
Shard End/Kitts Green (Birmingham)	Birmingham	267,500.00	805,119.67	835,303.59	747,000.00	2,654,923.96
Sheffield NE	Sheffield	312,500.00	906,328.02	917,880.22	817,000.00	2,953,708.24
Sheffield SE	Sheffield	0.00	4,500.00	550,000.00	559,000.00	1,113,500.00
Slough	Slough	0.00	168,633.54	529,494.00	869,090.00	1,567,217.54
South Bradford	Bradford	0.00	197.59	712,000.00	1,004,121.00	1,716,318.59
South East Virtual	Essex and Bromley	0.00	0.00	864,400.00	978,000.00	1,824,400.00
South Tyneside	South Tyneside	367,500.00	863,210.34	921,957.00	744,655.98	2,897,323.32
Southend	Southend on Sea	0.00	230,000.00	716,000.00	848,000.00	1,794,000.00
Speke Garston	Liverpool	0.00	25,000.00	712,345.00	659,306.00	1,396,651.00
Stoke on Trent (Rainbow Zone)	Stoke on Trent	0.00	251,607.02	753,000.00	757,791.26	1,762,398.28
Sunderland	Sunderland	0.00	85,225.00	473,469.00	807,551.00	1,366,245.00
Telford and Wrekin	Telford and Wrekin	0.00	130,525.83	685,377.36	854,000.00	1,669,903.19
Thetford (Norfolk)	Norfolk	267,500.00	779,567.64	824,384.87	829,000.00	2,700,452.51
Wakefield	Wakefield	0.00	36,000.00	690,600.00	822,024.00	1,548,624.00
Wednesbury	Sandwell	0.00	51,857.88	929,663.00	632,100.00	1,613,620.88
Westminster	Westminster	0.00	0.00	493,000.00	699,000.00	1,192,000.00
Withernsea	East Riding of Yorkshire	0.00	92,318.51	310,622.00	1,008,655.00	2,011,595.51
Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton	0.00	137,155.32	137,802.00	630,327.22	1,705,284.54
Wythenshawe	Manchester	0.00	37,604.00	789,000.00	879,000.00	1,705,604.00

Independent Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* both primary and secondary independent schools have (i) opened and (ii) closed in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47750]

Mr. Timms: The table shows the number of independent schools that have opened and closed in each local education authority area in England in each of the last five years. The register of independent schools records the age range of pupils in each school which often spans one or more of the early years, primary, secondary and post-16 phases. The register does not categorise independent schools as primary or secondary because many do not conform with maintained school age ranges; for this reason we are unable to distinguish between primary and secondary schools listed in the table.

Number of independent schools that have opened and closed since 1997 in each LEA

		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	Reference	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed
North East											
Hartlepool	805	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesbrough	806	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Durham	840	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Northumberland	929	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Gateshead	390	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	391	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	393	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Sunderland	394	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
North West and Merseyside											
North West											
Halton	876	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Warrington	877	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1

Number of independent schools that have opened and closed since 1997 in each LEA

		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	Reference	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed	Opened	Closed
Cheshire	875	—	1	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	—
Cumbria	909	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	1	2
Bolton	350	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Bury	351	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Manchester	352	1	1	1	—	1	1	2	2	1	1
Rochdale	354	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Salford	355	1	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—
Stockport	356	—	2	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Trafford	358	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Blackburn with Darwen	889	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—
Blackpool	890	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Lancashire	888	3	1	3	—	3	1	3	1	4	1
Merseyside											
Knowsley	340	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Liverpool	341	—	—	1	—	1	2	2	1	1	—
Sefton	343	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Wirral	344	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—
Yorkshire and Humber											
East Riding of Yorkshire	811	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	810	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
York	816	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	815	1	2	—	1	—	2	—	1	—	3
Barnsley	370	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	371	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	373	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	380	—	2	1	1	—	—	1	—	1	1
Calderdale	381	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	382	—	—	2	2	1	—	—	—	1	—
Leeds	383	1	—	—	2	1	3	—	—	—	1
East Midlands											
Derby	831	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	830	1	2	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	1
Leicester	856	—	1	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	1
Leicestershire	855	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	2	—
Lincolnshire	925	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	1	1
Northamptonshire	928	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	1	—	1
Nottingham	892	—	4	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	891	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
West Midlands											
Herefordshire	884	2	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	—
Worcestershire	885	—	1	1	1	—	2	—	3	—	1
Telford and Wrekin	894	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Shropshire	893	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1
Stoke-on-Trent	861	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Staffordshire	860	—	—	1	—	—	1	2	—	—	2
Warwickshire	937	1	1	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	2
Birmingham	330	2	3	1	—	3	3	1	3	1	3
Coventry	331	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Sandwell	333	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull	334	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Walsall	335	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	336	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern											
Luton	821	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	820	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Cambridgeshire	873	3	2	1	—	2	1	1	—	1	3
Southend-on-Sea	882	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Essex	881	—	1	1	2	—	1	—	2	—	—
Hertfordshire	919	—	1	1	1	—	3	—	1	1	1
Norfolk	926	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	935	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	2	—	1
London											
Inner London											
Camden	202	1	—	1	2	2	1	—	—	—	—
Hackney	204	4	1	—	3	2	—	4	1	2	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	205	3	1	3	1	—	—	—	2	—	1
Haringey	309	1	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—
Islington	206	1	2	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	207	2	—	1	1	1	1	3	—	1	—
Lambeth	208	2	—	5	1	3	4	2	4	2	1
Lewisham	209	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	1	—
Newham	316	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Southwark	210	1	2	—	1	1	2	1	—	1	1
Tower Hamlets	211	1	1	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	1

Number of independent schools that have opened and closed since 1997 in each LEA

		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	Reference	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Opened*	*Closed*
Wandsworth	212	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	1	—
Westminster	213	—	1	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	1
Outer London											
Barnet	302	3	3	—	1	2	—	—	1	3	—
Brent	304	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	2	—
Bromley	305	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Croydon	306	—	3	1	—	2	—	3	1	1	—
Ealing	307	—	2	—	—	3	1	—	—	1	—
Enfield	308	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Greenwich	203	2	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Havering	311	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hillingdon	312	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Hounslow	313	—	—	1	1	—	2	—	1	—	1
Kingston upon Thames	314	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Merton	315	1	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Redbridge	317	1	—	1	1	—	1	1	—	1	—
Richmond upon Thames	318	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Sutton	319	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Waltham Forest	320	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
South East											
Windsor and Maidenhead	868	—	3	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
West Berkshire	869	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	1	—	1
Reading	870	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Wokingham	872	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes	826	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Buckinghamshire	825	1	2	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Brighton and Hove	846	1	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	2	1
East Sussex	845	3	—	1	2	2	4	1	4	1	1
Southampton	852	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	850	—	2	—	1	—	4	2	2	—	—
Isle of Wight	921	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Medway	887	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	886	5	8	6	1	5	2	1	2	5	3
Oxfordshire	931	—	2	—	3	2	3	—	3	1	1
Surrey	936	4	7	—	2	1	3	—	1	1	2
West Sussex	938	1	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	—	2
South West											
Bath and North East Somerset	800	—	1	1	1	—	1	—	3	—	—
City of Bristol	801	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1
South Gloucestershire	803	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Cornwall	908	—	—	1	2	1	1	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	420	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Torbay	880	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Plymouth	879	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—
Devon	878	1	4	—	—	—	4	—	—	1	3
Bournemouth	837	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Poole	836	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Dorset	835	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	—
Gloucestershire	916	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	1
Somerset	933	1	2	1	2	4	4	—	1	2	—
Swindon	866	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	865	1	1	1	—	1	2	2	—	1	—

Teacher Work Load

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department has estimated the amount of time spent by *(a)* head teachers, *(b)* deputy head teachers, *(c)* teachers and *(d)* classroom assistants dealing with (i) Government-produced circulars and (ii) other work, expressed as a proportion of total time worked by head teachers, for each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [47752]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold the information requested. The study on teacher work load that we commissioned last year from PricewaterhouseCoopers suggests that some 20 per cent. of teachers' time is spent on tasks not directly related to classroom teaching. We recently offered practical advice on how these tasks might be transferred to support staff and Information and Communications Technology. Beyond that, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) will be reporting on work load shortly. The STRB has been asked among other things to look at possible contractual changes to help teachers to focus on the core of their job.

Edexcel

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the results of the assessment of examination board Edexcel; and if she will make a statement. [47743]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The results of the assessment of examination board Edexcel were published on 1 February by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and made available on its website. http://www.qca.org.uk/news/press/20020201.asp

My Department made a press announcement on that day as did QCA and the Edexcel Foundation. QCA will continuously review Edexcel's performance against the eight action points agreed between Edexcel and the QCA. The QCA will not be publishing progress reports. However, the first four action points have been satisfactorily met and a report of a review of performance will be made in the autumn.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council to promote and resource English for speakers of other languages, with particular reference to vocational needs. [47878]

John Healey: Large numbers of people need access to good quality English language provision if they are to have equal chances of success at work, at home and in society in general. The Government are fully committed to providing tuition for adults who do not speak English as their first language as part of 'Skills for Life', our national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. A core curriculum for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was published in December 2001 and 2,500 tutors have received training in its use. We are also developing ESOL diagnostic tools and learning materials. We are running a national promotional campaign to boost demand for literacy, language and numeracy learning which has so far resulted in over 70,000 calls to the promotional hotline.

Improving adult basic skills, including language skills, is also one of the Learning and Skills Council's most important objectives. Its priority was emphasised by the chief executive in his recent letter to all post-16 providers to encourage the expansion of provision to meet our target of improving the basic skills levels of 750,000 adults by 2004. To ensure the resourcing and promotion of basic skills matches local needs and reflects national policy, local LSCs have produced delivery plans, setting out how they intend to increase and improve literacy, language and numeracy provision. These plans also set local targets for participation and achievement in literacy, language and numeracy provision.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of her Department in the last 12 months; and what plans she has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [47948]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Over the past 12 months no payments have been recorded as being made by the Department of Education and Skills as a result of the findings of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (parliamentary ombudsman).

The Department no longer has any executive agencies under its control. Information on maladministration payments made by Non-Departmental Public Bodies, sponsored by the Department, is not held centrally and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

The level of award in maladministration cases is recommended, on an individual basis, by the parliamentary ombudsman and is not decided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by education authority the number of children of asylum seekers and refugees with English language difficulties who are not being counted as being at school for the purposes of calculating annual primary and secondary performance tables. [47990]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We received a number of requests from schools to discount children who had recently arrived from overseas (including children of asylum seekers and refugees) from the 2001 school performance tables.

For the primary school tables, a total of 1,648 children were discounted from the published results in the performance tables.

For the secondary school tables, a total of 1,559 children were discounted. A breakdown by local education authority, for the primary school and secondary school tables respectively, is provided.

Numbers of children recently arrived from overseas discounted from 2001 performance tables

Local education authority	*Number of children discounted*
Primary school performance tables	
Barking and Dagenham	23
Barnet	43
Barnsley	3
Bath and North East Somerset	3
Bedfordshire	7
Bexley	5
Birmingham	42
Blackburn with Darwen	5
Bolton	8
Bournemouth	7
Bracknell Forest	3
Bradford	23
Brent	78
Brighton and Hove	7
Bristol, City of	9
Bromley	4
Buckinghamshire	5
Calderdale	1
Cambridgeshire	2
Camden	13
Cheshire	3
Coventry	24
Croydon	33
Cumbria	1
Derby City	6
Derbyshire	2
Devon	2
Doncaster	4
Dorset	1
Dudley	5
Durham	1
Ealing	53
East Sussex	4
Enfield	55
Essex	12
Gateshead	2
Gloucestershire	3

Numbers of children recently arrived from overseas discounted from 2001 performance tables

Local education authority	*Number of children discounted*
Greenwich	28
Hackney	44
Halton	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	27
Hampshire	7
Haringey	66
Harrow	32
Havering	6
Hertfordshire	12
Hillingdon	14
Hounslow	34
Islington	7
Kensington and Chelsea	23
Kent	26
Kingston upon Hull, City of	6
Kingston upon Thames	21
Kirklees	4
Lambeth	19
Lancashire	8
Leeds	12
Leicester City	40
Leicester	4
Lewisham	31
Lincolnshire	3
Liverpool	24
Luton	16
Manchester	41
Medway	2
Merton	10
Milton Keynes	10
Newcastle upon Tyne	22
Newham	116
Norfolk	3
North East Lincolnshire	1
North Lincolnshire	1
North Tyneside	2
North Yorkshire	3
Northamptonshire	11
Nottingham City	9
Nottinghamshire	3
Oldham	10
Oxfordshire	19
Peterborough City	8
Plymouth	8
Portsmouth	1
Reading	10
Redbridge	32
Redcar and Cleveland	2
Richmond upon Thames	2
Rochdale	3
Salford	11
Sandwell	4
Sefton	4
Sheffield	33
Slough	4
Solihull	2
Somerset	1
South Gloucestershire	2
South Tyneside	2
Southampton	3
Southend-on-Sea	4
Southwark	51
Staffordshire	1
Stockport	2
Stockton on Tees	2
Stoke on Trent	4
Suffolk	8
Sunderland	4
Surrey	5
Sutton	7
Swindon	7

Numbers of children recently arrived from overseas discounted from 2001 performance tables

Local education authority	*Number of children discounted*
Tameside	2
Tower Hamlets	25
Trafford	4
Wakefield	1
Walsall	3
Waltham Forest	30
Wandsworth	36
Warrington	1
Warwickshire	4
West Berkshire	1
West Sussex	4
Westminster, City of	20
Wigan	3
Wiltshire	2
Wolverhampton	2
Worcestershire	2
York, City of	1
Secondary school performance tables	
Barking and Dagenham	20
Barnet	41
Bedfordshire	14
Bexley	1
Birmingham	32
Blackburn with Darwen	1
Blackpool	2
Bolton	2
Bournemouth	1
Bradford	10
Brent	60
Brighton and Hove	23
Bristol, City of	6
Buckinghamshire	2
Bury	2
Calderdale	5
Cambridgeshire	8
Camden	16
Cheshire	2
Coventry	20
Croydon	78
Cumbria	6
Derbyshire	10
Dorset	7
Dudley	2
Durham	4
Ealing	63
East Sussex	16
Enfield	30
Essex	18
Gateshead	2
Gloucestershire	14
Greenwich	23
Hackney	25
Hammersmith and Fulham	40
Hampshire	6
Haringey	59
Harrow	41
Havering	2
Hertfordshire	11
Hillingdon	7
Hounslow	34
Islington	49
Kensington and Chelsea	33
Kent	27
Kingston upon Thames	7
Lewisham	20
Lincolnshire	1
Liverpool	1
Luton	17
Manchester	30
Medway	5

Numbers of children recently arrived from overseas discounted from 2001 performance tables

Local education authority	Number of children discounted
Merton	22
Milton Keynes	7
Newcastle upon Tyne	4
Newham	72
Norfolk	6
North East Lincolnshire	2
North Tyneside	3
North Yorkshire	8
Northamptonshire	10
Nottingham City	2
Nottinghamshire	1
Oldham	2
Oxfordshire	14
Peterborough City	2
Plymouth	4
Reading	5
Redbridge	29
Redcar and Cleveland	1
Rotherham	1
Sandwell	2
Sheffield	26
Shropshire	22
Slough	7
Solihull	1
Somerset	6
South Gloucestershire	1
Southwark	69
Staffordshire	1
Suffolk	16
Surrey	16
Swindon	1
Tameside	2
The Wrekin	2
Torbay	4
Tower Hamlets	20
Trafford	1
Waltham Forest	68
Wandsworth	16
Warrington	1
West Berkshire	1
West Sussex	3
Westminster, City of	4
Wiltshire	2
Wolverhampton	17
Worcestershire	2

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list by education authority the amount of money paid in 2001–02 by her Department to support the education costs of children of asylum seekers dispersed to cluster areas under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. [47991]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: £1.5 million was made available in 2000–01 to support the education costs of children of asylum seekers dispersed to cluster areas under the Immigration and Asylum Act. This amounted to £500 per child and was to be used to help settle these children into school quickly. This funding was rolled forward into 2001–02 and, due to a greater number of eligible children, was increased to £2,377,000. Thus allowing this Department to continue to make a payment of £500 per child.

In addition, all schools with children of asylum seekers on their school roll, including those in the dispersal areas, receive funding for them in the same way as they do for all other children through the education standard spending assessment. In addition, there is support through the ethnic minority achievement grant. All local education authorities are eligible for this grant which totals around £154 million this year. The purpose of this grant is to support minority ethnic children at risk of underachieving and provide support to those for whom English is an additional language, including the children of asylum seekers and refugees.

The list of authorities in receipt of funding is as follows:

Asylum seekers grant allocations 2001–02

LEA name	Amount of funding
Barnsley	23,500
Birmingham	75,500
Blackburn	13,500
Bolton	65,000
Bradford	78,500
Brighton	7,500
Bristol	10,000
Bury	26,500
Calderdale	16,500
Coventry	36,500
Darlington	500
Derby	64,000
Doncaster	35,000
Dudley	11,000
Gateshead	41,000
Hants	2,000
Hartlepool	9,000
Kingston	31,500
Kirklees	31,000
Lancashire	4,500
Leeds	108,000
Leicester	51,000
Leicestershire	1,500
Lincolnshire	2,500
Liverpool	124,000
Manchester	425,500
Middlesbrough	44,500
Newcastle	131,500
Newham	1,500
North Tyneside	34,000
Nottingham	128,000
Oldham	9,000
Peterborough	6,000
Plymouth	9,500
Portsmouth	4,000
Redcar	30,500
Rochdale	51,500
Rotherham	21,000
Salford	101,500
Sandwell	30,000
Sefton	10,000
Sheffield	148,500
South Tyneside	20,500
Stockport	17,000
Stockton-on-Tees	10,500
Stoke-on-Trent	16,000
Sunderland	30,000
Tameside	11,500
Trafford	19,000
Wakefield	29,000
Walsall	19,000
Wigan	50,500
Wolverhampton	98,000
Total	2,377,000

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of primary schools have additional facilities for children with special needs. [48219]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children had statements of special educational needs in England in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1991. [37421]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) in all schools in England—position in January each year

	1991	*1996*	*2001*[1]
Nursery			
Pupils with statements	264	425	600
Pupils on roll	52,237	52,284	45,000
Incidence (%)	0.5	0.8	1.3
Primary			
Pupils with statements	32,655	61,698	75,300
Pupils on roll	4,047,136	4,389,364	4,406,200
Incidence (%)	0.8	1.4	1.7
Secondary			
Pupils with statements	29,056	65,137	82,100
Pupils on roll	2,773,540	3,010,416	3,231,800
Incidence (%)	0.8	2.2	2.5
Special[2]			
Pupils with statements	85,632	92,450	91,900
Pupils on roll	97,763	98,076	95,600
Incidence (%)	87.6	94.3	96.1
Pupil Referral Units[2]			
Pupils with statements	[4]—	1,828	1,800
Pupils on roll	[4]—	6,872	9,300
Incidence (%)	[4]—	26.6	19.4
Independent[3]			
Pupils with statements	5,621	5,810	6,600
Pupils on roll	565,927	559,531	586,200
Incidence (%)	1.0	1.0	1.1
All schools			
Pupils with statements	153,228	227,348	258,200
Pupils on roll	7,536,603	8,116,543	8,374,100
Incidence (%)	2.0	2.8	3.1

[1] Estimates have been made for January 2001 because the data for SEN are known to be incomplete.
[2] Excluding dually registered pupils.
[3] Including Direct Grant Nursery Schools and City Technology Colleges.
[4] Pupil Referral Units did not exist prior to 1995.
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Foreign Schoolchildren

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of children who are *(a)* citizens of other EU countries and *(b)* citizens of other non-EU countries studying in schools in England in each of the last five years. [48233]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Ministerial Visits (Schools)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the schools which have been visited on more than one occasion by Ministers in DfEE and DfES since 1 May 1997 giving in each case *(a)* the date, *(b)* the purpose of the visit and *(c)* the identity of the Minister. [48242]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information in the form requested is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

School Toilet Facilities

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of new outside toilet facilities installed in schools in England in each of the last five years. [48243]

John Healey: The Department does not collect information on construction of toilet facilities in schools.

Modern Languages

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in secondary schools receive tuition in *(a)* French, *(b)* German, *(c)* Spanish and *(d)* another modern foreign language; and in each case what percentage this constitutes of the total number of pupils in secondary schools. [48236]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The School and College Performance Tables give information on how many pupils are entered for GCSE and A-level examinations. In 2000–01 entries for GCSE and A-level for *(a)* French totalled 321,200 and 15,170 respectively, for *(b)* German totalled 130,623 and 7,488, for *(c)* Spanish totalled 45,626 and 4,447 and for *(d)* all other languages, entries totalled 20,317 and 3,478.

Expressed as a percentage of all 15-year-old pupils attending school, the GCSE entries for each language represented 53.2 per cent. (French), 21.6 per cent. (German), 7.6 per cent. (Spanish) and 3.4 per cent. (other). The A-level entries expressed as a percentage of all 17 to 18-year-old candidates are 6.8 per cent. (French), 3.3 per cent. (German), 2.0 per cent. (Spanish) and 1.6 per cent. (other).

Data are not collected on how many pupils choose to study a language but do not go on to take an examination.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of children in each year of *(a)* Key Stage 1 and *(b)* Key Stage 2 who receive tuition in modern foreign languages in maintained schools; and what percentage that number is of the total for each year group. [48238]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: One in five primary schools currently offer some form of language learning at Key Stage 2. As language learning is not a compulsory element of the primary curriculum, it is not possible to give more detailed information.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of pupils aged 14 years and

over who would choose not to study a modern foreign language if the national curriculum requirement were ended. [48239]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are currently undertaking an extensive consultation on a range of proposals including the position of modern foreign languages in our Green Paper, "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards". Our proposal for languages would allow all young people a statutory entitlement to study a modern foreign language but they would have no obligation to do so. Latest figures suggest that around 36,000 pupils are covered by the disapplication arrangements regarding modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4. We have made no estimates at this stage of the effect of our proposals on the study of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of additional language teachers which would be required for all maintained schools to offer a modern foreign language at Key Stages 1 and 2. [48237]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our ambition that all primary school children will be entitled to study languages by 2012 is one of a number of proposals set out in our consultation pamphlet "Language Learning". The consultation period ends on 31 May.

We recognise the need to raise the number of primary teachers trained to teach languages and will develop our long-term language learning and teaching strategy in the light of the responses to our consultation. The Languages National Steering Group, chaired by my ministerial colleague Baroness Catherine Ashton, is developing that strategy which will be published in the autumn.

Capita

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if Capita will participate in individual learning account successor schemes; and if she will make a statement. [48277]

John Healey: There will be a replacement ILA-type scheme building on the strengths of the ILA and taking into account the findings of the current stakeholder consultation exercise which are due in early April. We will announce our plans for introducing the new scheme, including delivery arrangements, in due course.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the quality control directives given to Capita in relation to the operation of the individual learning account scheme. [48247]

John Healey: Capita Business Services Ltd. are required to meet a range of service standards as part of their contract to operate the individual learning account scheme. Although the precise nature of these is a matter between the Department and Capita, performance against the standards is appraised by the Department on a monthly basis.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44938]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The correspondence standard in the Department for Education and Skills is to reply to 95 per cent. of all correspondence within 15 working days of receipt. The target will remain the same for 2002–03.

School Funding (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much funding has been allocated to the City of York Council for repairs to school buildings in each year since it became a unitary authority, including funding delegated direct to schools; [46769]

(2) how much funding has been allocated to the City of York Council for new or modernised classrooms in each year since it became a unitary authority, including funding delegated direct to schools; [46765]

(3) how much funding has been allocated to the City of York Council or delegated direct to schools for *(a)* new build, *(b)* modernisation and *(c)* repairs over the next three years. [46766]

John Healey: We do not hold information in the form requested. Much capital support for school buildings is allocated to Local Education Authorities and schools on a formulaic basis. Records of how it is utilised for specific projects are held locally. However, the table sets out the capital allocations made to date to York Local Education Authority (LEA) and its schools from 1996–97 to 2003–04.

Allocations to York Local Education Authority by the department for education and skills for school accommodation 1996–97 to 2003–04

£000

Financial year	*New deals for schools 1–4 allocations*[1]	*Other capital allocations*	*Grand total*
1996–97	n/a	800	800
1997–98	180	1,083	1,263
1998–99	691	775	1,466
1999–2000	1,626	2,544	4,170
2000–01	2,065	4,722	6,787
2001–02	n/a	4,135	4,135
2002–03[2]	n/a	7,763	7,763
2003–04[2]	n/a	4,759	4,759

[1] This covers allocations made under the original New Deal for Schools programme, which utilised resources raised from the Windfall Tax in order to address the backlog of repairs.

[2] Includes allocations made as of 31 March 2002, including £3 million allocated in 2002–03 from the Targeted Capital Fund.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the percentage change in real terms was in education SSA in the City of York in each year since it became a unitary authority, including funding delegated direct to schools. [46768]

Mr. Timms: York became a unitary authority in 1996–97. Its Education SSA in real and cash terms is as follows.

York's SSA increases

Year	Real terms Total SSA (£ million)	Real terms Annual increase (Percentage)	Cash terms Total SSA (£ million)	Cash terms Annual increase (Percentage)
1996–97	58.30	n/a	52.79	n/a
1997–98	55.91	–4.11	52.18	–1.16
1998–99	59.49	6.40	57.08	9.38
1999.00	61.39	3.19	60.32	5.68
2000–01	63.44	3.35	63.44	5.17
2001–02	64.28	1.32	65.89	3.85
2002–03	66.25	3.07	69.60	5.64
1996–97	7.95	13.63	16.81	31.84

[1] Change since

Notes

1. Figures reflect all sub-blocks of the Education SSA. The Private and Voluntary Institutions' element of the SSA that replaced Nursery Education Grant funding is not included in the figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03.
2. In 1997–98 £527 million was taken out of the SSA to fund the nursery voucher scheme.
3. Real terms figures are calculated using GDP deflators published by the Treasury on 20 December 2001
4. 2002–03 figures are gross of the Learning and Skills Council allocation.

Class Sizes

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the average class size is in Lincolnshire secondary schools; and what the figure was in 1997; [48161]

(2) what the average class size is in Lincolnshire primary schools; and what the figure was in 1997. [48160]

John Healey: The information requested is shown in the table

Average size of one teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools in Lincolnshire and England

January each year

	Primary 1997	Primary 2001	Secondary 1997	Secondary 2001
England	27.5	26.7	21.7	22.0
Lincolnshire	26.9	26.6	20.2	21.4

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class size in primary schools in each LEA area in Lancashire was in each year since 1997. [48600]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table:

Maintained primary schools in Lancashire
Average class size[1]

Position in January each year

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Lancashire[2]	28.8	28.9	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire[3]	n/a	n/a	28.2	27.7	27.3
Blackburn with Darwen	n/a	n/a	29.0	28.8	28.1
Blackpool	n/a	n/a	30.0	29.4	28.3
England	27.5	27.7	27.4	27.1	26.7

[1] One teacher classes
[2] Before local government reorganisation
[3] After local government reorganisation
n/a = not applicable
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Private Finance Initiative

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills of the applications for provisional support for schools PPP projects in 2003–04, *(a)* how many failed and *(b)* what the total value was of the applications that were turned down. [47983]

John Healey: 33 applications in this bidding round were unsuccessful, with a combined value of approximately £1.936 billion. 21 projects have been selected for provisional support, with a combined value of £939 million.

Standard-setting Bodies

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will name the organisations recognised by her Department as standard setting bodies and under section 36 of the Education Act 1997 specified as appropriate bodies to receive financial assistance from levy income collected from persons who award vocational qualifications; and whether national training organisations will lose such status in consequence of withdrawal of their overall recognition by the Department. [47660]

John Healey: Until 31 March 2002 all national training organisations and a few other bodies were recognised as standards setting bodies. From 1 April all NTOs ceased to have the formal recognition of the Department. The withdrawal of recognition applies also to their status as standards setting bodies.

No bodies were specified under Section 36 of the Education Act 1997. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) acting jointly with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) administers a fund for the development of national occupations standards based on a certification fee charged on NVQs and SVQs. A remit letter from the Department instructs QCA as to which bodies may receive financial assistance.

Future arrangements are being considered in the light of the recent report by the Independent Review of National Occupational Standards, chaired by John Hillier, the establishment of the Sector Skills Development Agency from 1 April 2002, and the new stronger sector councils we are putting in place. In the short term we will ensure there are suitable arrangements in place so that essential national occupational standards work can continue.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what EU money supported the ILA scheme; and how it was distributed. [48268]

John Healey: The Individual Learning Account programme was not supported by European Union money. In England, the programme was funded centrally by the Department and by £127.5 million of existing TEC resources.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47810]

Estelle Morris: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget Report on 17 April. For 2001–02 the initial Departmental Expenditure Limit appears in the Departmental Report (Cm 5102), published March 2001, and subsequently changed following the Winter Supplementary Estimate (Cm 5335), published November 2001, and the Spring Supplementary Estimate, (Cm 5385) published in February 2002.

Maintained Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of places in maintained grammar schools in each of the last five years. [48231]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not regularly collect information on the number of school places in any type of school. The 164 grammar schools in England account for just over 4 per cent. of the maintained secondary school population.

School Boarding Places

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of boarding places available in maintained schools in England in each of the last five years. [48232]

Mr. Timms: No estimate is available because this information is not held centrally.

Legal Action

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the cost to her Department of legal actions involving the adjudicator established under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. [48229]

Mr. Timms: The Department has incurred costs of £77,934, since 1999, as a result of the judicial reviews of cases dealt with by the Schools Adjudicator.

Teacher Assaults

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in maintained schools have been the victims of serious assaults by *(a)* pupils and *(b)* parents in each of the last five years. [48228]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collect this information.

We deplore abuse by parents and others against teachers. We already have legal remedies in place to combat this, including injunctions, and prosecution for criminal damage, common assault and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. We have made it clear that, where necessary, pupils can be excluded from school for assaulting a teacher, and we intend to make Parenting Orders available for parents of pupils who receive several fixed period exclusions from school or a permanent exclusion.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the cost of servicing *(a)* petitions and *(b)* ballots on the future of grammar schools in each year since the introduction of the ballot regulations. [48230]

Mr. Timms: The Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations came into effect on 3 December 1998. Since then, there have been 39 requests for petition thresholds to be set, and one ballot has been held. To date, we have spent a total of £436,806.26 on petitions and ballots, as follows:

£

Petition year	*(a) Petition costs*	*(b) Ballot costs*	*Total for year*
1998–99	22,778.81	0	22,778.81
1999–2000	216,283.51	1,708.07	218,063.58
2000–01	58,285.36	0	58,285.36
2001–02	137,678.51	0	137,678.51
Totals	435,026.19	1,780.07	436,806.26

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many grammar schools have held ballots on their future status; and what were the results of those ballots in each year since 1997. [47490]

Mr. Timms: Grammar school ballots legislation came into effect in December 1998, and since then one ballot has been held in respect of Ripon Grammar School; parents in the area voted 2–1 in favour of keeping selective admissions.

School Sixth Forms

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received from *(a)* schools with sixth forms and *(b)* local education authorities regarding the operation of learning and skills councils in respect of funding school sixth forms; and if she will make a statement. [48241]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend has received representations from a number of school headteachers, deputy headteachers and local education authorities.

The Real Term Guarantee given to sixth forms means that their funding will be maintained relative to 2000–01 funding levels, provided pupil numbers are maintained. The Learning and Skills Council has calculated two figures for each sixth form—its RTG and its LSC formula allocation—and the school will receive the higher of the two. The Financing of Maintained School Regulations 2002 have been amended to ensure that sixth forms funded through the LSC formula see some benefit. Schools should gain a minimum of one third of the potential benefit from the LSC's allocations for 2002–03. We intend to amend the regulations further for 2003–04 to ensure that such schools have a minimum two-thirds gain in that year.

Teachers' Pension Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* active members, *(b)* premature retirements, *(c)* ill-health retirements and *(d)* age retirements there were from the Teachers' Pension Scheme in each of the last 10 years. [47366]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is provided in the following table. Data on active members are obtained from returns submitted by employers. Not all returns have yet been received in respect of 2000-01. Data relating to numbers of retirements have been provided by the scheme administrators.

Financial year	*Active members*	*Premature retirements*	*Ill health retirements*	*Actuarially reduced benefits*	*Age retirements*
1991–92	535,400	10,300	4,700	—	4,400
1992–93	532,100	12,200	4,900	—	4,400
1993–94	539,200	12,200	5,600	—	4,500
1994–95	550,300	10,600	6,100	—	4,600
1995–96	563,200	13,100	6,000	—	4,500
1996–97	557,800	16,000	6,300	—	4,500
1997–98	561,600	19,100	4,100	—	4,900
1998–99	570,600	2,900	2,700	—	5,300
1999–2000	575,700	3,100	2,700	—	5,900
2000–01	[1]—	3,100	3,000	900	6,100

[1] Not yet available

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the contribution rate for teachers' employers will, following the next quinquennial review of the scheme by the Government Actuary, be based on a valuation that includes increases in pensions. [47368]

Mr. Timms: The valuation of the scheme currently being conducted by the Government Actuary, and future valuations, will include the cost of providing annual increases to pensions in payment.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment her Department has made of the impact of increased salary costs of teachers on the required contribution rate for the Teachers' Pension Scheme. [47367]

Mr. Timms: In determining the required contribution rate at each actuarial review, the Government Actuary allows for future increases in salaries arising from general salary inflation and from promotion or scale increments. Details of the most recent assumptions are included in the Government Actuary's report on the actuarial review as at 31 March 1996. The actuarial review as at 31 March 2001 will reflect increases in salaries and the extent to which they differ from the assumed increases at the 1996 review. I expect to have the Government Actuary's report on the 2001 review by the end of this year.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the funds held by the Teacher Superannuation Fund, broken down by *(a)* asset type and *(b)* share holdings. [47751]

Mr. Timms: The Teachers' Pension Scheme is an unfunded scheme. There are, therefore, no assets or shareholdings.

School Exclusions

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was spent by her Department in pursuing legal action against children who have been *(a)* temporarily and *(b)* permanently excluded from school for each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47742]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: None. My Department does not pursue legal action against children who have been excluded from school.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* temporary and *(b)* permanent exclusions were made by (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) all schools in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47483]

Mr. Timms: A table showing the available information has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Information on fixed term (temporary) exclusions in not collected centrally.

Information on permanent exclusions is collected only from maintained primary and secondary schools and special schools.

City Academies and Beacon Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have become *(a)* city academies and *(b)* beacon schools in each year since the beginning of the scheme, broken down by local education authority. [47493]

Mr. Timms: No city academies have yet been established. It is expected that the first three will begin operating in September 2002. The beacon school programme was launched in 1998. The number of beacon schools established each year was:

1998: 75

1999: 125

2000: 350

2001: 450.

The network currently consists of 1,000 schools. The breakdown by local education authority is as follows:

LEA	*Beacon schools*
Barking	2
Barnet	8
Barnsley	3
Bath and North East Somerset	4
Bedfordshire	7
Bexley	3
Birmingham	28
Blackburn with Darwen	4
Blackpool	4

LEA	Beacon schools
Bolton	8
Bournemouth	4
Bracknell Forest	3
Bradford	13
Brent	7
Brighton and Hove	4
Bromley	6
Buckinghamshire	12
Bury	6
Calderdale	4
Cambridgeshire	9
Camden	9
Cheshire	14
City of Bristol	4
City of London	1
Cornwall	12
Coventry	4
Croydon	6
Cumbria	11
Darlington	2
Derby	6
Derbyshire	13
Devon	7
Doncaster	6
Dorset	3
Dudley	3
Durham	10
Ealing	5
East Riding of Yorkshire	4
East Sussex	7
Enfield	6
Essex	9
Gateshead	7
Gloucestershire	14
Greenwich	7
Hackney	4
Halton	3
Hammersmith	5
Hampshire	20
Haringey	4
Hartlepool	5
Havering	4
Herefordshire	4
Hertfordshire	14
Hillingdon	3
Hounslow	5
Isle of Wight	2
Islington	5
Kensington and Chelsea	8
Kent	18
Kingston upon Thames	4
Kingston-upon-Hull	5
Kirklees	7
Knowsley	8
Lambeth	10
Lancashire	26
Leeds	13
Leicester	5
Leicestershire	3
Lewisham	7
Lincolnshire	2
Liverpool	16
Luton	2
Manchester	12
Medway Towns	5
Merton	3
Middlesbrough	4
Milton Keynes	4
Newcastle upon Tyne	4
Newham	7
Norfolk	12
North East Lincolnshire	5
North Lincolnshire	3
North Somerset	2
North Tyneside	8
North Yorkshire	11
Northamptonshire	9
Northumberland	8
Nottingham City	6
Nottinghamshire	8
Oldham	5
Oxfordshire	7
Peterborough	5
Plymouth	3
Poole	3
Portsmouth	5
Reading	3
Redbridge	4
Redcar and Cleveland	3
Richmond upon Thames	7
Rochdale	6
Rotherham	8
Rutland	2
Salford	7
Sandwell	4
Sefton	12
Sheffield	8
Shropshire	6
Slough	2
Solihull	8
Somerset	8
South Gloucestershire	4
South Tyneside	8
Southampton	5
Southend-on-Sea	4
Southwark	7
St. Helens	8
Staffordshire	10
Stockport	9
Stockton-on-Tees	3
Stoke-on-Trent	4
Suffolk	12
Sunderland	7
Surrey	19
Sutton	3
Swindon	2
Tameside	4
Telford and the Wrekin	5
Thurrock	2
Torbay	3
Tower Hamlets	8
Trafford	5
Wakefield	7
Walsall	2
Waltham Forest	5
Wandsworth	10
Warrington	4
Warwickshire	6
West Berkshire	4
West Sussex	14
Westminster	6
Wigan	7
Wiltshire	7
Windsor and Maidenhead	3
Wirral	15
Wokingham	1
Wolverhampton	4
Worcestershire	6
York	4

Specialist Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have become

specialist schools in each year since the beginning of the scheme, broken down by *(a)* specialism and *(b)* local education authority. [47494]

Mr. Timms: The information is given in a table which has been placed in the Library.

Special Schools

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many special schools have closed in each of the last seven years. [48220]

Mr. Timms: The number of special schools that have closed in each of the last seven years is:

Year	*Number*
1996	28
1997	32
1998	35
1999	35
2000	33
2001	31
2002	1
Total	195

Parental Choice

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children failed to gain a place at the *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special school of their first choice in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47488]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not keep statistics on how many children fail to gain a place at primary, secondary and special schools of their first choice. It is possible, however, that local education authorities might collect this type of information individually.

Teachers (Early Leavers)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers left the profession in each year since 1997; and what proportion had taught for *(a)* less than three years, *(b)* between three and five years, *(c)* between five and 10 years, *(d)* between 10 and 15 years and *(e)* more than 15 years, broken down by local education authority. [47510]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of teachers leaving regular full or part-time service in the maintained schools sector in England were as follows. For each local education authority the numbers leaving (in bold type) and the proportions of these leavers with different lengths of service are given. The latest provisional data available are for 31 March 2000 and has been placed in the Libraries.

Teacher Dismissals

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many teachers have been dismissed from their post *(a)* in each year since 1997 and *(b)* since June 2001, broken down by local education authority; [47495]

(2) how many *(a)* head teachers, *(b)* deputy head teachers and *(c)* classroom assistants have been dismissed from their post in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority; [47496]

(3) how many teachers have been suspended for misconduct from *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary, *(c)* special and *(d)* all schools in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority; [47509]

(4) how many *(a)* classroom assistants, *(b)* deputy headteachers and *(c)* headteachers were suspended for misconduct from (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) special, and (iv) all schools, in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47491]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect this information.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many former grant-maintained schools have gained *(a)* specialist, *(b)* beacon and *(c)* city academy status in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47489]

Mr. Timms: The number of former grant-maintained schools which have gained *(a)* specialist and *(b)* beacon status is provided in the tables. For *(c)*, city academies, none of the schools involved were grant-maintained.

Number of former grant-maintained schools designated as specialist schools by year by specialism by LEA

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Barking and Dagenham, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Barnet, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bath and North East Somerset	2	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	—	—	1	—	—	1
Bexley, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	1	—	—	3	2	—
Blackburn with Darwen	1	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolton	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bournemouth	—	—	—	2	—	—
Bracknell Forest	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	1	—	—	1	—	—
Brent, LB of	—	—	—	—	1	—
Brighton and Hove	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol, city of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bromley, LB of	—	—	—	—	1	1
Buckinghamshire	1	—	—	—	—	—
Bury	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of former grant-maintained schools designated as specialist schools by year by specialism by LEA

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Calderdale	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cambridgeshire	—	—	1	—	1	—
Camden, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	—	1	—	—	—	—
Corporation of London	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coventry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Croydon, LB of	—	1	—	—	—	1
Cumbria	1	1	—	—	2	1
Darlington	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derby, city of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	1	—	—	—	1	—
Devon	—	—	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	2	—	—
Dudley	—	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ealing, LB of	—	—	—	—	2	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enfield, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	—	1	2	4	2	2
Gateshead	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	1	1	3	1	1	4
Greenwich, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hackney, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Halton	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	1
Haringey, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Harrow, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hartlepool	—	—	—	—	—	—
Havering, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	1
Herefordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	1	1	1	1	—
Hillingdon, LB of	1	1	1	—	—	—
Hounslow, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—	—
Islington, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea, RB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	—	—	1	1	2	3
Kingston upon Hull, city of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston-upon-Thames, RB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	—	—	—	—	—	—
Knowsley	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lambeth, LB of	—	—	—	1	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicester City	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lewisham, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	3	6	2
Liverpool	1	—	—	1	—	—
Luton	—	—	1	—	—	—
Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medway	—	—	—	—	1	—
Merton, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesbrough	—	—	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes	1	2	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newham, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	1	—	—	1	—
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumberland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham, city of	—	—	—	—	—	1
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oldham	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of former grant-maintained schools designated as specialist schools by year by specialism by LEA

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Peterborough, city of	—	—	—	—	1	1
Plymouth, city of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Poole	—	—	—	—	1	—
Portsmouth	—	—	—	—	—	—
Reading	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Richmond-upon-Thames, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rochdale	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rotherham	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rutland	—	—	—	—	—	1
Salford	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sandwell	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sefton	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	—	—	—	1	—
Shropshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Slough	—	—	—	—	—	1
Solihull	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southend-on-Sea	—	—	—	—	2	—
Southampton	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockport	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockton on Tees	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sunderland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Surrey	1	—	—	—	—	1
Sutton, LB of	1	—	—	—	—	—
Swindon	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tameside	—	—	—	—	—	—
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thurrock	—	—	—	—	1	1
Torbay	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trafford	—	1	—	—	—	—
Wakefield	—	—	—	—	—	—
Walsall	—	—	—	—	—	1
Waltham Forest, LB of	1	—	—	—	—	—
Wandsworth, LB of	1	—	—	1	—	—
Warrington	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Berkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—
Westminster, LB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wigan	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	1	2	—	1	1	—
Windsor and Maidenhead, RB of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wirral	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wokingham	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	1	—	—	—	—	—
Worcestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—
York, city of	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	18	13	12	22	31	26

Beacon schools—ex-GM schools by year and LEA

LEA	1998	1999	2000	2001
Barnet	—	—	—	2
Bath and NE Somerset	—	—	—	1
Bedfordshire	1	—	1	—
Birmingham	—	—	1	—
Bolton	—	—	1	—
Bradford	—	—	1	—
Brent	—	—	1	2

Beacon schools—ex-GM schools by year and LEA

LEA	1998	1999	2000	2001
Bromley	—	—	1	—
Buckinghamshire	1	—	—	—
Calderdale	1	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	2	1
Camden	—	—	2	—
Croydon	—	—	—	2
Cumbria	—	—	1	2

Beacon schools—ex-GM schools by year and LEA

LEA	1998	1999	2000	2001
Derbyshire	1	2	—	3
Devon	—	—	—	1
Doncaster	—	—	—	1
Dorset	—	—	—	1
Dudley	—	1	—	—
Ealing	—	1	1	—
Essex	1	3	2	2
Gloucestershire	—	2	1	1
Hampshire	1	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	2
Hillingdon	—	—	1	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—	1
Kent	—	—	3	4
Lambeth	—	—	3	3
Lancashire	—	1	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	1	1
Manchester	—	—	—	1
Medway Towns	—	—	—	1
Milton Keynes	—	—	—	1
Norfolk	1	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	1	—	—
Nottingham City	—	—	—	1
Nottinghamshire	1	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	1
Peterborough	—	3	—	—
Poole	—	—	1	—
Reading	—	—	—	1
Rutland	—	—	—	1
Sheffield	—	—	1	1
Shropshire	—	—	1	—
Slough	1	—	—	1
Southampton	—	1	—	—
Southend-on-Sea	—	—	—	3
St. Helens	—	—	2	1
Surrey	—	1	—	1
Sutton	—	—	—	2
Tameside	—	—	—	1
Torbay	1	—	—	—
Trafford	1	—	—	—

Beacon schools—ex-GM schools by year and LEA

LEA	1998	1999	2000	2001
Wandsworth	—	—	3	—
West Berkshire	—	—	1	—
Wiltshire	—	—	1	1

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female teachers in the United Kingdom are employed in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools. [47492]

Mr. Timms: The provisional numbers of teachers in regular full or part time service in the maintained schools sector in England at 31 March 2000 (the most recent date available) were as follows:

	Nursery/primary	Secondary
Male	28,300	86,100
Female	168,200	117,300
Total	196,500	203,300

Some 10 to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many supply teachers were employed in each year since 1997, and what proportion had qualified teacher status, broken down by local education authority. [47485]

Mr. Timms: Information on the qualifications held by supply teachers is not collected centrally. The numbers of occasional teachers with contracts of less than one month, working for the whole day on the survey date, in the maintained schools sector, in January of each year, 1997 to 2001, by local education authority[1,2] were as follows:

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
City of London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Camden	80	90	100	110	70
Greenwich	50	70	60	50	100
Hackney	50	80	70	110	230
Hammersmith and Fulham	80	90	80	90	230
Islington	90	60	140	130	120
Kensington and Chelsea	90	70	60	50	60
Lambeth	70	30	30	90	50
Lewisham	110	100	110	90	100
Southwark	110	130	130	140	120
Tower Hamlets	70	110	80	90	220
Wandsworth	30	70	50	50	50
City of Westminster	50	70	70	50	80
Barking and Dagenham	60	100	90	60	110
Barnet	40	60	90	80	100
Bexley	70	60	100	130	110
Brent	50	60	70	110	100
Bromley	60	40	60	100	110
Croydon	110	100	100	110	190
Ealing	30	60	50	70	100
Enfield	60	90	70	100	140
Haringey	120	120	130	100	100
Harrow	40	40	40	120	120
Havering	60	70	80	100	90
Hillingdon	30	30	40	70	90
Hounslow	90	60	90	80	50

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Kingston upon Thames	20	40	40	30	60
Merton	60	70	60	80	60
Newham	170	160	130	200	230
Redbridge	30	40	40	30	60
Richmond upon Thames	60	20	60	70	110
Sutton	60	40	40	70	40
Waltham Forest	30	50	50	50	40
Birmingham	300	460	200	220	300
Coventry	120	80	70	100	110
Dudley	70	130	80	120	120
Sandwell	60	70	60	60	90
Solihull	50	80	40	50	80
Walsall	110	60	60	80	80
Wolverhampton	70	70	60	70	150
Knowsley	60	60	80	100	40
Liverpool	230	130	150	190	130
St. Helens	60	60	80	70	60
Sefton	100	90	110	140	150
Wirral	120	90	120	130	170
Bolton	110	100	110	120	140
Bury	80	50	60	70	100
Manchester	100	140	140	120	240
Oldham	40	40	60	40	30
Rochdale	110	90	100	110	130
Salford	70	110	90	80	100
Stockport	120	130	60	60	120
Tameside	40	30	40	80	80
Trafford	70	60	40	10	100
Wigan	110	180	190	170	170
Barnsley	120	100	110	140	140
Doncaster	100	70	70	80	100
Rotherham	100	100	110	140	140
Sheffield	150	150	190	190	210
Bradford	180	120	200	260	310
Calderdale	70	50	70	110	80
Kirklees	140	110	150	140	130
Leeds	150	160	170	170	240
Wakefield	100	90	120	140	140
Gateshead	50	60	60	100	130
Newcastle upon Tyne	60	70	80	70	120
North Tyneside	70	60	80	90	100
South Tyneside	50	30	50	60	80
Sunderland	60	110	80	80	80
Isles of Scilly	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Bath and North East Somerset	60	30	60	70	60
City of Bristol	220	160	130	230	150
North Somerset	30	80	120	90	70
South Gloucestershire	130	70	80	90	130
Hartlepool	40	30	50	50	30
Middlesbrough	60	40	50	40	60
Redcar and Cleveland	30	50	50	60	40
Stockton on Tees	90	70	90	100	130
City of Kingston Upon Hull	100	90	80	130	180
East Riding of Yorkshire	80	90	130	110	140
North East Lincolnshire	80	70	60	60	80
North Lincolnshire	110	90	60	50	70
North Yorkshire	170	130	170	190	270
York	110	80	70	140	100
Former Bedfordshire	290	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Bedfordshire	[5]—	210	80	130	130
Luton	[5]—	80	60	50	420
Total former Bedfordshire area	290	290	140	190	550
Former Buckinghamshire	40	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Buckinghamshire	[5]—	40	30	40	120
Milton Keynes	[5]—	40	60	80	80
Total former Buckinghamshire area	40	80	90	110	200
Former Derbyshire	270	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Derbyshire	[5]—	190	170	240	260
Derby	[5]—	50	40	70	[4]—
Total former Derbyshire area	270	240	210	310	260

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Former Dorset	70	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Dorset	[x]	[x]	90	100	100
Poole	[x]	30	30	30	30
Bournemouth	[x]	40	60	40	80
Total former Dorset area	70	80	180	170	200
Former Durham	230	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Durham	[x]	220	200	280	270
Darlington	[x]	10	[x]	40	50
Total former Durham area	230	230	200	320	330
Former East Sussex	100	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
East Sussex	[x]	100	150	120	150
Brighton and Hove	[x]	40	40	50	60
Total former East Sussex area	100	140	190	170	210
Former Hampshire	420	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Hampshire	[x]	290	310	420	520
Portsmouth	[x]	40	70	60	70
Southampton	[x]	50	60	80	100
Total former Hampshire area	420	380	440	570	690
Former Leicestershire	270	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Leicestershire	[x]	80	120	150	180
Leicester	[x]	70	70	130	150
Rutland	[x]	10	10	[x]	30
Total former Leicestershire area	270	160	190	280	360
Former Staffordshire	340	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Staffordshire	[x]	250	210	290	320
Stoke on Trent	[x]	70	100	150	130
Total former Staffordshire area	340	330	310	430	440
Former Wiltshire	120	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
Wiltshire	[x]	70	70	130	120
Swindon	[x]	40	50	60	50
Total former Wiltshire area	120	110	120	190	170
Former Berkshire	120	130	[x]	[x]	[x]
Bracknell Forest	[x]	[x]	30	50	40
Windsor and Maidenhead	[x]	[x]	20	20	20
West Berkshire	[x]	[x]	40	30	30
Reading	[x]	[x]	20	20	60
Slough	[x]	[x]	50	50	60
Wokingham	[x]	[x]	50	[x]	40
Total former Berkshire area	120	130	200	170	230
Former Cambridgeshire	150	120	[x]	[x]	[x]
Cambridgeshire	[x]	[x]	120	60	90
Peterborough	[x]	[x]	[x]	20	90
Total former Cambridgeshire area	150	120	120	80	180
Former Cheshire	210	150	[x]	[x]	[x]
Cheshire	[x]	[x]	150	180	170
Halton	[x]	[x]	30	20	60
Warrington	[x]	[x]	100	40	60
Total former Cheshire area	210	150	270	240	290
Former Devon	210	250	[x]	[x]	[x]
Devon	[x]	[x]	170	270	270
Plymouth	[x]	[x]	70	110	170
Torbay	[x]	[x]	40	40	60
Total former Devon area	210	250	280	410	490
Former Essex	290	240	[x]	[x]	[x]
Essex	[x]	[x]	180	330	480
Southend on Sea	[x]	[x]	30	40	60
Thurrock	[x]	[x]	20	40	60
Total former Essex area	290	240	230	410	590
Former Hereford and Worcestershire	110	140	[x]	[x]	[x]
Herefordshire	[x]	[x]	50	20	60
Worcestershire	[x]	[x]	150	180	160
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	110	140	200	200	210

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001[3]
Former Kent	260	130	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Kent	[5]—	[5]—	330	430	470
Medway	[5]—	[5]—	20	60	130
Total former Kent area	260	130	350	490	600
Former Lancashire	560	510	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Lancashire	[5]—	[5]—	270	370	340
Blackburn with Darwen	[5]—	[5]—	90	70	80
Blackpool	[5]—	[5]—	50	60	100
Total former Lancashire area	560	510	400	510	520
Former Nottinghamshire	310	450	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Nottinghamshire	[5]—	[5]—	400	360	280
Nottingham	[5]—	[5]—	80	130	130
Total former Nottinghamshire area	310	450	470	480	400
Former Shropshire	110	130	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Shropshire	[5]—	[5]—	120	110	100
Telford and Wrekin	[5]—	[5]—	70	80	90
Total former Shropshire area	110	130	190	180	190
Cornwall	100	130	290	260	250
Cumbria	130	130	140	170	180
Gloucestershire	70	80	100	150	130
Hertfordshire	120	90	130	170	120
Isle of Wight	60	40	40	40	60
Lincolnshire	140	140	160	230	230
Norfolk	210	160	140	260	220
Northamptonshire	190	240	130	160	190
Northumberland	170	140	150	130	190
Oxfordshire	140	110	170	120	130
Somerset	150	140	160	220	330
Suffolk	220	230	210	270	240
Surrey	130	130	130	180	260
Warwickshire	110	110	130	140	130
West Sussex	170	100	130	150	210
England	13,610	13,150	14,120	16,660	19,590

[1] Local education authorities created by local government re-organisation in 1997 and 1998 are shown under their parent authority. Data have been aggregated to give totals for the former authority areas, in order to allow comparisons between years.
[2] All figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Totals may not appear to equal the sum of their component parts, due to rounding.
[3] 2001 figures include 820 teachers without qualified teacher status from outside the European Economic Area, collected for the first time in the January 2001 survey.
[4] Less than 5.
[5] Not applicable.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average pay is for teachers in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* inner London. [47965]

Mr. Timms: The average salaries of regular full time teachers in the maintained schools sector at 31 March 2000 were as follows. This is the latest date for which provisional data are available.

	£
Staffordshire LEA	25,000
Inner London LEAs	28,200

Teacher Training Council

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* meetings and *(b)* communications there have been between her Department and the Teacher Training Council in each year since 1997. [48255]

Mr. Timms: Ministers and officials in this Department communicate regularly and have frequent formal and informal meetings with the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). The Department does not keep a central record of all meetings and communications. Key meetings include six TTA board meetings a year and quarterly meetings on audit and accreditation matters. Regular contacts and communications take place to ensure that TTA programmes are planned, managed and delivered effectively and in line with the Government's objectives.

Teacher Qualifications

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of teachers in England in secondary schools hold a *(a)* masters and *(b)* PhD in the subject area they are qualified to teach. [48276]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Teachers (Age)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of teachers in

England employed in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools are (i) under and including the age of 35 and (ii) over the age of 35 years. [48275]

Mr. Timms: The proportions of teachers in regular full or part-time service in the maintained schools sector in England at 31 March 2000 (the latest date for which provisional data are available) who were under or over the age of 35 years were as follows:

Percentage

	35 and under	*Over 35*
Nursery/Primary	33	67
Secondary	29	71

Some 10 to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

Free School Meals

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level qualified for free school meals in each of the last seven years. [48223]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Pupils eligible for free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in England—day pupils[1]

	Number known to be eligible for free school meals	*Number on roll*	*Percentage known to be eligible for free school meals*
Primary			
1995	956,497	4,312,072	22.2
1996	974,281	4,389,311	22.2
1997	938,542	4,428,616	21.2
1998	886,069	4,460,128	19.9
1999	848,173	4,460,171	19.0
2000	816,994	4,435,343	18.4
2001	779,307	4,406,187	17.7
Secondary			
1995	539,438	2,988,954	18.0
1996	550,902	3,006,938	18.3
1997	552,903	3,036,994	18.2
1998	537,073	3,069,029	17.5
1999	527,339	3,118,277	16.9
2000	523,630	3,177,998	16.5
2001	509,676	3,226,973	15.8

[1] Excludes boarding pupils

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to put in place a career structure for teaching assistants; and if she will make a statement. [48296]

Mr. Timms: Developments in the roles of teaching assistants, including a career structure based on training, skills, experience and qualifications, are currently being considered by a working party which includes representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other government bodies. National Vocational Qualifications, based on the new National Occupational Standards for Teaching Assistants, are expected to be in place later this year and will form part of the proposed career structure.

Convent of Jesus and Mary High School

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the targets agreed by Convent of Jesus and Mary high school by Brent LEA at the time of its acquisition of specialist status identifying any not yet achieved. [48267]

Mr. Timms: The Convent of Jesus and Mary high school has been operating as a Language College since September 1996. The information requested is being collated. I will therefore write to the hon. Member shortly giving a full reply to the question raised.

Careers Guidance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to ensure continuing universal availability of careers information, advice and guidance. [47879]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Through the Connexions Service, all young people aged 13–19 will have access to a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA). One of the key roles of a PA is to provide independent information, advice and guidance on learning and career options. This can be delivered in class or small group settings, or through one-to-one interviews, depending on the young person's needs. The Connexions Service is now operating in 25 (out of a total of 47) Partnership areas and will be rolled-out nationally by 2003.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by her Department. [48336]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In line with Government policy my Department, like others, has Crown immunity and is exempt from the need to purchase television licenses for televisions which are used for official use. All of the televisions which are in use on my headquarter buildings are for official use only.

Schooling Costs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the average annual cost of schooling for an individual student taking three A-levels at *(a)* an English maintained secondary school and *(b)* an English maintained sixth form college. [48244]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The figures for school and college funding have not been calculated on the same basis and cannot therefore be used to make comparisons. The FE unit funding figure includes total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figure does not. It is based only on delegated funds and excludes other funding the school receives centrally from LEAs which impacts on post-16 students.

The latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools per year for 2001–02 is £3,330. The total funding per full time equivalent student in FE sector colleges per year for 2001–02 is £3,660. Separate figures for sixth form colleges are not available.

Vacant Teaching Posts

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacant *(a)* deputy head teacher, *(b)* head teacher and *(c)* teacher posts existed in (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools and (iii) special schools in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47505]

Mr. Timms: The deputy head teacher, head teacher and classroom teacher vacancies in maintained nursery/primary, secondary and special schools by local education authority' in January of each year since 1997 has been placed in the Libraries.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47717]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development endeavours to answer all parliamentary questions in a timely manner. As the hon. Member will be aware there has been a sharp increase in the number of parliamentary questions in the current session and we will continue to aim to answer all questions as quickly and accurately as possible.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34461]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be made available only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34386]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be made available only at a disproportionate cost.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47808]

Hilary Benn: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34409]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be made available only at a disproportionate cost.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47326]

Hilary Benn: As part of the refurbishment of our new London Headquarters, a number of additional security measures were introduced. Additional external CCTV cameras were installed, and a purpose-built security control room constructed. Improved external doors, grills and locks were also fitted, and security pillars were installed to monitor and control access into the building. A new system for asset control has also been introduced, whereby valuable assets can be tagged, and their movement monitored.

Similar measures will be implemented during future refurbishment of our other two UK buildings. In the meantime our East Kilbride office is currently being fitted with secure storage for up to 30 bicycles.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of her Department to Scotland. [47953]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has no executive agencies. Two of the three non-departmental public bodies under my remit are based in the South East. The third, the Overseas Service Pensions Scheme Advisory Board, is administered from our offices in Scotland although their meetings take place in the South East. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital

cable television held by her Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its *(i)* cost and *(ii)* purpose. [48533]

Hilary Benn: The Department's 1 Palace Street, London office currently subscribes to the Annunciator Link to the Houses of Parliament, which transmits both digital terrestrial and satellite channels. The cost of this is £937 plus VAT per month. The link is used by my Private and Press Offices to keep in touch with events in both Houses of Parliament and to pick up broadcasts from the various news channels.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by her Department. [48332]

Hilary Benn: We currently hold three television licenses at a total cost of £327. In addition, we also pay a monthly rental fee of £937 plus VAT for the Annunciator Link to the Houses of Parliament. This is used for the transmission of terrestrial and satellite channels to points to our 1 Palace Street, London office.

Pensions

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the average value in pounds sterling of pensions received by British nationals under the CAPF in the last year for which figures are available. [48020]

Hilary Benn: I am advised by the Crown Agents, who are responsible for the management of the Central African Pension Fund (CAPF), that the average CAPF pension is £451.17 a year. It is not possible to provide a figure for British nationals alone.

Electronic Invoices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the initiation by her Department of the electronic receipt of invoices. [47782]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Internet Access

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if access to the internet for all overseas staff of the Department and its agencies will be provided in 2002. [47776]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Audit Needs Assessment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the result was of the consideration by the Department's Management Board of an audit needs assessment in March 2001. [47780]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Budgeting Forecasting

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the result of the testing of the pilot systems for improved budgeting forecasting and suspense management is. [47779]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Implementation Group (Tokyo)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development who will represent the UK Government at the first meeting of the Implementation Group (Tokyo) due to meet in Kabul on 19 April; and if she will make a statement. [47702]

Hilary Benn: Senior officials from DFID will represent the UK at the Implementation Group meeting in Kabul, which is scheduled to take place from 10 to 11 April.

This will be the first meeting of the Implementation Group since the Ministerial Conference that was held in Tokyo in January 2002. Around 150 participants are expected to attend, approximately a third of whom will be representing Afghan line ministries. Issues for discussion are likely to include the National Development Framework; an analysis of donor pledges and commitments; a progress report on the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme (ITAP) for Afghanistan in 2002; and modalities of the World Bank Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will support the call from Afghanistan's Minister for Women's Affairs for 25 per cent. female representation on the Loya Jirga being organised under the auspices of the UN. [47700]

Hilary Benn: We welcome the announcement by the Special Commission for the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga on 31 March on the procedures and criteria for the selection of delegates for the Emergency Loya Jirga. This includes a quota of 165 seats for women: approximately 11 per cent. of the total Emergency Loya Jirga delegation. This is the highest proportion of women included in any Loya Jirga in Afghan history, and as such is an important first step in ensuring that the views of women will be represented. We will continue to urge the

Special Commission for the Emergency Loya Jirga to actively encourage more Afghan women to participate in the political process.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 916W, on her Department's office in Kabul, what jobs are filled by Afghan *(a)* women and *(b)* men at the office. [47656]

Hilary Benn: 25 Afghan staff are employed in the DFID office in Kabul: 24 of whom are male, and one female. National staff are predominantly employed as programme officers, programme assistants, security guards, drivers and housekeepers. The female Afghan member of staff is employed as a housekeeper.

All DFID positions for national staff in Afghanistan are advertised publicly with a notice encouraging women to apply.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she has received a report from UNIFEM on the meeting held in Kabul with the Association of Afghan Women on 7 and 8 March; and if she will make a statement. [47699]

Hilary Benn: The UNIFEM report of the meeting held in Kabul with the Association of Afghan Women in March has not yet been published. We have requested a copy of the final report when it is issued.

Gender Strategy

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's gender strategy is. [47696]

Hilary Benn: Inequalities between women and men are deeply embedded, and they need to be tackled in economic, political, social and cultural life. We are concentrating on supporting changes in policy, laws and attitudes, while maintaining links with work at the grass roots. Our strategy is set out in "Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women", published in September 2000.

In respect of its role as an employer, DFID's gender policy is based on a long-standing policy of equal opportunities in respect of all aspects of our recruitment and employment practices. We have targets for the representation of women. A diversity audit, which addresses gender and other issues, is currently underway looking at DFID's policies and practices, and we are planning an equal pay audit.

Education

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the target of 91 per cent. for the percentage of children in education in the top 30 UK development partner countries by 2002 will be met. [47772]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if she will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37977]

Clare Short: Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, Special Advisers in my Department travelled abroad on two occasions, at an average cost of £3,100 per trip. This figure includes the average accommodation cost and subsistence allowance for all DfID staff travelling overseas, as it is not possible to provide specific information for these categories. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for reducing maternal mortality will be met by 2002. [47771]

Hilary Benn: The final out turn of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target covering maternal health and progress towards all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 departmental report to be published in April.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target that 60 per cent. of departmental services should be reviewed by 2003 will be met. [47777]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 department report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target that 75 per cent. of relevant bilateral projects shall be likely to meet their objectives by 2002 will be met. [47769]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 departmental report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the PSA target for the implementation of an overseas pilot exercise in the use of procurement cards was met by the end of 2001. [47781]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department

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between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the PSA target to reply to 100 per cent. of Ministerial correspondence within 21 days of receipt *(a)* was met in 2001 and *(b)* will be met in 2002. [47774]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for the development of the performance reporting information system for management will be met in 2002. [47775]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of when the PSA target of an annual 1.5 per cent. real gross domestic product per capita growth in the top 30 UK development partners will be met. [47770]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47199]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development's Service Delivery Agreement sets out in more detail how we are working to achieve specific Public Service Agreement outcomes. progress towards Public Service Agreement targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002—as well as a full account of the UK's work to support poverty elimination—will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published in April.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for reduction in sickness absence rates by 2003 will be met. [47778]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to reduce central and support costs as a percentage of aid policy and administration by 1 per cent. or approximately to £0.5 million per year will be met by 2002. [47773]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Department Report to be published later this month.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the value is of total investments of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [46901]

Hilary Benn: At 31 December 2000, CDC's portfolio at valuation was £1,063.9 million. The valuation at the end of December 2001 will be published in CDC's annual report for 2001.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to expand the proportion of CDC Capital Partners' portfolio held in equity investments. [46906]

Hilary Benn: None. Management of CDC's portfolio is the responsibility of CDC's Board of Directors.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what percentage of CDC Capital Partners and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's portfolio was in countries with a per capita GNP of less than £1,600 in real terms in each of the last six years; [46900]

(2) in how many (i) countries and (ii) businesses CDC Capital Partners and the Commonwealth Development Corporation had investments in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46902]

(3) what percentage of CDC Capital Partners' and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's investment was in sub-Saharan Africa by value in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46903]

(4) what the average rate of return on capital employed was by CDC Capital Partners and the Commonwealth Development Corporation on a three year basis for *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46904]

(5) what percentage of the portfolio of CDC Capital Partners and the Commonwealth Development Corporation was held in equity investments by (i) value and (ii) the number of investments in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46905]

(6) what the return was on CDC Capital Partners' and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's equity portfolio as a percentage in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46907]

(7) what percentage of CDC Capital Partners' and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's Equity Investments were in (i) least developed countries and (ii) sub-Saharan Africa in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46908]

(8) what percentage of CDC Capital Partners' and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's equity investments were in (i) the agribusiness sector and (ii) the infrastructure sector in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; [46909]

(9) what percentage of CDC Capital Partners' and the Commonwealth Development Corporation's investment in least developed countries were in (i) the agribusiness sector and (ii) the infrastructure sector in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001. [46910]

Hilary Benn: The Commonwealth Development Corporation was registered as CDC Group plc in 1999 and now trades as CDC Capital Partners. The data below refer to the portfolio or new equity investments of the group as a whole, and takes no account of new lending if any.

Statistics held by CDC are based on the category of poorer countries defined in the Investment Policy. These are countries with a GNP per capita below the weighted mean for lower middle income countries, based on World Bank data published in 1998. This category, which corresponds to a GNP per capita of $1,730 in 1996, has been used in the replies.

Some data for years preceding the establishment of CDC's Investment Policy are not readily available. CDC will write shortly to supplement the answers given for earlier years. Data for the year ending December 2001 will be published later this month in CDC's Annual Report.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Percentage of portfolio in poorer countries (per cent.)	n/a	n/a	85	85	84	n/a
Number of countries in which investments were made during the year	35	34	33	29	34	29
Number of businesses in which investments were made during the year	n/a	n/a	96	90	86	81
New investments in sub-Saharan Africa as percentage of investments during the year (per cent.)	31	33	36	32	25	n/a
Average rate of return on three-year basis (per cent.)	15	13	5	5	−2	n/a
Percentage of portfolio held in equity investments: by value (per cent.)	26	29	32	40	50	n/a
Rate of return on equity portfolio (per cent.)	12	11	−8	−9	−11	n/a
Percentage of new investments in (i) poorer developing countries	n/a	n/a	n/a	71	78	n/a
Percentage of new investments in (ii) sub-Saharan Africa	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	15	n/a
Percentage of new investments in (i) the agribusiness sector	34	21	3	28	5	n/a
Percentage of new investments in (ii) the infrastructure sector	6	0	0	15	19	n/a
Percentage of new investments in poorer countries in (i) the agribusiness sector	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	19	n/a
Percentage of new investments in poorer countries in (ii) the infrastructure sector	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	5	n/a

WORK AND PENSIONS

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47144]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 28W. Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, special advisers in the Department did not travel abroad on any occasion.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47723]

Maria Eagle: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Since the House returned in October we have received double the number of the previous session and by the end of this session we anticipate having dealt with significantly more questions than any of the last five years. This does of course have an impact on our ability to deal with questions speedily. We are confident that in deciding to table questions hon. Members take into account the impact of their requests on the ability of colleagues to secure answers to their inquiries. Many hon. Members secure information from other sources such as publications by the Department which are available in the Library.

Targeting Fraud Website

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he is conducting to evaluate the impact of the Targeting Fraud website. [46462]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department collates website statistics for all its sites including those for the Targeting Fraud site. The website has received more than 1.65 million hits and has generated more than 11,000 fraud referrals. The website is just one part of our campaign to raise awareness of benefit fraud and reinforce the message that committing fraud is wrong.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45220]

Maria Eagle: The table gives the number of staff recorded as having been seconded in to the Department (including Employment Service and the former Department of Social Security) from non-governmental organisations in the financial years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01.

Secondments are part of the interchange initiative promoting the exchange of people and good practice between the civil service and other organisations. Interchange is a key component of the civil service reform agenda. The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to increasing interchange, in particular bringing more people in to the Department on secondment.

Number of staff recorded as having been seconded in to the Department from non-governmental organisations

Year	*Number of inward secondments*
1998–99	42
1999–2000	31
2000–01	69
Total	142

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42424]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have a range of alternative working practices available to all staff which aim to strike a balance between working life and personal commitments. The majority of staff work on a flexible working pattern, which allows a degree of freedom that they can tailor around their work and home life priorities.

The Department for Work and Pensions is a new Department, therefore figures supplied below have been supplied from Employment Services and DSS legacy systems.

(a) Job sharing

	ES	*DSS*	*DWP*
Number of staff employed	40,123	104,597	144,720
Number of job sharers	4	6	10
Proportion of staff employed as job sharers	0.01	0.01	0.01

(b) Part-year working

	ES	*DSS*	*DWP*
Number of staff employed	40,123	104,597	144,720
Number of part-year workers	539	3,328	3,867
Proportion of staff employed as part-year workers	1.34	3.18	2.67

(c) Other flexible working patterns

	ES	*DSS*	*DWP*
Number of staff employed	40,123	104,597	23.62
Number of staff employed on other flexible working patterns	9,477	29,770	28.46
Proportion of staff employed on other flexible working patterns	23.62	39,247	27.12

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42098]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The question covers a period prior to the establishment of the Department for Work and Pensions in June 2001. The information requested on contracts let by the ex-Employment Service and ex-Department of Social Security is not held centrally in the new Department and the question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Information on contracts let by the Department for Work and Pensions will be collated for the current financial year but is not currently available.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the saving from the PFI/PPP deal for IS and IT services to underpin child support reforms. [18990]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to John Bercow Esq., dated 9 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me. I apologise for the delay in writing to you.

You asked for a statement on the saving from the PFI/PPP deal for IS and IT services to underpin child support reforms.

Child Support Reform delivers new legislation, IS/IT services, procedures and working practices which together provide financial savings accruing over the life of the IS/IT contract. By 2005/2006 the changes will result in a reduction of 17% in the unit cost (which includes PFI costs) of handling child support applications.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the rise in the minimum income guarantee has been since 1997 after taking account of inflation. [45913]

Mr. McCartney: The minimum income guarantee was introduced in 1997. Since 1999, annual rises in the minimum income guarantee have been linked to earnings. The rises, after taking into account inflation increases and the differences in the premiums paid, are shown in the table.

	Single (per cent. increase)	Couple (per cent. increase)
April 1997	n/a	n/a
April 1998	0.0	0.0
April 1999	4.4	4.5
April 2000	3.0	3.0
April 2001	15.9	13.7
April 2002	4.8	4.9

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of the minimum income guarantee are attributed with income from private pension funds not yet annuitised; and how many claimants of MIG who were rejected were attributed with such income. [46613]

Mr. McCartney: Information regarding the numbers of minimum income guarantee claimants with income attributed to private pension funds not yet annuitised, and unsuccessful claims to minimum income guarantee attributed with such income, is not available.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Portsmouth receive the minimum income guarantee; and if he will make a statement. [46436]

Maria Eagle: As at November 2001, there were 5,000 claimants in receipt of the minimum income guarantee in the Portsmouth local authority area. However, when we include partners, 5,500 pensioners are benefiting from the minimum income guarantee.

Over two million pensioners nationwide benefit from the minimum income guarantee. Those pensioners in receipt of minimum income guarantee are at least £15 per week better off in real terms than in 1997. From April 2002, no single pensioner will be expected to live on less than £98.15 per week and no pensioner couple on less than £149.50.

Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry 5 per cent. sample, November 2001.

Job Creation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the number of jobs that have been created *(a)* under the Government's New Deal and *(b)* through local authority partnerships in the London boroughs of (i) Lambeth, (ii) Southwark and (iii) Lewisham; and if he will make a statement. [44718]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The New Deals are not job creation programmes. They work closely with employers to ensure that New Deal participants are provided with the tailored help and support they need to be able to fill existing vacancies and meet the skills shortages faced by employers. The New Deals have already helped over 600,000 people move into work.

We have a good working relationship with Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham councils, all of whom have signed up as New Deal employers. In April we will also be introducing a StepUP pilot in the Lambeth area, which will provide a stepping stone for long-term unemployed people moving from benefits into work.

Widowed Parent's Allowance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many widowers whose spouse died prior to 9 April 2001, were eligible for the widowed parent's allowance at the time of its introduction; and how many of them have received the benefit; [40455]

(2) how many fathers with dependent children have been widowed since 9 April 2001; and how many of them have received the widowed parent's allowance. [40456]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available but such information as we do have is shown in the table.

Men with dependent children widowed prior to the commencement of bereavement benefits on 9 April 2001 became eligible for widowed parents allowance from that date, subject to the normal conditions of entitlement. Such men whose awards were in payment at the date of the scan will be included in these figures.

Widows parent's allowance recipients, 30 September 2001

	Thousands
All recipients	8.6
Male recipients	6.3

Notes:
1. The figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. All data from 5 per cent. samples are subject to sampling error.

Source:
5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System as at 30 September 2001.

Benefit Fraud

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many extra *(a)* internal and *(b)* claimant fraud investigators have been taken on by his Department in the last year. [47384]

Malcolm Wicks: Although the Department has replaced internal investigators as they have left, no extra internal investigators have been recruited. Information on the number of staff employed by the Department in claimant fraud investigation is in the table.

Quarter ending	Total number of fraud staff
March 2001	4,531
June 2001	5,047
September 2001	5,210
December 2001	5,294

Note:
Figures include investigators and administrative support staff.

Source:
Professional Standards Unit.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were successfully prosecuted for *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit fraud in each local authority in 2000–01. [33624]

Malcolm Wicks: We are working in partnership with local authorities to tackle fraud and error. From April 2001 we introduced a comprehensive new incentive scheme that encourages authorities to focus more effectively on the full range of anti-fraud measures of

which prosecution is only one. 63 local authorities are already on the new scheme and the rest will join in April 2002.

Local authorities' investigations in 2000–01 rooted out 100,000 cases of fraud and claimed a weekly saving. It is not possible to give separate figures for prosecutions for housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud. Information on the total numbers of successful prosecutions for benefit fraud reported by each local authority in 2000–01 has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the letter of 20 February from the hon. Member for Walsall, North regarding correspondence sent by a Member of the Irish Parliament. [46504]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Lord Chancellor's Department, which has responsibility for reciprocal maintenance arrangements between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, the subject of the correspondence. The hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a response to his letter by 19 April 2002.

Benefits

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of the population received means tested benefits *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* according to the most recent figures available. [40295]

Malcolm Wicks: Overall, the proportion of people aged 16 and over receiving income-related benefits has fallen from 17.5 per cent. to 16 per cent. between May 1997 and May 2000.

Notes:

1. Income-related benefits/tax credits are defined as income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit, council tax benefit (plus disability working allowance and family credit for May 1997 only and working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit for May 2000).

2. The data refer to claims for income tested benefits, which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one person can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.

3. Overlaps between benefits/tax credits have been removed.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list each way in which benefit recipients can have their benefit income reduced because of a sanction; and how many people have been subject to each of these sanctions during the last year for which figures are available. [24239]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on how people's benefit income may be reduced because of a sanction is contained in the Decision Makers Guide, a copy of which is available in the Library.

The available information on the number of people who have been subject to a sanction is in the table.

Type of sanction	*Numbers of people subject to sanctions*
Community sentence	37
Income support—lone parents who fail to participate in a meeting with a personal adviser	765
Jobseeker's allowance	24,100

Notes:

1. Community Sentence data are based on clerical returns received at the DWP Information Centre between 15 October 2001 and 26 March 2002. Figures are unrounded.

2. Percentage figure on community sentence is not available, as the number of offenders on community orders in receipt of income support, jobseeker's allowance or training allowance is unknown.

3. Income support data for lone parents are based on a 100 per cent. count taken from the Labour Market Computer System between 9 April 2001 and 22 February 2002.

4. Jobseeker's allowance data are taken from a 5 per cent. scan of the benefit computer system. The figures in the table represent a snapshot as at 8 November 2001 of the number of jobseekers where a sanction has been applied.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total weekly benefit savings are for each local authority in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* each quarter of 2001–02. [42515]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested has been placed in the Library. From April all local authorities will be operating within our new anti-fraud incentive scheme that provides a broader range of financial incentives to prevent, detect, punish and prosecute fraud than did the old weekly benefit savings scheme.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* total value of emergency benefit payments issued in each month since 1997. [42180]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 13 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will estimate the (a) number and (b) total value of emergency benefit payments issued in each month since 1997.

Information held centrally records the total number of clerical payments that have been issued. This is not possible broken down into categories and the amount of the payments is not recorded.

It is not therefore possible to estimate how many payments were for emergency payments or the amount that has been paid. Emergency payments vary depending on individual customer's circumstances.

I'm sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact Statutory Instrument 2002, No. 648 will have on the eligibility to claim disability living allowance by those with *(a)* visual and hearing impairments, *(b)* heart disease, *(c)* asthma, *(d)* epilepsy, *(e)* ME/CFS and *(f)* bowel disease. [47731]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to disability living allowance is based on the claimant's need for personal care and/or walking difficulties which result from their severe disability. The claimant's medical condition is not, necessarily, the key factor.

This statutory instrument, the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, makes clear that "fear or anxiety" experienced when walking out of doors can be taken into account for entitlement to the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance only where they are a symptom of a mental disability. It does not alter the basic qualifying criteria for the lower rate mobility component, which require a person to be so severely disabled physically or mentally that they are unable to walk out of doors on unfamiliar routes without guidance or supervision from another person most of the time. The eligibility of claimants with any of the disabilities listed in the question will be unaffected by the statutory instrument except where their claims are based on 'fear or anxiety' experienced in these circumstances.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost would be of *(a)* extending the period from four to 13 weeks of an adult's stay in hospital before disability living allowance or attendance allowance is removed and *(b)* extending the period form 12 to 26 weeks before DLA is withdrawn for a child. [43984]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The proposed change would cost in the order of £50 million per annum.

Notes:

Caseloads have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 and costs to the nearest 5 million.

Based on data taken from the May 2001 5 per cent. scan of the AA/DLA computer systems, and 1999 Hospital Episode Statistics.

The costs have been calculated based on the stock of hospital suspensions at a point in time. The proportion of suspensions who would be affected by the extension to 13 weeks (26 weeks for children) was derived from Hospital Episode Statistics which show the number of hospital episodes by completed duration.

Estimates of the stock of hospital suspensions at a point are available from the 5 per cent. scan of the AA/DLA computer systems. Estimates of the flow of DLA/AA claimants on to a hospital suspension are not available.

Carers (Savings)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he proposes to enable people with caring responsibilities to save for their retirement. [45909]

Maria Eagle: SERPS has served many people well but, because it is purely earnings-related, people on the lowest earnings gain least, and carers and disabled people who cannot work, or earn very little, get nothing at all.

When state second pension is launched on 6 April, 18 million people will start to build up bigger pension entitlements. Some 4.5 million low-paid employees (those earning up to £10,800 in 2002–03) will get at least twice as much additional pension as a person earning £10,800 would have got from SERPS. In addition 2 million qualifying carers and a similar number of long-term disabled people with broken work records will benefit from state second pension. They will be treated, for state second pension purposes, as if they had annual earnings at the low earnings threshold, £10,800 for 2002–03.

State second pension will also deliver better pensions for 9.5 million moderately paid employees—those earning between £10,800 and £24,600 (in 2002–03 terms).

Employees earning more than £24,600 will get equivalent benefits to those provided by SERPS.

Enhanced national insurance rebates and state second pension "top-ups" will ensure that low and moderately paid employees who are contracted-out into private pensions will also benefit from the reforms.

In addition, we plan that the savings credit element of the pension credit will reward people with second pensions, including state second pension.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which local authorities have not sent information requested or expected by the Department relating to housing benefit administration in 2001; on which occasions figures have been estimated for non-responding local authorities; and what action the Department takes against non-responding local authorities. [41784]

Malcolm Wicks: At present information is provided on a voluntary basis by local authorities. We have reminded all authorities of the importance of providing management information.

Estimates have been made by the Department in respect of non-responding local authorities or missing information since 1994–95 for annual returns and since 1996–97 for quarterly returns.

Information on the number of local authorities who have failed to submit management information returns to the Department in 2000–01 has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform subsidies to local authorities for housing benefit administration so they become performance related. [42255]

Malcolm Wicks: We have already increased housing benefit administration subsidy for the year 2001–02 to £166 million, in 2002–03 it will increase to £170 million and to £174 million in 2003–04. This three-year settlement provides local authorities with stability, enabling them to plan more effectively for the future administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

As part of our drive to improve local authority performance in delivering housing benefit, we are developing a set of performance standards for effective and secure administration.

Local authorities will be able to self assess their performance against challenging standards that go beyond the core measures of speed, accuracy and basic security and address wider issues—customer service, housing need and anti-poverty objectives.

In April 2001 we launched a new anti-fraud incentive scheme which means that local authorities who uncover more fraud and prosecute fraudsters can expect to receive greater financial reward than before. 63 authorities are

currently on the scheme, the rest will join in April 2002. [redacted] scheme offers additional reward to those authorities who [redacted] the Verification Framework.

For the future, we are looking at how we can use performance assessments to target help and support to authorities that need it most.

Income Support (Dumfries and Galloway)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Dumfries and Galloway region are in receipt of income support. [45340]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Income Support recipients in the Dumfries and Galloway local authority area—November 2001

Income support recipients	*Minimum income guarantee recipients*
4,900	5,200

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred, and are based on a 5 per cent. sample which is subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Minimum income guarantee for pensioners is defined as income support recipients where the recipient and/or partner are aged 60 or over.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiry, November 2001

Child Support

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when current customers of the Child Support Agency will enter the new scheme starting in April; and what plans he has for the implementation of the new plan for existing customers. [45342]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the Statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16. Existing cases will be transferred when the new system has been introduced and we are sure it is working well.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what gender impact assessment was carried out prior to changes being made to arrangements for child maintenance payments; and if he will place a copy of that assessment in the Library. [44403]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* Under the legislation, each non-resident parent and each parent with care is treated in the same manner, irrespective of the sex of the individual. The purpose of the reforms to the child support system is to ensure an increase in the amount of support for children, irrespective of their gender.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he estimates the PSA target for the introduction of the reformed child support scheme for new cases will be met on time. [46102]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disqualification orders have been made since the provision came into effect; and how many prosecutions have been mounted for information offences since their introduction. [44431]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. Mitchell, dated 9 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask how many disqualification orders have been made since the provision came into effect; and how many prosecutions have been mounted for information offences since their introduction.

Our aim is to encourage parents to support their children. In the majority of cases our demonstrated intention to take a case to court has been sufficient to encourage the non-resident parent to make arrangements to pay maintenance.

In two cases the court has granted an order to suspend a driving licence but suspended the application of the order to permit the non-resident parent to comply with his liability. In both cases the non-resident parent is now making regular payments.

In a third case a driving licence was ordered to be withdrawn for six months, as the non-resident parent had been given the opportunity to pay his maintenance liability but failed to do so.

There have been no prosecutions and therefore no convictions made under the criminal offence of non-co-operation with the Child Support Agency. The deterrent effect of a criminal sanction for failing to provide information when requested is an important element of the new system. We strongly encourage parents to co-operate voluntarily with requests for information by contacting customers by telephone, letter and interview, and where necessary making them aware of this penalty before referring the case for consideration of prosecution.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 March, if lone parents receiving income support who start to receive child maintenance after April 2002 will qualify for a maintenance disregard; and what plans he has to compensate those who will not qualify because of the delay in implementing the new CSA computer system. [45919]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The child maintenance premium is an integral feature of the new child support scheme. Cases assessed under the current rules do not have entitlement to the premium. They accrue, depending on the amount of maintenance paid, a potential entitlement to child maintenance bonus. No question of compensation arises.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to transfer existing CSA clients to the new system; and if he will make a statement. [35375]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 315–16.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements will apply to new clients of the child support system after April. [39896]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 315–16.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the enhanced enforcement powers for child support. [44437]

Malcolm Wicks: The new powers, in sections 13 (information—offences) and 16 (commitment to prison and disqualification from driving), are intended to help the Child Support Agency to secure compliance. Their success is in the extent to which non-resident parents co-operate with the Agency.

In the majority of the cases that the Agency has taken to court, the non-resident parent has been encouraged to make arrangements to pay maintenance. There have been no prosecutions and therefore no convictions made under the criminal offence of non-cooperation with the Child Support Agency. The deterrent effect of a criminal sanction for failing to provide information when requested is an important element of the new system.

Pension Credit

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of eligible claimants there will be for the savings credit component of the pension credit in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* the north-west and *(e)* England. [44716]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Around half of all pensioner households in Great Britain will be eligible for pension credit in 2003–04. Of these, about 80 per cent. will be eligible for the savings credit. Remaining information is not available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to which benefits administered by his Department he proposes that the payment of pension credit should be a passport. [44708]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We propose that recipients of pension credit should be entitled to the same DWP benefits administered by the Department as recipients of income support.

Pensions

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the numbers of contributors to *(a)* defined benefit occupational pension schemes, *(b)* defined contribution occupational pension schemes in (i) 1992, (ii) 1997 and (iii) the most recent year for which figures are available. [40195]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available. The available information is given in the table.

Contributors to occupational pension schemes in the UK

Thousands

	1991	*1995*
Defined benefit	9,800	9,200
Defined contribution	900	1,100
Total	10,700	10,300

Notes:

1. The GAD survey does not separate public sector schemes into defined benefit and defined contribution. It has been assumed that all public sector scheme members are in defined benefit schemes but the figures given for defined benefit will include a small number of public sector workers who are members of defined contribution schemes.
2. 1995 is the latest year for which information is available. The next GAD survey of occupational pension schemes covering the position in 2000 is due for publication later this year.

Source:

'Occupational Pension Schemes' Surveys by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) 1991, 1995.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department will consult on the introduction of compulsory pensions. [41730]

Mr. McCartney: Any employee earning over the primary threshold is making compulsory contributions to their pensions through national insurance.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the basis is of the attribution of income to a private pension pot before annuitisation for the assessment of income support on the minimum income guarantee; and how many claimants of each benefit were subject to such an attribution. [37032]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The income from an annuity purchased from a pension fund is taken fully into account for MIG purposes.

If a person over 60 has not taken an annuity he is treated as having a notional income of the amount he could have obtained if he had used his pension fund to buy an annuity. A similar approach is intended for pension credit.

Information regarding the number of claimants subject to such an attribution is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the circumstances under which SERPS entitlement can be offset against entitlement to a guaranteed minimum pension. [46435]

Maria Eagle: There are no circumstances under which SERPS entitlement can be offset against an individual's guaranteed minimum pension but the guaranteed minimum pension is offset against an individual's SERPS entitlement.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on how his policies for pensions will affect women. [45907]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to ensuring that our pension reforms significantly improve women's pension rights.

In April 2001 we introduced simple, low charge, flexible stakeholder pensions which are not restricted to those who are working. Women who wish to save towards

a decent income in retirement can now do so and benefit from tax relief on the contributions paid into a stakeholder pension.

Stakeholder pensions can be moved between providers without charge. This is beneficial to those women in the modern labour market who move regularly between employers and occupations and who at different times, may be self employed, employed on a limited term contract or on a permanent contract.

The flexibility of stakeholder pensions means that they are a good option for women who take a break from work, for example to raise a family, as contributions can be started and stopped without penalty. As stakeholder pensions are open to non-earners those women who are not employed but can afford to save something towards their retirement can now do so. Stakeholder pension rules also allow family or friends to contribute towards someone else's pension, which may help the large number of women who are carers.

From April 2002, state second pension will boost the pensions of low and moderately paid employees and, for the first time, will provide additional pension for carers and some long-term disabled people. It will be of particular benefit to women, many of whom work part-time or as carers.

Some 2 million carers, at least 1.5 million of whom are women, will begin to build up entitlement to additional pension for the first time under state second pension. Just over 4.5 million low earners, 70 per cent. of whom are women, and 9.5 million moderate earners will gain under state second pension.

The minimum income guarantee for low-income pensioners, most of whom are women, allows people to have £12,000 savings and still qualify for extra support. From April 2002, minimum income guarantee will rise to £98.15 for single pensioners and £149.80 for couples. Currently, over 1.1 million women are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee.

From 2003, the new pension credit will benefit lower income pensioners. Two thirds of people receiving pension credit will be women, half of whom will be aged 80 or over. By April 2003, as a result of the pension credit no single pensioner will have to live on less than £100 a week (£154 for couples).

Winter fuel payments, at £200 for each eligible household, aim to ensure that no older person is fearful of turning up the heating in cold weather. Last winter (2000–01), over 11 million people aged 60 or over in around 8.5 million households received a payment; around 6.3 million of these recipients were women. In addition those aged 75 and over, the majority of whom are women, have been eligible for a free TV licence since February last year.

Under pension sharing legislation, couples whose divorces commenced on or after 1 December 2000 are able to apply to the courts to share the capitalised value of any pension rights held by either or both of them, a measure which benefits many women.

The Government recognise the importance of providing people with sound information on which types of pension provision best suit their individual need and circumstances. We will ensure that clear and understandable guidance is available to assist people in planning for their pension provision. So far, we have produced a series of leaflets to inform the public of the pension options open to them. One of these, "Pensions for Women", outlines the pension options available specifically for women.

State Pension

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost in a financial year of increasing the state retirement pension for *(a)* single pensioners by (i) £5 for those aged up to 74 years, (ii) £10 for those aged 75 to 79 years, (iii) £15 for those aged 80 years and over and *(b)* for married pensioner couples by (i) £8 for those aged up to 74 years, (ii) £18 for those aged 75 to 79 years, and (iii) £28 for those aged 80 years and over per week. [45620]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:*

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

Costs in 2002–03 of increasing the basic state retirement pension for single pensioners by the specified amounts or a proportion of the specified amounts

	Additional costs in 2002–03 £
Up to 74 years	420 million
75–79 years	540 million
80 years and over	1.33 billion
Total cost	2.29 billion

Notes:

1. Costs are in cash terms, rounded to the nearest £10 million, based on September 2001 GB administrative data.
2. Costs relate to recipients of category A, AB and B pensions only.
3. Figures represent the additional cost of introducing the principle set out in part *(a)* of the question rather than the stated increase in the basic state pension in 2002–03.
4. The costs are gross.

EU Pensions Directive

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations have been made *(a)* by his Department to the EU and *(b)* to his Department in respect of the proposed EU Pensions directive. [45310]

Mr. McCartney: Officials from the Department, together with their colleagues from the Treasury, are members of the council working group which is discussing the draft directive on the prudential supervision of occupational pension schemes. The directive has also been discussed at routine meetings between Ministers and their European counterparts. Ministers and officials frequently meet and receive representations from a range of organisations with an interest in occupational pension provision. The subjects discussed have included the draft directive.

Pensioners

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 18 March, *Official Report*, column 145W, to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), on pensioners, how many *(a)* men and

(b) women not making national insurance contributions or receiving credits in the years mentioned were (i) under 24 years of age and (ii) full-time students. [46619]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of people, aged 16 to 23, who have neither paid national insurance contributions nor received credits for pension purposes in each financial year since 1979

Thousands

	Men	*Women*	*Total*
1979–80	61	323	384
1980–81	60	345	405
1981–82	60	371	431
1982–83	55	361	416
1983–84	49	366	416
1984–85	52	357	409
1985–86	55	345	400
1986–87	62	337	398
1987–88	72	344	416
1988–89	80	340	419
1989–90	95	342	437
1990–91	102	354	455
1991–92	106	371	477
1992–93	106	360	466
1993–94	99	349	448
1994–95	92	309	401
1995–96	86	278	364
1996–97	102	269	371

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample so are subject to rounding error and are rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Figures exclude those not registered on NIRS in each year (particularly affecting women in the early years of this analysis and those aged 18–21).

Source:

Figures are taken from the Lifetime Labour Market Database (LLMDB), extracted from the National Insurance Recording System.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of pensioners with low incomes who are living alone and who are not in recept of IS or CTB. [48019]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is contained in the publication, "Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take Up 1999–2000". Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the gap between the average income of the best off fifth of pensioners and the least well off was in the last year for which figures are available. [45914]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is contained in Table 13 of the National Statistics publication "The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1999–2000" a copy of which is available in the Library.

Winter Fuel Payments

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures his Department has taken to ensure that winter fuel payments are not paid twice to the same household. [36920]

Malcolm Wicks: Many households are entitled to more than one winter fuel payment. This is because whether a person is entitled to a winter fuel payment and, if so, at what level, is determined by their personal circumstances in a set qualifying week. An individual who is the only eligible person in that household will receive £200. However, where an eligible person shares a household with another eligible person, each will be entitled to £100, unless income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance is in payment, when the winter fuel payment is £200 per benefit unit.

We have procedures in place to ensure that all eligible people in a household receive the correct level of winter fuel payment. The addresses on the various benefit computer systems are cross-referenced and matched against each other where appropriate. By doing this, the correct level of payment can be determined.

As a further check, we use staff with local knowledge to identify cases where the nature of the address may cause an incorrect level of payment to be issued.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether someone aged over 60 remains eligible for the winter fuel payment if they move to another EU country; and in what other circumstances a British person living abroad can claim the benefit. [46464]

Mr. McCartney: Department officials met recently with officials from the European Commission to discuss the extent of the Government's responsibilities regarding winter fuel payments under Community law. As a result, we expect to bring this matter to a close shortly.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 959W, on winter fuel payments, if he has concluded his discussions with the European Commission about the extent of the United Kingdom's legal obligations under European regulations on winter fuel payments; and if he will make a statement. [48306]

Mr. McCartney: No, but we hope to do so as soon as possible.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Clwyd, South are in receipt of the winter fuel allowance. [41901]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Figures for this year are not yet available. For details of last year's payments I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 152W.

Sandler Review

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many responses to the Sandler Review had been received by the end of the consultation period; and when he expects the review to provide its report to the Government. [40193]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The Sandler review is an independent review of the retail savings industry. More than 200 responses have been submitted to the review team, which is expected to report to the Government in the summer.

TREASURY

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent by his Department and bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27385]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

£000

Department	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
HMT	0	0	0	0	0
IR	0	0	0	0	0
HMCE	0	0	0	0	0
OGC-CCTA	0	0	0	0	0
OGC-PACE	0	0	0	45	66
OGCBS	0	0	0	0	0
DMO	0	0	0	0	0
NSI	21	35	147	60	173
ONS	0	0	0	0	202
RM	114	111	113	117	119
VO	0	0	0	0	0
GAD	0	0	0	0	0

Note:
Values are inclusive of VAT and rounded up to the nearest £1,000.

Detail of the expenditure for each Department is contained in the following table:

	Amount (£)	Project	Company used
OGC—(PACE)			
1996–97	—	PACE was launched as an agency in April 1996. Since the costs for PR for the launch were incurred in the previous financial year they have not been included in this table.	
1999–2000	45,000	Burtonwood Disposal	Roland Dransfield Ltd.
2000–01	66,000	Burtonwood Disposal	Roland Dransfield Ltd.
National Savings			
1996–97	21,798	Consumer Roadshows	Not available
1997–98	34,039	Regional PR Activities	Key Communications Ltd.
	529	Inflation and interest rates	Financial Perspectives Ltd.
1998–99	3,408	Quarterly PR Bulletin	Financial Perspectives Ltd.
	111,675	PR Support for NS ISA launch	Hill and Knowlton (UK) Ltd.
	25,667	PR Consultancy re: Premium Bonds	Register Larkin Ltd.
	5,875	Consultancy re: PR campaigns	Citigate Dewe Rogerson
1999–2000	49,879	Consultancy re: PR campaigns	Citigate Dewe Rogerson
	9,988	Radio editorial coverage	EMR
2000–01	28,842	Broadcast support services	Bulletin International Ltd.
	84,367	Consultancy re: PR campaigns	Citigate Dewe Rogerson
	18,277	Radio editorial coverage	EMR
	41,202	Consultancy re: PR campaigns	The Red Consultancy
Office for National Statistics			
2000–01	202,000	Publicity advice for the 2001 Census	Bell Pottinger
Royal Mint			
Detailed information by year not available but total spend over the period 1996–97 to 2000–01:	574,000	Press Office support; Launch of an average of two commemorative coinage issues per year; Crisis management; General PR activity of coinage; Publication of annual results.	Good Relations

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37552]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

Number of leavers in the year ended 31 March 2001

Department/Agency	Total number of leavers	Before retirement age	Early retirement
HM Treasury	126	117	10
Inland Revenue	3,451	2,965	46
Customs and Excise	1,081	858	168
Office of Government Commerce/ Buying Agency	73	64	7
Debt Management Office	3	3	0
National Savings	21	20	6
Office for National Statistics	520	493	0
Royal Mint	39	39	2
Valuation Office	272	36	20
Government Actuary's Department	9	8	0

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39192]

Ruth Kelly: None that I am aware of.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39123]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not held centrally and providing it would involve disproportionate cost. Regulatory impact assessments are produced for all proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on businesses in the UK and are generally made available in the Libraries of the House. We do not hold information on the costs to public funds of implementation.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects HM Customs and Excise to *(a)* complete, *(b)* submit to Ministers and *(c)* publish their estimate of VAT losses and their strategies to tackle them. [38595]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Government will prepare and publish any such estimates within the framework set out in Paragraph 2.4 of its "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" paper, published alongside the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT was paid by *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools in the state sector in the last year for which figures are available. [46661]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available.

Pension Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the case of a small, self-administered pension scheme with one member who is also the managing trustee, the existence of a pensioner trustee takes the situation outside the exemption granted by section 36 of the Data Protection Act 1998. [41673]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

In the first instance, responsibility for interpreting the Data Protection Act 1998 lies with the Information Commissioner. I understand that her view is that small, self-administered pension schemes do not benefit from the exemption provided by section 36 of the 1998 Act. I shall consider the case for providing an exemption for such pension schemes from the requirement to give a notification to the Information Commissioner under section 18 of the 1998 Act.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce his plans for health spending in 2004–05 and 2005–06. [44693]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government have said that they will set out the details of departmental spending allocations up to 2005–06 in this year's spending review.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43375]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Sue Nye was appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

For details of unpaid appointments made by the Treasury to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent, broken down on an annual basis, on advertising and promoting the children's tax credit. [46468]

Dawn Primarolo: The annual spend on advertising and promoting the children's tax credit is as follows.

£

Financial year	*Expenditure*
2000–01	6,958,527
2001–02	363,625

In this, the third phase of children's tax credit, applications were driven from 2.7 million up to 3.8 million, reflecting the success of this advertising. The response can be measured by the fact that following the advertising we took over two million telephone calls.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost was of administering the working families tax credit in the last year for which figures are available. [46465]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 438W.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officers are allocated by Customs and Excise to control the entry of contraband tobacco into the UK. [46271]

Mr. Boateng: The Law Enforcement arm of Customs comprises just under 7,500 staff, divided primarily between Detection, Intelligence and Investigation units. Many staff, particularly those in Detection, are multi-functional, working across the broad range of Customs responsibilities including tackling indirect tax fraud, the supply of Class A drugs and other import/export prohibitions and restrictions.

In March 2000, the Government published the "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy. This strategy included funding for an additional 955 Customs officers throughout the UK. This represented a broad doubling of Customs resource dedicated to tackling tobacco smuggling.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the rate of growth of tobacco smuggling in 2000–01 was. [47692]

Mr. Boateng: The estimated number of cigarettes smuggled in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 can be found in the xvi report by the Comptroller and Auditor General—Departments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer: HM Customs and Excise Appropriation Accounts 2000–01, paragraph 5.31.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the level of smuggling in 2002–03, as shown by illicit market share, will be reduced. [47694]

Mr. Boateng: The "Tackling Smuggling" strategy published in March 2000 set out targets for the illicit market share of smuggled cigarettes. These targets have been incorporated into a PSA target for Customs. For 2002–03, the aim is for the illicit market share of smuggled cigarettes to be 21 per cent. or less.

Information about the achievement of this PSA target will be published in Customs annual report for 2002–03.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the measurable effects in the financial year 2001–02 of HM Customs and Excise targeting the organisers of tobacco smuggling. [47682]

Mr. Boateng: The "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy published in March 2000 set out targets for the number of smuggling gangs Customs aim to break up or disrupt. These targets have been incorporated into a PSA target for Customs. For 2001–02, the aim is for Customs to break up or disrupt at least 55 tobacco smuggling gangs.

Information about the achievement of this PSA target will be published in Customs annual report for 2001–02.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what increases in the inland activity of HM Customs and Excise took place in 2001–02 to tackle tobacco smuggling. [47669]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the "Tackling Tobacco Smuggling" strategy published in March 2000, Customs have developed a comprehensive approach to tackle all aspects of the tobacco smuggling problem.

Custo[illegible]pproach inland is to carefully plan and target their activities to inflict maximum disruption to the illicit inland distribution networks for smuggled tobacco.

Customs have also introduced new penalties and sanctions designed to disrupt inland supplies of smuggled tobacco. For example, in July 2001, Customs introduced a system for prominent marks to be placed on packs of cigarettes and tobacco indicating UK duty has been paid. This measure makes smuggled cigarettes very easy to identify and provides sanctions designed to hit those who sell smuggled tobacco or allow their premises to be used for selling.

Tax Revenue

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax revenue derived from non-domiciles who have *(a)* UK income or gains and *(b)* overseas income remitted to the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [46618]

Dawn Primarolo: The information on which such an estimate would be based is not available.

Taxation (Retirement)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the *(a)* Treasury and *(b)* Inland Revenue are reviewing the tax rules about (i) partial and (ii) flexible retirement; and if he will make a statement. [46617]

Dawn Primarolo: This issue is kept under regular review and an announcement will be made if it is decided to change the current rules.

Contingency Planning

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional expenditure has been incurred on counter-terrorism *(a)* planning, *(b)* provisions and *(c)* defences, including civil defence, since 11 September 2001. [46614]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Funds have been approved by Parliament in the normal way in Supplementary Estimates. The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave details of additional public spending arising from attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 in his Pre-Budget Report Statement to Parliament on 27 November 2001. Departments are taking account of the importance of counter-terrorism issues in their departmental priorities and future spending is being considered in the normal way as part of the Spending Review 2002.

GDP

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the GDP per capita growth of *(a)* the English regions and *(b)* Wales was in each year since 1997. [46605]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Don Foster, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on estimating the GDP per capita growth of the English Regions and Wales in each year since 1997.

The latest GDP per capita estimates for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom are available up to 1999, and were published as an ONS News Release on 27 February 2001. These data form the basis for the growth rates shown in table 1.

Regional GDP data are only available on a current price basis. The growth rates shown in the table will therefore include the effects of inflation.

The publication referred to in this answer is available in the House of Commons Library and on the web at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalaccounts.

Table 1: Gross Domestic Product, £ per head at current basic prices

Year on year change expressed as a percentage

	1997[1]	1998[1]	1999[1]
United Kingdom[2]	6.1	5.7	3.4
North East	2.1	4.7	2.9
North West	5.2	4.0	3.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	6.2	4.2	3.8
East Midlands	6.5	4.2	2.5
West Midlands	5.2	5.6	3.9
East	7.4	6.3	3.6
London	8.0	8.2	2.2
South East	7.8	6.3	4.1
South West	6.3	4.0	2.9
England	6.6	5.8	3.4
Wales	3.5	5.2	3.8
Scotland	2.4	6.0	3.3
Northern Ireland	6.1	2.6	3.0

[1] Provisional

[2] Excluding Extra-Regio and the Statistical Discrepancy

Regional Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's policy is toward the draft European regulation to recognise and adopt the current NUTS structure. [48266]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on Government policy towards the draft European regulation to recognise and adopt the current NUTS structure. (48266)

During the discussion of the regulation in the Council Working Group, the UK has supported the principle of the regulation, that common definitions must apply if statistics are to be comparable across the Community. However, the UK view has been that the initial draft would benefit from changes. The three principal concerns raised by the UK have been: (i) either that NUTS should provide a breakdown of the whole of the European Union rather than just the economic territory of the Member States, or that it should be clear to users that it does not (ii) that no changes should be imposed by the Commission, and (iii) that the regulation should cover all existing five NUTS levels, not just levels 1, 2 and 3. Council discussions are still underway to resolve the concerns of the UK and other member states. A revised version of the regulation, which seeks to address member states' concerns, will be discussed at a Council Working Group meeting on 16 April 2002 in Brussels.

UK support for the regulation will be considered on the basis of changes emerging from consideration by the European Parliament and the Council.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations were received from organisations in the Isle of Wight and Hampshire concerning the consultation on proposals by the Government Statistical Service Committee for Regional Statistics on NUTS area definitions. [48265]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 10 April 2002.

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on representations from organisations in the Isle of Wight and Hampshire concerning the Government Statistical Service Regional Statistics Committee consultation on NUTS area definitions. (48265)

The consultation document was issued in July 1996, and about 120 responses were received by the deadline of September 1996. The organisations based in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight that made representations were the Isle of Wight Council, Wight Training and Enterprise, Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council. Comments relating to the Isle of Wight and Hampshire were also made by Government Office for the South East and the Association of District Councils.

There was general support for the proposal to make Hampshire and the Isle of Wight separate NUTS2 areas, as opposed to the existing situation of the two areas being a single NUTS2 area. However, one organisation commented that there was no logical reason for such a split. The other main points made by these organisations related to (a) changing the NUTS1 structure for England from Standard Statistical Regions to Government Office Regions—some supporting and some opposing the proposal; and (b) a general welcome for the greater availability of data at the new smaller NUTS3 and NUTS4 levels that the new classification should enable.

Drugs Deaths

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died as a result of illegal drugs related deaths in Weston-Super-Mare in 2001. [47762]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Brian Cotter, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of people who died of illegal-drug-related deaths in Weston-Super-Mare in 2001. (47762)

Figure are not yet available for 2001. In 2001, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 9 deaths to residents of Weston-Super-Mare parliamentary constituency which mentioned drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Cancer Statistics

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many men in England have been diagnosed with testicular cancer since 1 January 2000 aged *(a)* under 25, *(b)* 25 to 35, *(c)* 36 to 45, *(d)* 46 to 55 and *(e)* over 55 years. [46760]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of men in England who have been diagnosed with testicular cancer since 1st January 2000 aged (a) under 25, (b) 25 to 35, (c) 36 to 45, (d) 46 to 55 and (e) over 55 years. (46760)

Figures on the number of newly registered cases of testicular cancer since 1 January 2000 are not yet available. The latest available statistics for England cover registrations of cancer diagnosed in 1998. The table below shows the latest published available information.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of testicular cancer by age, 1998, England

	Cases of malignant neoplasm of testis
Under 25	182
25–34	571
35–44	497
45–54	191
55 and over	100

Source:
Table 1 from 'Office for National Statistics. "Cancer statistics: registrations 1998, England", series MB1 no. 29' at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme—health/MB1—No29.pdf.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the survival rates for patients in England suffering from thyroid cancer over the last three years. [46742]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the survival rates for patients in England suffering from thyroid cancer over the last three years. (46742)

The information requested is not available. The latest available figures on survival of thyroid cancer patients relate to England and Wales and were published in *"Cancer Survival Trends in England and Wales 1971–1995: deprivation and NHS region"* Series SMPS No. 61, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. For patients diagnosed in 1986–90, the five year relative survival rate in England and Wales was 73%.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the survival rate for bowel cancer is in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other European countries. [47550]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Tim Loughton, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what the survival rate for bowel cancer is in (a) the UK and (b) other European countries. (47550)

Comparable information on cancer survival in the parts of the UK and Europe covered by the Eurocare II study was published in "Survival of Cancer Patients in Europe: the EUROCARE-2 Study" (IARC Scientific Publications No. 151); a copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

Information on survival from bowel[1] cancer in England and Wales, Scotland and parts of Europe (see below[2]) is summarised in Chapter 4 of the book *Cancer Survival Trends*[3]. Figures for the UK as a whole are not available.

Five-year relative survival (%)

	Colon		*Rectum*	
	Men	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
Europe[2]	47	47	43	43
England and Wales	39	39	37	39
Scotland	41	41	38	39

[1] This includes cancers of the small intestine, colon and rectum (ICD 9 codes 152, 153 and 154, respectively). Survival is usually analysed separately for colon and rectum, (although the rates tend to be similar). There are relatively few cases of cancer of the small intestine: 0.3% of the total in England in 1998.

[2] Cancer registries in the following European countries participated in the EUROCARE-2 study (those countries with complete coverage of the population by cancer registries are marked *): Austria, Denmark*, England*, Estonia*, Finland*, France, Germany, Iceland*, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Scotland*, Slovakia*, Slovenia*, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

[3] Coleman MP et al. Cancer Survival Trends in England and Wales, 1971–1995: deprivation and NHS Region. Studies in Medical and Population Subjects No. 61. London: The Stationery Office, 1999.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been diagnosed with skin cancer in (i) 2002 to the latest available date and (ii) each of the last 10 years. [46754]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on how many (a) men and (b) women have been diagnosed with skin cancer in (i) 2002 to the latest available date and (ii) each of the last ten years. (46754)

Figures on the number of newly registered cases of malignant melanoma of the skin for 2002 are not yet available. Registration of non-melanoma skin cancer (which is very common but rarely fatal) is unreliable.

Figures for malignant melanoma of the skin for the latest available ten years are given in the table below.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of malignant melanoma of the skin, by sex, 1989–98, England and Wales.

	Number of cases	
	Male	*Female*
1989	1,421	2,385
1990	1,507	2,176
1991	1,488	2,268
1992	1,658	2,512
1993	1,915	2,823
1994	1,909	2,816
1995	1,928	2,872
1996	1,938	2,767
1997	2,092	2,834
1998	2,257	2,989

Asthma

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children have died as a result of asthma symptoms in each of the last 10 years. [47458]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Tim Loughton, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of children dying as a result of asthma symptoms in each of the last 10 years. (47458)

The latest available figures are for the 10 years 1991–2000. Figures for children aged under 16 are given in the table below.

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Number of deaths occurring to children aged under 16[1] with an underlying cause of death of asthma[2] in England and Wales in the calendar years 1991 to 2000

Calendar year[3]	*Number of deaths*
1991	40
1992	24
1993	21
1994	32
1995	18
1996	22
1997	22
1998	24
1999	24
2000	24

[1] Excludes deaths under 28 days.
[2] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD9), code 493.
[3] Figures up to 1992 relate to death registrations in each calendar year. From 1993 they relate to deaths occurring each year.

Taxation

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he proposes to publish illustrations of the effect of direct and indirect taxes in the Budget on various specimen households. [48032]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Budget documentation will contain relevant and meaningful analyses showing the impact of the Budget on different types of households.

Indirect Taxes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what improvements in risk targeting he has initiated in 2001–02 in HM Customs and Excise in order more effectively to tackle serious non-compliance in the payment of indirect taxes. [47668]

Mr. Boateng: As part of Customs' recent restructuring, greater emphasis is being placed on risk assessment, both at national and regional levels. During 2001–02 National Risk Managers have been appointed for VAT, Excise and International trade, supported by Risk Managers in each of the seven Customs geographical regions.

Special teams have also been established to tackle risks in relation to VAT Missing Trader Intra-Community fraud and VAT Avoidance, while 20 joint teams have been set up alongside the Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions specifically to identify and tackle businesses operating in the informal economy.

Following the independent investigation conducted by John Roques into excise diversion fraud, regional and national teams have also been set up to target risk in relation to excise warehouses, complementing the risk based controls applied to goods entering the country under duty suspense.

Aggregates Levy

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department undertook to ascertain the effects of the aggregates tax on the *(a)* rate proposed in the UK and *(b)* rates levied in other European Union countries. [48167]

Mr. Boateng: The independent research which underpins the aggregates levy considered all aspects of the environmental damage caused by aggregate extraction. These environmental costs are reflected in the levy's rate of £1.60 per tonne.

Aggregate taxes in other EU member states are a matter for the individual states themselves.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department undertook to ascertain the effects of the aggregates tax on *(a)* individual quarries in parts of the UK, *(b)* local government finance and *(c)* employment in the construction industry. [48050]

Mr. Boateng: A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the *(a)* Scottish Executive and *(b)* Welsh Assembly on the subject of the aggregates levy. [48036]

Mr. Boateng: The Government has received a large number of representations regarding the aggregates levy, and has held discussions regarding its implementation with a wide range of organisations both within and outside of Government.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total amount that will be received from Scotland in each of the next five years from the aggregates levy at the proposed rate. [48037]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimate has been made.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of the aggregates levy on the implementation of public sector infrastructure projects. [46705]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 687W.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48363]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48362]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury holds a multiple form TV licence at a cost of £327 covering its three buildings—Parliament street, Allington towers and Downing street.

CITES

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage and how many seizures by

HM Customs of illegal wildlife items under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species System resulted in successful prosecution in each year since 1997; [48003]

(2) what the financial value is of illegal wildlife items seized by HM Customs under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species System in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [48005]

(3) what plans he has to increase the maximum sentence for import of wildlife items under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species System; and if he will make a statement; [48004]

(4) how many successful prosecutions have been brought under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species System in each year since 1997. [48002]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise is responsible for enforcement of the restrictions on import and export from or to countries outside the European Union on goods covered by the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species and EU regulations made to implement the Convention. It is not responsible for the enforcement of controls on trade within the UK or European Union. Maximum penalties for illegal import or export are seven years imprisonment and an unlimited fine. There are no plans to increase these penalties.

Details of the number of seizures in each year since 1997 and the number of successful prosecutions are:

Calendar year	*Number of seizures*	*Persons successfully prosecuted*
1997	495	None
1998	498	None
1999	336	None
2000	441	1
2001	434	2
2002[1]	[2]—	3

[1] To date
[2] Not available

The financial value of illegal wildlife items seized is not recorded since there is no legal trade in prohibited goods to provide a basis for valuation.

Correspondence

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters he has received from the public since June 2001; what his target time is for reply; what percentage of letters were replied to within that time; and of those exceeding it, what the range is of time spans in which he has replied. [48173]

Mr. Boateng: Between 1 June 2001 and 28 February 2002 13,459 letters were received of which 79 per cent. were replied to within the 15 working day target. A breakdown of time spans for those exceeding target is not known and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to improve the response time to Parliamentary questions. [47712]

Mr. Boateng: An increasing proportion of parliamentary questions has been answered on time by the Treasury in each session since PSA targets were introduced in 1998–99, and the Department is on track to meet its targets again in the present session.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average number of days, in excess of the day the question was put down for answer, that it has taken him to answer questions from *(a)* Opposition party hon. Members and *(b)* Government party hon. Members since 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [46445]

Mr. Boateng: 5.2 and 5.5 days respectively. However, 1,205 of the 1,522 written Parliamentary questions (79.1 per cent.) answered by Treasury Ministers between 1 January and 26 March received replies on or before the due date for answering.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47803]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Wanless Report

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 25 February, *Official Report*, column 1045W, whether he has set a date for the publication of the Wanless report. [48216]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No date has yet been set for the publication of Mr. Wanless' final report.

London Underground

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from HM Treasury have met (i) Ministers and (ii) officials from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions to discuss the potential liabilities to the Exchequer which will arise from underwriting the contingent liabilities of the public private partnerships for London Underground, as proposed in the letters of comfort and Minute from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the partners in the PPP presented to Parliament on 21 March. [47962]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers and officials have discussions with colleagues in other Departments on a wide range of subjects on a regular basis.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the accounting advice he has received from the Office of National Statistics on the treatment of the commitments given in the London Underground Public Private Partnership letter of comfort in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [46676]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Office for National Statistics has not been asked for advice on the London Underground Public Private Partnership.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' Resource Accounts are drawn in accordance with the Treasury Resource Accounting Manual, which takes account of all Financial Reporting standards pronounced by the Accounting Standards Board. The contingent liability arising from any letters of comfort would therefore be recorded as a Note to the Department's Resource Accounts.

Network Rail

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions regarding the underwriting of the debt of Network Rail by means of potential emergency loans from the Strategic Rail Authority. [47958]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers and officials have discussions with colleagues in other Departments on a wide range of subjects on a regular basis.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47102]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers, including the Chancellor have made 40 trips abroad since March 2001 and visited USA, Belgium, Italy, Canada, Portugal, Luxembourg, France, Germany, San Juan, Spain, Ireland, Korea, Malawi and Japan. Total cost of the visits was £110,250.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47242]

Ruth Kelly: It is not the Treasury's practice to comment on protective security measures.

Scottish Transport Group

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make public *(a)* correspondence, records of verbal communication and other documents and communications between himself and the Scottish Executive and *(b)* advice which he has received in connection with the Scottish Transport Group Pension schemes, the winding up thereof and the disposal of and entitlement to surplus funds therefrom. [48283]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive is responsible for these schemes. They announced in December 2000 how the surplus is being distributed.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated value is of the Scottish Transport Group pension fund at 31 March; and whether increases in the value of the fund following 31 March 2000 will accrue to *(a)* the fund and *(b)* Her Majesty's Government. [48053]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive announced in November 2001 that the estimated net of tax surplus as at 31 March 2001 is £168 million and that £118 million is to be distributed as ex gratia payments by the Scottish Executive, which includes an additional £18 million as a result of an increase in the net of tax surplus. The size of the surplus as at 31 March 2002 is not yet known.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reasons underlie the proposed distribution of the surplus from the Scottish Transport Group pension schemes; what part of the distributed surplus is to be used for a contingency fund in respect of indemnities against the risk of legal action based on the actions of trustees; and whether in the event that there are no successful claims against that contingency fund, it will be the subject of a subsequent distribution to Scottish Transport Group pensioners. [48052]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The wind-up of the STG pension schemes is being taken forward by the trustees and the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive has announced that £118 million will be made available as ex gratia payments to pensioners. I understand that there is no intention that any part of that sum will be used for a contingency fund against potential legal action.

Tax Thresholds

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the threshold for paying *(a)* tax and *(b)* higher rate tax, in relation to average earnings, has changed since 1997. [47959]

Dawn Primarolo: The new earnings survey provides the best estimates for average earnings and the income tax personal allowance and thresholds are in annex A of Inland Revenue Statistics. The most recent edition is on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax—structure/menu.htm.

Sustainability Fund

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total amount that will be paid to Scotland from the Sustainability Fund in each of the next five years. [48038]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive's share of the Sustainability Fund is estimated at £3 million in 2002–03 and 2003–04. Decisions on the size of the Fund in subsequent years, and consequently the total amounts the Scottish Executive will receive in these years, have yet to be made.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total liability to the Exchequer of current PFI projects and the expected liability of planned PFIs. [47792]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1144–46W.

Road Pricing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when road pricing for hauliers will be introduced. [48181]

Mr. Boateng: The Government published a consultation document "Modernising the Taxation of the Haulage Industry" alongside 2001 pre-Budget report. The consultation closed on 8 February and the Government are considering the responses ahead of the Budget.

Strip Stamps

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what analysis he has conducted of the experiences of countries that have abolished their strip stamp regimes; [46948]

(2) what analysis has been conducted of the experiences of countries that considered introducing strip stamps but then decided against it; [46949]

(3) whether the proposed whisky strip stamps would apply to miniature bottles of whisky. [46947]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise are considering a wide range of issues as part of their ongoing consultation on the costs, benefits and practicalities of introducing a tax stamps system for spirits. This includes the experiences of other countries and the various sizes of container to which tax stamps would be affixed.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Scotland Office with regards to the proposed whisky strip stamps. [46950]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and his Ministers meet regularly with their Ministerial colleagues to discuss a wide range of issues.

National Insurance

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's income in 2001–02 was on national insurance on earned income from *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees. [47631]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to Appendix 6 of Cm5383—Report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the social security benefits up-rating order 2002 and the social security (Contributions) (re-rating and National Insurance Funds payments) order 2002.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of revenue for financial year 2001–02 if top band taxpayers paid national insurance on unearned income. [47634]

Dawn Primarolo: If higher rate taxpayers paid national insurance on their taxed investment income then this would yield some £¼ billion in 2001–02. This estimate is based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's income on national insurance is from taxpayers in the 40 per cent. income tax band. [47632]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government Actuary's Department estimate that some £6 billion primary class 1, class 2 and class 4 accrue in 2001–02 from higher rate taxpayers.

Tax Credit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent estimate is of the extent of fraud in tax credits; what assessment he has made of the Inland Revenue benchmarking exercise of fraud in tax credits; and if he will publish the benchmarking exercise. [46899]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 815W.

Unearned Income Tax

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are paying tax at 40 per cent. on unearned income. [47633]

Dawn Primarolo: In 2001–02 some two million taxpayers were liable to tax at the higher rate on their investment income. This estimate is based on the Survey of Personal Income.

Alcohol Imports

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a system of prior-approval for legitimate import of alcohol for personal use. [46979]

Mr. Boateng: The vast majority of people who import alcohol for personal use enter the UK without encountering any fiscal checks. A system of prior-approval would represent a significant restriction on movement of goods and people. It would be costly to introduce and could be held to contravene the UK's long-standing obligations under the Treaties of the European Union.

Alcohol Duty

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the proposals from the EU on minimum duty rates on alcoholic drinks. [46978]

Mr. Boateng: The Commission proposals on EU minimum duty rates on alcoholic drinks are long overdue and are expected later on this year.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the PSA target for UK revenue evasion prevention *(a)* was met in 2000–01 and *(b)* will be met in 2001–02; [47675]

(2) when the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to pay 100 per cent. of undisputed invoices within 30 days will be met; [47691]

(3) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to set up a virtual call centre structure to support the introduction of a national helpline for VAT, excise and customs freight by 31 March will be met; [47683]

(4) what recent assessment he has made of whether the HM Customs and Excise target of 18,500 detections of import and export irregularities will be met by the end of the Comprehensive Spending Review period; [47671]

(5) what recent assessment he has made of whatever the PSA target to ensure that by 2005 100 per cent. of HM Customs and Excise services are offered electronically, and that the take-up rate for these services is at least 50 per cent., will be met; [47679]

(6) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to increase its electronic communications with traders from 29 per cent. to 58 per cent. of potential dealing by 31 March will be met; [47687]

(7) what recent assessment he has made of whatever the PSA target to improve value for money in HM Customs and Excise by achieving average annual productivity gains of at least 2.5 per cent. per year until March 2004, without detriment to accuracy or customer satisfaction, will be met; [47677]

(8) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target in HM Customs and Excise to stabilise the level of smuggling in 2001–02 will be met; [47693]

(9) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to have identified annual savings of at least £5 million on estate spending by 31 March will be met on time; [47685]

(10) if the target for the number of detections of indecent or obscene material featuring children, a performance indicator listed on page 49 of the 2001 departmental report of HM Customs and Excise, *(a)* was met in 2000–01 and *(b)* will be met in 2001–02; [47673]

(11) what recent assessment he has made of whatever the PSA target to limit the market share taken by smuggled goods will be met on time; [47681]

(12) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to implement the Procurement Review by 31 March will be met; [47689]

(13) if the PSA target for HM customs and Excise to collect the amount of forecast UK revenue yield from indirect taxes *(a)* was met in 2000–01 and *(b)* will be met in 2001–02; [47676]

(14) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to reduce sickness absence by 2001 was met; [47684]

(15) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to increase customer satisfaction by 6 per cent. in VAT, customs freight and excise will be met in 2001–02; [47672]

(16) what improvements have taken place in 2001–02 in the level of compliance with Customs and statistical requirements of businesses engaged in international trade; [47680]

(17) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the reduction in sickness absence in HM Customs and Excise by 2003 will be met; [47688]

(18) what reductions in the costs to business of compliance with the main UK duties and taxes payable to HM Customs and Excise were achieved in 2001–02; [47678]

(19) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to assess requests for international technical assistance against its overall objectives and strategic priorities and to provide a first class service to sponsors and recipients to achieve the agreed goals will be achieved in 2001–02; [47670]

(20) if the PSA target for HM Customs and Excise to review at least 60 per cent. by value of its services by March will be met; [47686]

(21) if the PSA targets for HM Customs and Excise to reduce the availability of drugs in the UK *(a)* were met in 2000–01 and *(b)* will be met in 2001–02; [47674]

(22) if the PSA target in HM Customs and Excise for 75 per cent. of the members of the Government Procurement Service in key designated posts to have, or to be working towards, a graduate level procurement qualification by 31 March 2000 was met. [47690]

Mr. Boateng: Information on performance against targets in 2000–01 is set out in the Customs and Excise's Report and Financial Statements published on 25 March 2002 (Cm 5309). Information on progress against targets in 2001–02 will be published in Customs' forthcoming departmental report.

Carrier Bags

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue to HM Exchequer which would result from the imposition of a tax on carrier bags in the UK at the same rate as in Eire. [47576]

Mr. Boateng: The Government keeps all taxes under review, but has not calculated the revenue that such a tax would bring.

Post-conflict Assistance Accounts

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress was made on post-conflict assistance accounts for countries which have not reached decision point under the HIPC Initiative at the Financing for Development in Mexico. [46658]

Mr. Boateng: There was no formal discussion on the Post Conflict Assistance Account at the UN Financing for Development Conference. However, the Post Conflict Assistance Account has been successfully established and has already provided assistance for six countries. The Department for International Development was the first contributor to this account, and the Government will continue to press for other countries to contribute.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discuss the Poverty Reduction Strategy papers under preparation with the IMF and World Bank at their Spring Meeting in April 2002, with particular reference to the *(a)* financial resources required to achieve the 2015 development targets, *(b)* creation of a post-conflict assistance account and *(c)* definition of debt sustainability. [46883]

Mr. Boateng: We expect the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings to cover a broad range of issues of relevance to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; including support HIPC Initiative and support for countries emerging from conflict and the need to increase the level and effectiveness of finance for development.

In addition, the Government will continue to press for action to ensure that HIPC countries leave the process with sustainable levels, and that in particular each country will have its debt sustainability reviewed at Completion Point and will receive additional debt relief as appropriate.

The Post-Conflict Assistance Account had been set up following last Spring Meetings and the UK has been the first country to contribute to this fund. Several countries have already benefited from this account and the Government will continue to press for other donors to contribute.

Monterrey Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions took place at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico regarding the achievement of the UN target for spending national income on overseas development assistance and the effect this would have on achieving the 2015 development goals. [46654]

Mr. Boateng: Discussions at the Financing for Development conference in Monterrey covered all aspects of development finance, focusing on the UN target for developed countries to give 0.7 per cent. of national income as official development assistance, as a means of financing the Millennium Development Goals. The UK delegation, led by the Secretary of State for International Development, played a central role in these discussions. Countries attending the conference agreed principles representing a new partnership for development; reaffirmed the UN target, and strengthened their commitment to meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

In preparation for the conference, EU member states agreed to raise their development assistance to an average of 0.39 per cent. of national income by 2006. The UK was instrumental in securing this agreement by the EU, which will mean an additional $7 billion each year for poor countries by 2006. Together with the US announcement of an additional $5 billion, the additional resources announced at Monterrey will total $12 billion per year after 2006. These announcements of substantial additional aid, and the broad consensus reached on the measures required by all Governments to secure more, and more effective finance for development, helped to ensure a successful conference.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions took place at the Financing for Development Conference regarding his Department's Hold in Trust policy on debt repayments for countries which have not yet reached decision point within HIPC. [46655]

Mr. Boateng: The Government continue to press other countries to follow the UK's Hold in Trust policy. While there were no formal discussions scheduled on this issue at the UN Financing for Development Conference, there was agreement reached on the need to keep debt sustainability under review, and to take into account any external shocks when updating debt sustainability at Completion Point.

Scotch Whisky Duty

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was raised by duty on Scotch whisky in each of the last 10 years. [46980]

Mr. Boateng: Information on total duty receipts from spirits can be found in HM Customs and Excise "Spirits Factsheet", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. Information on duty receipts from Scotch whisky is not collected separately.

Annuities

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise the age at which it becomes mandatory to purchase an annuity from 75 to 80 years. [47765]

Ruth Kelly: The consultation document, "Modernising Annuities", issued on 5 February, makes it clear that the Government continue to believe that, in the current circumstances, age 75 should remain the upper limit for turning pension savings into retirement income.

Tax Returns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of businesses submitted their indirect tax returns correctly at the first attempt in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [47667]

Mr. Boateng: Customs VAT systems perform automated checks once a VAT return has been received.

(a) Within the financial year 1999–2000 Customs received approximately 7.3 million VAT returns of which 98.2 per cent. were processed satisfactorily at the first attempt.

(b) For 2000–01, Customs received 7.3 million VAT returns of which 98.1 per cent were processed satisfactorily at the first attempt.

Credit Unions

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the Financial Services Authority helps credit unions meet the new regulatory framework. [48632]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA recognises that transition to the new regulatory environment will be challenging for some credit unions. That is why, last autumn, Sir Howard Davies outlined to me a strategy for facilitating transition through a Credit Unions Support Programme: a proposal to which I gave my full support, and one which FSA has now brought to fruition.

Forest Stewardship Council

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase taxation on wood imported into the UK that does not meet standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council or equivalent credible and international certification systems. [48154]

Mr. Boateng: All options for taxes are kept under review as part of the Budget process.

Objective 1

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will award the National Assembly funding to cover the match funding of Objective 1 projects in Wales; [48215]

(2) if he will make a statement on the amount of match funding awarded to the National Assembly to cover Objective 1 programmes. [48303]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Additional provision of some £272 million was made available to the National Assembly in the 2000 spending review to ensure funding of the EU share of its Objective 1 needs.

State Aid

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the gross contribution was from public funds in 2000 and 2001 to *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* farming. [46278]

Mr. Andrew Smith: According to the European Commission's Ninth Survey on State Aid in the European Union, total state aid to the manufacturing sector in the UK in 1999 totalled 1,238.8 million euro (in 1999 prices). 1999 is the latest year for which State Aid Survey figures are available.

According to the latest available figures, DTI spending on the promotion of enterprise, innovation and increased productivity was forecast to be £867 million in 2000–01, and £983 million in 2001–02. A significant proportion, though not all, of this money will have benefited manufacturing directly or indirectly.

Total public expenditure under the Common Agricultural Policy and on national grants and subsidies for farming was £3,043 million in 2000–01, and is forecast to be £5,255 million in 2001–02.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Aggregate Dredging

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria and what time scale is being used by her Department for the issuing of aggregate dredging licences for the Brucey's Garden Area of the NW Dogger shipping area of the North sea; and if she will make a statement. [46397]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Marine aggregate dredging licences are issued by the Crown Estate which owns nearly all of the seabed out to the UK 12 mile territorial limit and has rights to all minerals within the UK share of the European Continental Shelf. It issues licences only if the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions first issues a favourable 'Government View' on the proposed dredging.

The Crown Estate has received no dredging licence applications for the Brucey's Garden Area of the North West Dogger shipping area of the North sea but has received applications from two nearby areas, called North West Rough and Southernmost Rough. No applications in those areas have yet been submitted to the Secretary of State for a Government View.

If they are, as in all other cases, they will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, including a Coastal Impact Study, and wide consultation with other Government Departments, relevant coastal local authorities and other bodies having responsibilities for the protection of the marine environment. The Secretary of State would not issue a favourable Government View unless he was satisfied that there will be no adverse impact on the coast and no unacceptable effect on the marine environment that could not be mitigated through the observance of conditions attached to the licence.

Time scales for the issue of marine dredging licences are a matter for the Crown Estate. Suggested time scales for processing and determining applications for a Government View are set out in the former DETR/WO publication "Government View: New Arrangements for the Licensing of Minerals Dredging" dated May 1998.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what priority the home efficiency scheme gives to *(a)* the elderly and *(b)* low-income priority groups. [22890]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England is the home energy efficiency scheme (HEES), which is now marketed as 'The Warm Front Team'.

HEES has been developed to help tackle the problem of fuel poverty, which is caused by a combination of energy inefficient housing and low incomes. Certain people are particularly vulnerable to cold-related ill health—the old, families with children, the disabled and the long term sick. HEES is targeted at these priority households, providing two levels of financial assistance for the installation of insulation and heating measures dependent upon the needs of the householder and property type.

HEES—up to £1,500 for low income households with children under 16, disabled persons or those suffering a long term sickness on a qualifying benefit; and

HEES Plus—up to £2,500 for over-60s on an income related benefit.

All applications to the scheme are treated equally in terms of priority.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire, dated 18 July, concerning dormant quarries in the Peak District National Park; [7972]

(2) when she will answer the letter from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 18 July about dormant quarries within the Peak District National Park Authority. [11967]

Mr. Morley: The Department transferred the hon. Member's correspondence to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in December, as they have responsibility for the issue of dormant quarries. I understand that a response was sent on 14 January.

I am sorry that the hon. Member's parliamentary questions tabled to this Department in October and November were not answered at the time the correspondence was transferred.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects a reply to be sent to the letters to the Minister for the Environment dated 31 October 2001 and 8 August 2001 concerning Mr. James Bourne of Maldon. [45493]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 27 March 2002.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the conclusions of Professor Mercer's report on foot and mouth in Devon in respect of *(a)* the handling of the outbreak and *(b)* the lessons of the 1967 outbreak; [11725]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* The report of a committee of Devon County Counsellors chaired by Professor Mercer clearly provides a local perspective and reflects local views and conclusions. I am afraid I do not accept those conclusions. The recommendations of the Northumberland Committee were taken into account as appropriate during the 2001 outbreak. Inevitably, conditions have changed here and in Europe since the Northumberland Committee's report, and the 2001 outbreak was clearly different in nature and extent to the 1967–68 outbreak.

More generally, the Government's position is set out in its written response to Dr. Iain Anderson's independent Lessons Learned inquiry, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what reports she has received from *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Ministry of Defence, regarding their role during the foot and mouth outbreak. [48318]

Margaret Beckett: I have not received any reports from the Army or the Ministry of Defence regarding their role during the foot and mouth outbreak.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has made of the total cost to public funds of the three inquiries following the foot and mouth epidemic. [48202]

Margaret Beckett: The estimated cost of the Policy Commission into the Future of Farming and Food is £176,000 (including gross salary costs of secretariat members). The estimated likely cost of the Royal Society study is £320,000. £620,000 has been set aside for the Lessons Learned Inquiry, which expects to complete its work within its budget.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice on re-stocking is issued by her Department to farms culled out as part of the foot and mouth disease control measures in 2001. [46386]

Mr. Morley: The Department has provided a wide range of advice to livestock farmers on the re-stocking of farms. This was compiled with the help and co-operation of farmers' organisations and representatives and can be found on the Department's website at www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/farmers/index.htm.

We have explained the procedure that must be followed when restocking which includes arrangements for the cleansing and disinfection of the premises, the testing of flocks of origin and inspection of animals once restocking has commenced. We have also sent out information on biosecurity and herd and flock health including a video on "Biosecurity" and leaflets on "Golden rules for a healthy herd: advice on restocking cattle herds", "Golden rules for a healthy flock: advice on restocking sheep flocks", "TB in cattle; reducing the risk" and "Brucellosis: a reminder for all cattle farmers". These include the recommendation that farmers consult their veterinary surgeon and develop an overall health plan for their herd or flock. This would not only be used for evaluating prospective purchases but could be incorporated into the farm management system.

To cover the wider issues associated with restocking, the Farm Business Advice Service offer up to five days of free business advice for farmers whose livestock have been slaughtered under FMD control measures. Seminars have also been run covering advice on both business and farming operational issues.

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase levels of inspection of food contained in luggage from countries infected with foot and mouth disease. [46430]

Mr. Morley: The Government announced on 26 March a programme of work the aim of which is to reduce exotic animal and plant disease entering the country and then threatening our public health and livestock, agriculture and horticulture industries.

The programme includes assessing the disease risks posed by personal imports; work to achieve effective inter-agency enforcement co-operation on the ground, and looking at new, more effective ways of working. We will review, in the light of the risk assessment, the appropriate level and type of resources committed to inspection of luggage.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost of the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak to the *(a)* cattle, *(b)* pig and *(c)* sheep sectors. [46788]

Mr. Morley: The recent foot and mouth outbreak is estimated to have resulted in losses of some £3.1 billion to agriculture and the food chain. However, some £2.6 billion has been paid by the Government in compensation for slaughtered livestock and payments for disposal and clean up costs. Separate estimates for the different sectors are not available.

Edmonton Incinerator

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which body carried out the 1997 study into dioxin levels in ash from the Edmonton incinerator; [20760]

(2) what was the basis on which the 1997 analysis of ash from the Edmonton incinerator showed dioxin levels close to background levels. [20761]

Mr. Meacher: I am not aware of any formal study carried out in 1997 on dioxin levels in ash from the Edmonton incinerator. However, under section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, operators of such plant must provide sufficient information to those managing waste ash to ensure appropriate disposal. From analyses carried out for the operators, there is data showing dioxin levels in electrostatic precipitator ash from the Edmonton incinerator.

Industry figures for dioxins in ash entering the construction market in 2000 (20–50 ng/Kg I-TEQ) indicated levels close to those found in normal urban soils, which 1999 AEAT figures show to be 4.9–87 ng/Kg I-TEQ, with a mean of 28 ng/Kg I-TEQ. Analysis for the industry is carried out by independent laboratories.

Refrigerator Recycling

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received on the impact on local authorities of the regulations on the recycling of fridges which come into force on 1 January 2002. [22071]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received a number of representations from English local authorities concerning EC Regulation 2037/2000 and the collection and disposal of domestic fridges and freezers. We have received representations through stakeholder meetings, individual meetings, letters, e-mail and telephone calls.

We announced a package of measures to assist local authorities at the end of last year. This included guidance on storage, disposal and funding for local authorities.

Off-farm Employment

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the number of farm women engaged in employment off-farm in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what recent representations she has received from the Women's Food and Farming Union in respect of the trend in the level of farm incomes. [31514]

Mr. Morley: Information on farm women with employment off-farm is not available. Although the Department maintains regular contact with the Women's Food and Farming Union, we have no record of any detailed representations on off-farm employment of farm women.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33864]

Mr. Morley: One member of staff (formerly of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions) was seconded to Andersen in January 2001.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45233]

Mr. Morley: The Department employed three members of staff on secondment from non-governmental organisations in 1999, four in 2000 and six in 2001. Secondments refer to all continuous interchange activity of three months or more.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if she will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37974]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food travelled abroad on 12 occasions, at an average cost of £515 per trip. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Community Councils

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what help is available through *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Countryside Agency to local community councils. [39397]

Alun Michael: Support for rural community councils is now provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs through the Countryside Agency. £2.984 million was paid in 2001–02; from 2002–03, under a new three-year service level agreement, £3.334 million will be available each year. Rural community councils may be eligible for funding under other programmes run by DEFRA and the Countryside Agency—for instance if a particular rural community council puts forward a successful bid to run a project under the England Rural Development Programme or within one of the programmes run for us by the agency, but no separate record is kept of money they may have received from such sources.

Timber and Wood Products

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from which companies her Department has obtained its timber and wood products in the past two years. [39892]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Refrigerants

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement indicating what her understanding is of whether part of Article 15, Paragraph 5 of EC Regulation 2037/2000 applies to foam-insulating materials used in pre-2001 manufactured refrigerators and freezers. [39993]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Article 16(5) of EC Regulation 2037–2000 requires member states to promote the recovery, recycling and destruction of ozone-depleting substances and to assign to appropriate bodies responsibility for ensuring compliance with the provisions of paragraph 1. Since the obligations under paragraph 1 are also applicable to paragraph 2, the Government's interpretation of paragraph 5 is that it applies in its entirety to insulating foam blown with ozone-depleting substances in any refrigerators or freezers.

Gender-based Assessments

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many gender-based assessments she has undertaken in her Department since June 2001. [40699]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Department's employment practices and procedures are monitored on a regular or rolling basis by gender as well as by ethnicity, disability and full time/part time categories.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41086]

Mr. Morley: In the past four years one member of staff in DEFRA's press office has received a redundancy payment. No termination payments have been made.

Anderson Inquiry

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the verbatim oral evidence of witnesses to the Anderson Inquiry will be made public. [41358]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for the Lessons Learned Inquiry. I understand that verbatim transcripts of the public meetings held in Okehampton, Builth Wells, Lockerbie, Newcastle and Carlisle are available on the inquiry website. The transcript of the public meeting held in Harrogate will be published shortly. The inquiry is not otherwise taking verbatim notes of interviews.

Cloud Seeding

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether cloud seeding is allowed in the UK; [43850]

(2) whether the Government have used cloud seeding in Great Britain since 1972; [43849]

(3) what research the Government are conducting into cloud seeding; and if she will make a statement. [44122]

Mr. Meacher: None. The Met Office maintains a watching brief on any developments in this area of science, but it has not pursued research into cloud seeding for many years.

There is no legislation to prevent cloud seeding in the UK.

The Government have not used cloud seeding since 1972.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Home Office about the level of penalties for convictions of persons having imported meat illegally into the UK; and if she will make a statement. [44062]

Mr. Morley: We have had no discussions with the Home Office about the current level of penalties, which on conviction are up to two years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000. This Department is leading an initiative to address the disease risks posed by illegal imports of meat, and our work will look at what additional or improved deterrents might be put in place.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to make her first assessment of the impact of her Department's recent poster campaign at United Kingdom seaports and airports on the dangers of illegal meat imports and associated penalties; how she intends to measure its effect on the number of illegal meat imports made through UK points of entry; and if she will make a statement. [44061]

Mr. Morley: We are continuously reviewing the impact of our poster campaign. We are undertaking market research to help assess the impact of the posters and provide information on how public awareness can be improved still further. We will also be monitoring and sharing information with enforcement bodies during this time to assess the effects on the number of illegal imports. We have improved our intelligence gathering and sharing of information and there is increased vigilance among enforcement officers.

We have commissioned a risk assessment of the animal disease risks posed by illegal imports of meat, the results of which will provide information about what further action to reduce the risk is needed and where this will be most effective.

We are also amending secondary legalisation to generalise powers to search suspect consignments, including personal baggage. We are actively looking at other measures such as warnings on landing cards, use of detector dogs and better use of x-ray technology.

Timber

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning recent shipments of Brazilian mahogany to the UK; and if she will make a statement. [44703]

Mr. Morley: Representations have been received from members of the public, from 10 Members of Parliament and from Greenpeace. In addition illegal logging in Brazil has been the subject of recent parliamentary questions.

Greenpeace sought to take the Department to judicial review in order to compel DEFRA and HM Customs and Excise to seize a recent importation of Brazilian mahogany. The judgment refusing Greenpeace's application is now the subject of appeal.

I can assure the hon. Member that we continue to take a strong stance on illegal logging and welcome the Brazilian Government's efforts to tighten controls on the concessions and logging facilities. In particular we totally support the temporary moratorium by the Brazilian Federal Environment Agency on transport and commercialisation of mahogany. My officials are in contact with their opposite numbers in the Brazilian CITES Management Authority and I hope that they will be able to meet shortly to discuss bilateral measures to combat illegal trade. The shipments concerned did have the required documentation complying with Brazilian law and following inquiries made were confirmed by the Brazilian authorities as genuine and in line with CITES regulations.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45396]

Mr. Morley: No administrative manuals or internal guidance are currently published though certain material, particularly in relation to handling complaints, is published on the DEFRA website.

Forests

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average acreage of new forest land planted in each of the last five years was. [45210]

Mr. Morley: The information is given in the table.

Thousands of hectares

Year ended 31 March	*New planting*
1997	4.7
1998	4.4
1999	5.1
2000	5.9
2001	5.9

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department has played in discussions relating to the fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe; and if she will make a statement. [46570]

Mr. Morley: The Forestry Commission is actively involved in the discussions and preparatory meetings and will represent the interests of the UK at the conference. Some of the key issues are likely to be national forest programmes, biodiversity and forest conservation, fostering cooperation with central and eastern European countries and cultural and spiritual aspects of sustainable forest management.

Ham Fen Beaver Project

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department was first informed of the situation of the Norwegian beavers involved in the Ham Fen Beaver Project. [44766]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I understand that Kent Wildlife Trust contacted the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 30 January 2001 to notify them of the possible importation of beavers for conservation purposes.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), which had responsibility for controls on non-native species was not contacted. The DETR became aware of the situation on 1 May 2001, following the beavers' arrival at Heathrow Airport on 30 April.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the Ham Fen beavers have been held in quarantine for 11 months. [44768]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The Norwegian beavers, which are not native to the UK and are subject to import, quarantine and release controls, entered the UK on 30 April 2001 and were subject to six months quarantine, which is now complete.

The beavers are also subject to release controls. Kent Wildlife Trust made an application for a licence for permission to release some of the beavers to Ham Fen nature reserve, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This application was received on 10 September 2001. It raises some serious environmental questions. The Department has agreed in principle to issue the licence, with conditions, as soon as possible.

Waterways (Kendal Canal)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the British Waterways Board has to reopen the canal to Kendal; and by what means. [45303]

Mr. Morley: British Waterways have announced proposals to restore the northern section of the Lancaster Canal to navigation. The project will be taken forward by the Northern Reaches Restoration Group which comprises British Waterways, local authorities, The Waterways Trust and other voluntary organisations.

Beef

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take to secure the lifting of the ban imposed by the French Government on imports of beef from the UK. [45388]

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent representations she has made to the Government of France to lift the ban of British beef; [45213]

(2) what recent representations she has made to the Government of France on compensation for British farmers affected by the ban of British beef; [45215]

(3) what representations she has made to the Government of France on compensation for British farmers affected by the ban on British beef; [45212]

(4) what recent representations she has made to the Government of France to lift the ban on British beef. [45214]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Secretary of State met the French Agriculture Minister at the 18 March Agriculture Council and made it clear that we expect France to lift its ban on the import of UK beef produced in accordance with the Date-based Export Scheme as soon as possible. However, it is for the Commission to take action to enforce EU law and on 20 March the Commission wrote to the French Government seeking observations on France's failure to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the beef consumed in the UK was imported in the last 10 years for which figures are available; what proportion of the beef imported annually into the European Union is used by the UK for domestic consumption; and what assessment she has made of the effect on the UK beef industry of the European Commission's proposal to increase beef imports from Argentina. [46403]

Mr. Morley: The amount of beef imported as a proportion of the total available for consumption in the UK between 1991 to 2000 has fluctuated between 18 per cent. and 25 per cent. Detailed figures are shown in the table.

Beef and veal	*1991*	*1992*[1]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Supply and use ('000 tonnes, dcw)[2]									
Home-fed production[3]	1,028	973	888	947	1,002	710	698	699	679
Imports from:									
the EU[4]	165	160	157	149	145	95	141	92	125
the rest of the world	39	45	52	41	67	74	75	60	59
Exports to[5]:									
the EU	126	140	167	228	263	64	13	9	9
the rest of the world	31	25	45	65	72	16	1	—	—
Total new supply	1,075	1,014	885	844	880	799	901	842	853
Increase in stocks	80	21	−36	−125	−23	67	37	−16	−83
Total available for consumption in the UK	995	993	921	969	903	732	865	858	936
Closing stocks	220	240	204	79	56	123	160	144	61
Imports as % of the total available for consumption in the UK	21	21	23	20	23	23	25	18	20

[1] For comparability with other years, the figures have been adjusted from a 53-week to a 52-week basis where appropriate.
[2] Does not include meat offals or trade in preserved or manufactured meat products. Boneless meat has been converted to bone-in weights.
[3] Excludes cattle slaughtered under the over-30-month scheme and selective cull and calves slaughtered under the calf processing aid scheme.
[4] Includes meat from finished animals imported from the Irish Republic.
[5] Adjusted, as necessary, for unrecorded trade in live animals.
Source:
Statistics (Commodities and Food Division), Economics and Statistics Directorate, DEFRA 26 March 2002

Imports of beef into the UK originating outside the EU as a proportion of imports into the EU rose from 15 per cent. in 1991 to 31 per cent. in 1996 but then fell to 24 per cent. in 2000. Detailed figures are shown in the table.

Imports from third countries of beef, 1991–2000

Units: Thousand tonnes product weight

Year	*EU imports*	*UK imports*	*UK imports as % of EU imports*
1991	216.5	33.0	15
1992	219.7	32.4	15
1993	194.9	34.3	18
1994	209.1	43.1	21
1995	161.8	45.9	28
1996	170.3	52.8	31
1997	202.7	57.8	28
1998	177.9	46.4	26
1999	201.3	42.4	21
2000	202.4	48.0	24

Source:
Eurostat, Comext CD-Rom, Disk No S2/2001. Extracted: 26 March 2002

This table is not directly comparable with the supply and use table which is expressed in carcase weight and includes the meat equivalent of live trade.

The EU may import up to 293,690 tonnes of beef, under various concessionary tariff schemes. This represents less than 4 per cent. of EU beef production, which totals approximately 8 million tonnes per year. UK beef consumption is around 900,000 tonnes a year, of which imports from third countries account for less than 10 per cent., around 64,000 tonnes. The proposal to increase imports from Argentina may increase UK third country imports by around 2,000 tonnes.

Although UK consumption has shown steady recovery since the BSE crisis in 1996, recent estimates of consumption in 2000 and 2001 show a downward trend of 2 per cent. on previous years but an increase of 4 per cent. is expected in 2002.UK beef production fell 8 per cent. in 2001 following the effects of the FMD crisis. Although recovering, UK production is still expected to meet only 69 per cent. of consumer demand in 2002.

Furthermore, the Community beef market is well protected from third country imports by the use of import tariff systems. While some imports are allowed under certain limited concessionary import schemes, the concessions are limited to a quantity of beef amounting to no more than 5 per cent. of total Community production.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to hold discussions with *(a)* her French Government counterpart and *(b)* the European Commission about the continuing French ban on imports of British beef; and if she will make a statement. [46402]

Mr. Morley: The Secretary of State repeatedly raises this issue with both her French counterpart and the Commission at Agriculture Councils.

Action to enforce the Judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) lies with the Commission which wrote to the French Government on 20 March seeking observations on France's failure to comply with the ruling. This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France.

Sand Eels

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on sand eel stocks of the 2002 total allowable catch for sand eel stock. [46395]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has yet been made. The fishery operates during the second and third quarters of the year, approximately from May to August.

Horticulture

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much financial support has been granted by HM Government to horticultural research and development projects in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [46399]

Mr. Morley: A summary of the total spend by DEFRA (and prior to 2001–02 MAFF) for horticultural research and development projects, including potatoes, is given in the table. Annual spends are given in £ millions.

£ million

	Annual spends
1992–93	3.7
1993–94	4.2
1994–95	13.4
1995–96	13.3
1996–97	13.4
1997–98	12.3
1998–99	12.1
1999–2000	11.7
2000–01	11.5
2001–02[1]	11.4

[1] provisional

Details of current projects can be found on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/research.

In addition, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland support research projects on horticulture. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council provides funding for underpinning research relevant to horticulture.

Bovine TB

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in her Department's bovine TB cattle testing programme; when she expects the TB testing programme to be brought up to date; and how many of *(a)* her Department's staff and *(b)* the State Veterinary Service are employed directly in the testing programme. [46390]

Mr. Morley: The vast majority of TB testing is carried out on behalf of the State Veterinary Service (SVS) by private vets from local large animal practices, who work for the SVS as local veterinary inspectors (LVIs). Nearly 4,000 are approved to carry out this testing. For February 2002 nearly 3,000 hours of veterinary and technical time was spent on TB testing within the SVS and just over 11,500 hours of administrative time.

We cannot yet say when the backlog of overdue TB tests will be cleared.

Egg Production

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of the British Egg Industry Council to discuss the future viability of the UK egg production industry. [46393]

Mr. Morley: I will next be meeting representatives of the British Egg Industry Council on 15 April 2002

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of total domestic egg sales is achieved through *(a)* retail, *(b)* catering and *(c)* processing/manufacturing; what percentage of total egg sales volume was organic; and what percentage of total UK egg production by volume was (i) cage, (ii) barn and (iii) free range in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [46391]

Mr. Morley: Official figures are not available at the level of detail requested.

The provisional figure for UK production of eggs for human consumption in 2001 was 803 million dozen; of which 17 per cent. were bought by UK egg processors for breaking; around 50 per cent. were sold through retailers (based on National Food survey estimates for 2000); with the remainder to other processing, i.e. hard boiling, manufacturing, catering and other.

Official figures are not available on the percentage of total organic egg sales by volume. However, using the farmgate value of organic eggs in 1999–2000 from the Soil Association Organic Food and Farming Report, the percentage of egg sales by value is estimated to be about 5 per cent.

In 2001 UK egg production by volume was split as follows:

laying cages—72 per cent.

barn—5 per cent.

free range—23 per cent.

The methodology used to calculate this split by production system is being updated with a view to publishing revised figures in the Summer.

Poultry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of the British Poultry Council to discuss levels of imports of turkey meat from competitor nations; what assessment she has made of domestic market conditions for domestic turkey producers; and if she will make a statement on the health and hygiene standards of turkey meat imported into the United Kingdom. [46400]

Mr. Morley: There are currently no plans to meet the British Poultry Council to discuss this specific issue, although there has been frequent contact with officials on this and other issues.

The EU turkey market has been oversupplied for a number of years and the UK industry is to be congratulated on its past voluntary efforts to improve the market situation by reducing production. It is also pleasing to see that the traditional farm fresh turkey market enjoyed a prosperous 2001, with most birds selling out by Christmas. A surge in production in a number of member states has recently depressed prices throughout the EU, but Italian and French producers have voluntarily destroyed large numbers of hatching eggs in order to help bring the market back into better balance.

All consignments of fresh poultrymeat imported into the UK from other EU member states must have been produced in accordance with the harmonised Community rules laid down in Council Directive 71/118/EEC (as amended). Imports from third countries must have been produced to standards at least equivalent to those in the Directive. Among other things, this Directive sets out the licensing, structural and veterinary supervision requirements to be applied in abattoirs, cutting plants and cold stores.

Ensuring that all member states comply with their Community obligations in properly implementing and applying the Directive is the responsibility of the European Commission, whose Food and Veterinary Office carries out regular programmes of inspection visits to all member states. The Food and Veterinary Office are also responsible for carrying out inspections in the third countries from which fresh meat is imported into the Community.

All consignments of fresh poultrymeat imported from third countries are subject to veterinary inspection on entering the EU to ensure that conditions of import have been complied with and to ensure that they have remained in a satisfactory condition during transport. In line with Community rules, random spot checks at destination may be carried out on consignments of fresh meat imported into the UK from other EU member states.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the *(a)* economic and *(b)* welfare consequences of the use of levels of carbon dioxide exceeding 30 per cent. concentration of the gas mixture for poultry gassing. [46378]

Mr. Morley: The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (WASK) limit the concentration of carbon dioxide in gas mixtures to a maximum of 30 per cent. The limit was based on behavioural research studies in which the aversiveness to poultry of various concentrations of carbon dioxide was investigated. The research indicated that the 30 per cent. limit provided the best balance between reduced aversiveness to birds while guaranteeing a rapid loss of brain function. Given that, on welfare grounds, the concentration of carbon dioxide was limited to 30 per cent. no economic assessment of higher concentrations has been made.

However, recent developments in the industry have shown that gas mixtures comprising nitrogen and reduced levels of carbon dioxide produce economic benefits both in terms of reduced operating costs and reduced maturation times. In addition these mixtures are less aversive to birds.

Detailed neurophysiological work is currently under way to assess the effects on poultry of a variety of gas mixtures (including carbon dioxide) at varying concentrations.

North Eastern Fisheries Committee

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria her Department uses in making appointments to the North Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee; if she will list *(a)* the membership of the North Eastern Fisheries Committee and *(b)* the nature of the members' fishing activities; what assessment she has made of the composition of committee membership; and if she will make a statement on the role of the North Eastern Fisheries Committee chairman in making appointments to the committee. [46398]

Mr. Morley: The Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966 requires members appointed by the Secretary of State to local government Sea Fisheries Committees to be acquainted with the needs and opinions of local fishing interests, or have knowledge of or expertise in, marine environmental matters. These members are expected to represent in a balanced way all the local fishing and marine environmental interests in the waters of the committee districts.

Half the members on each Sea Fisheries Committee are appointed by its constituent local councils; the remainder are appointed by this Department or by the National Assembly for Wales. One member is appointed to each committee by the Environment Agency.

For the North Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee, the 17 members appointed by the Secretary of State for a four year term commencing June 2001 are: Dr. C. Frid, Mr. D. Heselton, Mr. D. Johnson, Mr. T. Smith, Mr. G. Traves, Mr. M. Emmerson, Mr. G. Collins, Mr. D. Horsley, Mr. F. Nesbitt, Mr. I. Rowe, Mr. J. Wilkinson, Mr. A. Pockley, Mr. C. Easton, Mr. J. Johnson, Mr. J. Linstead, Mr. J. Whitton and Mr. N. Proctor. Between them, these members have many years experience of trawling, gill netting, longlining, salmon netting, shellfish fishing, sea angling, boat chartering and marine ecology and biology. The chairman of the committee has no active involvement in making the Secretary of State's appointments to the committee.

State Veterinary Service

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Scotland Office on the devolution of powers and functions of the State Veterinary Service to the control of the Scottish Executive. [46396]

Mr. Morley: There have been no such discussions. Responsibility for animal health is devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the relationship between the State Veterinary Service and Scottish Ministers is outlined in the concordat with the Scottish Executive.

Wind Speeds

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent changes have taken place in respect of recording wind speeds and directions at the horticultural research station at Efford; and if she will make a statement. [45954]

Mr. Morley: Horticulture Research International informs me that it had been providing the Meteorology Office with wind speed measurements using cup-counter anemometers at its Efford site. The Meteorology Office has now discontinued the use of data from low-level counters of the type used by HRI. We understand that this change has been discussed with HRI who have agreed.

New Forest

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations have been received regarding the inclusion of *(a)* Fordingbridge and *(b)* Milford on Sea within the designated boundary for the proposed New Forest national park. [46265]

Alun Michael: As at 26 March, 46 representations have been received regarding the inclusion of Fordingbridge within the boundary of the proposed New Forest national park and 54 on the inclusion of Milford on Sea.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her procedure and timetable for designating the New Forest as a national park. [46266]

Alun Michael: The New Forest National Park (Designation) Order 2002 was submitted by the Countryside Agency to the Secretary of State in late February and was on deposit for public comment until 25 March. The objections and representations received are being considered and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will decide shortly whether or not to confirm the Order or to call a public inquiry. If the Order were confirmed, it would take about a year to establish a national park authority. If a public inquiry were called, this would start in the autumn. Depending on the length of the inquiry, it could be 2004 before the Order was confirmed and 2005 before a national park authority was set up.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to designate the New Forest as access land within the terms of the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [46264]

Alun Michael: I understand that the Countryside Agency expects to issue a draft map of open country and registered common land for the south of England, including the New Forest, later this year. Following consultation on the draft map, the agency will issue provisional and then conclusive maps. Part of the New Forest will be land to which there is an existing right of access under section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925: the new right under the 2000 Act will not apply to such land. The Forestry Commission has already announced its intention in principle to dedicate the national forestry estate under section 16 of the 2000 Act.

Laying Hens

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if egg producers will be permitted to beak trim chickens intended for laying up to a maximum of 10 days of age, where carried out by qualified staff. [45315]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Council Directive 99/74/EC prohibits all mutilation but permits member states to authorise beak trimming provided it is carried out by qualified staff on chickens that are less than 10 days old and intended for laying. It is intended that the directive will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. An implementing SI will shortly be presented to Parliament.

Animal Health

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to develop an animal health strategy; and to what extent this strategy is based on *(a)* the promotion of health and *(b)* the treatment and prevention of disease. [46636]

Mr. Morley: Work is already in hand to develop some aspects of an animal health strategy. In particular work on a strategy for veterinary surveillance was interrupted by the FMD epidemic, but has now been resumed; a draft strategy for surveillance of antimicrobial resistance in animals was published on 12 February; a programme of work to tackle illegal imports is being developed; plans for the improvement of cattle tracing systems and for identification and tracing of other livestock are being developed; and the Government are already consulting on changes to the rules on animal welfare. The Government have commissioned Royal Society and Lessons Learned inquiries into the FMD epidemic which will inform the animal health strategy when they are available later this year.

The strategy will be developed in conjunction with stakeholders, as it will include the promotion of biosecurity measures which are conducive to good health and the prevention of animal disease.

Treatment of animal disease will generally remain a matter for the individual choice of animal owners and their veterinary surgeons, except where the disease is subject to statutory control.

Water Pollution

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the level of pesticide residues found in fresh

water in the UK which comes from *(a)* agrochemicals used in farming and *(b)* products used by organic farmers to control insect pests. [46637]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is responsible for monitoring ground and surface waters for pesticides in England and Wales. A summary of the results is published by the agency; the most recent publication is called 'Pesticides 2000'. The 180 different pesticide active substances monitored do not include any insecticides used by organic farmers. Even if these compounds were to be included in the monitoring programme, most are also used in conventional farming and it would be impossible to identify whether a particular finding in water arose from a particular pattern of farming.

Agricultural Employees

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many agricultural employees there are per hectare on *(a)* organic and *(b)* non-organic farmland. [46628]

Mr. Morley: While the Farm Business Survey does collect limited data on organic farmland, the sample size for organic farms is too small to enable reliable comparisons with non-organic farmland to be made.

Organic Food

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of baby food consumed in the UK was organically produced in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 2000. [46620]

Mr. Morley: Information published in the MINTEL report—Baby Food and Drinks—October 2000 is as follows:

UK retail sales of organic baby food as a percentage of total baby food and drink market

Year	*Percentage*
1995	1.6
1996	2.3
1997	2.7
1998	3.4
1999	7.5
2000[1]	10.6

[1] Estimate

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of organic food sold in the UK in *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2002 was grown in the UK. [46631]

Mr. Morley: Official figures on the split between organic and non-organic food produced in the UK are not available.

However, the following table based on estimates produced by the Soil Association in their Organic Food and Farming Report 2001, shows the proportion of organic sales that are produced in the UK.

	Percentage of organic sales produced in the UK
Dairy products	65
Meat	55
Fruit and vegetables	15
Cereals[1]	20
Eggs	90

[1] And baked products.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to *(a)* collect organic food market and production data and *(b)* track developments in the organic market. [46641]

Mr. Morley: The forthcoming June Agricultural Census will identify farms with organic production or in conversion to organic status. There are also plans to improve the collection of organic data within the Farm Business Survey. Information from other organisations, including the Soil Association, will continue to be used to monitor developments in the organic sector. Further developments on the collection of organic data by the Department will be considered as part of our statistical planning process, but will need to balance the requirements for the information with the additional burdens imposed on survey respondents.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value was of the organic retail market in the UK in *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2002. [46630]

Mr. Morley: Information is not available for earlier years. It is estimated that the retail value of the UK organic food market was of the order of £100 million in 1993–94, £200 million in 1996–97 and £800 million in 2000–01.

Pesticide Residues

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether multiple pesticide residues on food produced with agro-chemicals are covered by testing procedures; and what steps the Government are taking to ensure that foods possibly containing such multiple residues are safe for consumers. [46624]

Mr. Morley: The Government's annual programme of residues testing in food generates results for about 90,000 pesticide/commodity food combinations. This includes an assessment of the number of multi-residues that may be present.

The potential health implications of multi-residues in food has been examined by The Advisory Committee on Pesticides in the past. The Committee concluded (on the basis of the evidence available at the time) that at the very low levels at which they occur, pesticide residues were unlikely to act synergistically. However, the issue remains under review and the Food Standards Agency has asked the Committee on Toxicity of chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) to look again at this issue sometimes known as the 'cocktail effect'. A working group of the COT (known as the Working Group on Risk Assessment of Mixtures of Pesticides (WIGRAMP) is working on this and has recently published its draft findings.

We will be working closely with the Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) and the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) to take forward the COT's recommendations as soon as they are finalised.

Soil Strategy Report

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the soil strategy report being prepared by her Department will recognise the role played by soil organisms in relation to *(a)* the ability of soil to retain moisture and carbon, *(b)* delivering nutrients to plants and *(c)* preventing soil erosion. [46635]

Mr. Morley: In the draft "Soil Strategy for England", issued for public consultation last year, we said that greater understanding of the functioning of soil biological processes was a priority and that we recognised the need to take these more fully into account. DEFRA is already funding research relevant to this. Other bodies, including the Natural Environment Research Council, are also carrying out research into soil biodiversity.

Our view remains unchanged that soil organisms play a key role in relation to retention of moisture and carbon, delivering nutrients and the avoidance of soil erosion, and thus a key role in the sustainable use of soil.

We expect to make an announcement later in the spring on how we plan to develop policies on the sustainable use of soil in England.

Food Production

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of food produced in the UK was sold to British consumers in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [46626]

Mr. Morley: The proportion of food produced in the UK and sold to British consumers was around 87 per cent. in both 1997 and 2001.

Source:

DEFRA self sufficiency calculation.

Organic Farming

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of organic land area is used in the production of *(a)* arable crops, *(b)* sheep, *(c)* beef and *(d)* dairy products. [46632]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the form requested. However it is estimated that around 80 per cent. of the organic area in the UK (fully organic land and land in conversion) is permanent pasture and rough grazing and around 8 per cent. is in arable production. The remainder of the area is taken up with temporary grass, horticulture and woodland.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many acres of land was organic or in conversion to organic in the UK in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 2000. [46629]

Mr. Morley: The estimated area of organic land and land in conversion in these years is set out in the following table.

	Hectares
1985	6,000
1990	14,000
1995	45,185
2000	527,323

Live Animals (Transport)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Ministers from her Department last raised EU obstacles to the ban of live exports and their replacement by meat exports in the Council of Ministers; and if she will make a statement. [46551]

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her European counterparts on the abolition of long distance transportation of live farm animals throughout the European Union. [47421]

Mr. Morley: The Government have been consistent in its preference for meat to be exported rather than live animals for slaughter. Two judgments of the European Court of Justice have made it clear that the UK does not have the legal powers to introduce a unilateral ban on live exports. The Government have continued to press for better enforcement and stronger rules on the welfare of animals during transport. In the June 2001 Agriculture Council my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, supported a unanimous resolution that specifically invited the Commission to report on options for reducing long distance transport of animals for slaughter. In the November 2001 Agriculture Council my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, called on the Commission to make their promised proposals on the protection of animals during transport.

Primate Imports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many wild caught non-human primates were imported into the United Kingdom in the last five years; for what purposes; and if she will make a statement. [48000]

Mr. Meacher: Imports of non-human primates are controlled under the European Commission Regulation dealing with the control in trade in endangered speeies. Our records show that 547 wild caught non-human primates were imported into the UK between 1 January 1997 and 31 December 2001.

The purposes of the imports were categorised as follows:

247 breeding;

2 personal;

266 commercial;

32 zoological collections.

Emissions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how far below 1990 levels *(a)* greenhouse gas and *(b)* carbon dioxide emissions were in percentage terms in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [47342]

Mr. Meacher: In 2000, total emissions of the 'basket' of six greenhouse gases, weighted by global warming potential, were 13 per cent. below 1990 levels. Estimates of greenhouse gas emissions in 2001 are not yet available. These figures confirm that the UK has met, and significantly exceeded, its commitment under the Framework Convention on Climate Change that was agreed at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to return its emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Carbon dioxide emissions in 2000 were 7.5 per cent. below 1990 levels. Provisional estimates suggest that in 2001 carbon dioxide emissions were 6 per cent. below 1990 levels. Final estimates for 2001 are not yet available. The increases in 2000 and 2001 were caused by the increased amount of coal used in electricity generation in those years and colder weather in the winter months.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how far below *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990 levels SO_2 emissions were in percentage terms in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [47404]

Mr. Meacher: Sulphur dioxide (SO_2) emissions fell by 76 per cent. between 1980 and 2000, and by 69 per cent. between 1990 and 2000. Estimates of SO_2> emissions in 2001 are not yet available.

Nitrate Pollution

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the percentage of nitrate pollution in rivers which arises from discharges by sewage treatment plants. [48076]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's 2001 publication "Rivers and Estuaries—a decade of improvement" provides information on general trends in nitrate levels of rivers in England and Wales. Although this information does not identify the source of the nitrates, the Agency's assessment was that in 2000 some 32 per cent. of rivers had high average concentrations of nitrate (greater than 30mg/l), and about 50 per cent. moderate or high average concentrations (greater than 20mg/l). It is considered that the average nitrate contribution from sewage treatment works is likely to be less than 20 per cent., and in most cases less than 10 per cent. However, where relatively large works, such as Altrincham and Sale, discharge to small rivers and provide a significant proportion of their flow, the nitrate contribution is likely to be higher than 20 per cent. immediately downstream of the discharge.

Where surface freshwaters are used for the abstraction of drinking water the Environment Agency has on-going monitoring at numerous points. If sampling confirms the presence, or likelihood, of more than the permitted concentration of nitrates, and the source of the nitrates is sewage treatment works, then we identify the stretch of river as a Sensitive Area (Nitrate) under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations, and reduce the amount of nitrates in the discharge from qualifying works.

On 5 March 2002 I announced the identification of stretches of the rivers Chelmer, Leam, Stour and Wissey as Sensitive Areas (Nitrate), and the requirement for two water companies to reduce the nitrate in discharges from six sewage treatment works by 2004.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the environmental effects which will follow from the use of ozone depleting substances for the eight year period allowed under the EU Regulations on Ozone Depleting Substances. [48074]

Mr. Meacher: Under EU regulation number 2037–2000, the production and use of virgin ozone depleting HCFCs is due to be prohibited in Europe by 2010. In the interim 8-year period, we anticipate that there will be a maximum HCFC emission of 27 thousand ODP (ozone depleting potential) Tonnes in Europe. This is a small figure in comparison to peak emissions of CFCs during the 1980s, which reached a maximum of 435 thousand ODP Tonnes per year, and thus makes a very small addition to the current atmospheric chlorine burden. The additional effect on ozone depletion is likely to be very small relative to other factors which influence the stratosphere. HCFCs have a much smaller impact on ozone depletion than CFCs, which they replace in many applications, and HCFC use until 2010 has allowed a more rapid move away from reliance on CFCs.

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what response her Department has made to the report of Evan Bowen-Jones, David Brown and Elizabeth Robinson entitled "Bushmeat—a Pilot Study". [48149]

Mr. Meacher: Evan Bowen-Jones, David Brown and Elizabeth Robinson submitted their final report on the Government's research project, "Bushmeat—A Pilot Study", in January 2002. The report, entitled "Assessment of the Solution-orientated research needed to promote a more sustainable Bushmeat Trade in Central and West Africa", examines the trade in terms of institutions, policies, biodiversity and livelihoods and sets out principles for further action in promoting more sustainability.

The report is an extremely thorough and useful piece of work. Arrangements have been made for its publication on the Department's website and on the UK's Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) website, as well as on that of the Overseas Development Institute. We have drawn it to the attention of key stakeholders—including UNEP's Great Ape Survival Project—through the UK Tropical Forest Forum's Bushmeat Working Group, encouraging them to use it as the basis for further targeted work. We shall also be presenting it to the next meeting of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group later this year, to obtain the maximum engagement of African range states in identifying subsequent actions and taking them forward.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what actions her Department proposes to tackle the trade in bushmeat; [48151]

(2) what plans she has to raise the subject of the trade in bushmeat internationally. [48150]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 272.

We have also now published our Action Plan for combating the illegal trade in all meat and animal products, including those commonly referred to as "bushmeat". High priority actions include enhanced co-operation for effective inter-agency enforcement, strengthened intelligence to counter smuggling, increased powers to search for illicit produce and increased public awareness through more publicity.

The Action Plan has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Abandoned Cars

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many abandoned cars local authorities have had to remove each year since 1997. [47380]

Mr. Meacher: Information on the number of abandoned vehicles removed by local authorities was collected for the first time in the Department's 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey which should be published in July 2002.

Hazardous Waste (Shoreham Harbour)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 272W, on hazardous waste, on what date the shipment of hazardous waste passed through Shoreham Harbour; and what safety measures were taken. [47559]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency area office report that the waste was offloaded at the port of Shoreham on 27 February 2002.

Safety measures for the carriage of dangerous goods are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive within the UK and the port authority at the point of entry into the UK. The port authority, once informed of the nature of a cargo, will enforce any special measures they deem necessary.

In this case, the Environment Agency local office report that two of their officers visited the port on 27 February 2002 to inspect the waste, and were satisfied that the waste was packaged appropriately. They further report that the waste arrived at its destination facility within 24 hours of being inspected.

Waste Disposal

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase provision to local authorities to help combat *(a)* fly-tipping and *(b)* abandoned cars. [47379]

Mr. Meacher: The financial pressures on local authorities generated by waste management, including abandoned cars and fly-tipping, will be considered in the course of the current spending review (SR2002).

Local authorities' waste management services are funded through council tax revenue and revenue support from Government via the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) block of funding. The spending review 2000 announced the framework for the Government's support to local authorities for the next three years up to 2003–04. This included an annual increase in the revenue support to local authorities for EPCS. By 2003–04 this support will have risen by £1.1 billion over the 2000–01 provision. Consistent with the general local authority financial framework, it is for individual local authorities to decide the proportion of their budget that should be directed to waste management work and what proportion of spending on waste management should go towards areas of work such as combating fly-tipping and abandoned cars.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies since 1997 have been prosecuted for illegal fly-tipping; and if she will make a statement as to the range of penalties imposed. [47378]

Mr. Meacher: Both local authorities and the Environment Agency may prosecute for fly tipping offences. Between 1996 and 2001 the Environment Agency recorded prosecutions for waste offences generally and on a financial year basis. Therefore, this information did not distinguish fly tipping offences from other waste offences. From 2001, data is collected on a calendar year basis and records whether an incident involves the unlawful deposit of waste (breach of section 33(1)(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990), and whether an individual or company is involved. From December 2001 the data now specifically records whether an incident involves fly tipping. The information is as follows:

	Number of prosecutions
Prosecutions for general waste offences	
1996–97	241
1997–98	345
1998–99	367
1999–2000	342
2000–01	439
Prosecutions under section 33 (1)(a)	
2001	[1]234

[1] 196 individuals and 38 companies

No central register is kept of local authorities' prosecutions.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether liquid animal carcases were dumped in the Irish Sea from 1 May 2001 to 28 February 2002; and if she will make a statement. [47050]

Mr. Morley: Liquid animal carcases have never been dumped in the Irish Sea but I can confirm that between 1 May 2001 and 10 December 2001, the leachate from the Watchtree (Great Orton) mass burial site was discharged via a long sea outfall at Workington, into the Irish Sea.

Between 8 April and 15 June, the leachate (including body fluids, the breakdown products of animal carcases and any rainfall or surface water ingress into the pits) was pH adjusted for FMD virus control purposes. The Department installed a Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) treatment plant on the site during June and from 15 June all leachate underwent additional primary treatment in the DAF plant before being tankered to Workington. On 2 October the pH adjustment ceased and on 10 December all use of the long sea outfall was stopped.

Since the 10 December, leachate has been tankered off site and disposed of at suitably licensed sites.

Air Pollution

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department will implement EU requirements to reduce emissions of air pollutants from industrial plant and power stations. [46734]

Mr. Meacher: Directive 96/61/EC concerning integrated pollution prevention and control addresses emissions to all environments from a wide range of industrial plant, including power stations. It is being implemented through the Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations 2000 (SI 1973). Any industrial installation covered by these Regulations which is newly constructed or substantially changed needs a permit from the Environment Agency or, for some smaller installations, from the relevant local authority. These permits will contain pollutant emission limits and other conditions concerning the operation of the installation. Operators of installations which were in existence before 31 October 1999 have to apply for permits according to a timetable for each of the main industrial sectors. This timetable, laid down in Schedule 3 to the Regulations, extends overall to March 2007. Existing power stations, which generally fall into the 'combustion' sector, have until 31 March 2006 to make permit applications under these Regulations.

Directive 1999/13/EC on the limitation of emissions of volatile organic compounds due to the use of organic solvents in certain activities and installations is being implemented by Directions to the Environment Agency, in respect of some plants. The Department expects to consult on draft implementation proposals for other plants later in the year.

Directives 2000/69/EC relating to limit values for benzene and carbon monoxide in ambient air, 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste, 2001/80/EC on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants, 2001/81/EC on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants, and 2002/3/EC relating to ozone in ambient air have not yet been transposed. The Department expects to consult on draft implementation proposals later in the year.

Emissions (Sellafield)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Government of Norway regarding emissions from Sellafield. [48043]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met the Norwegian Environment Minister, Borge Brende in December 2001. They discussed a number of issues, including Norway's concerns about radioactive discharges from Sellafield. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also exchanged letters with Mr. Brende following that meeting. I also met Mr. Brende immediately prior to the fifth North Sea Conference of Ministers in Bergen on 20 March. A number of issues were discussed at that meeting and Mr. Brende re-iterated his concerns about Sellafield discharges, especially those of technetium-99. In January of this year I also discussed Sellafield with members of the Standing Committee on Energy and Environment of the Norwegian Storting (Parliament).

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the Chancellor on the environmental impact of the aggregates levy. [48042]

Mr. Meacher: We fully support the aims and objectives of the Aggregates Levy and have had no call to make any representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on its environmental impacts.

Aircraft Hazards (Birds)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to amend the Game Act 1831 to enable aircraft operators to deal with game birds posing a threat to aircraft; [47557]

(2) what action is available to the management of Shoreham Airport to deal with game birds posing a hazard to aircraft movements during the closed season; [47556]

(3) what directions she has issued to regional airports to deal with game birds in the closed season. [47558]

Alun Michael: DEFRA has received correspondence from Shoreham Airport about the occasional incursion of pheasants and roe deer into the airport perimeter.

A DEFRA Senior Wildlife Adviser has carried out a site inspection at Shoreham Airport to quantify and provide advice. An internal report is also being prepared for consideration by Ministers and I will write to the hon. Member responding in full to his questions as soon as that report has been considered.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many officials her Department employs at its office in Worcestershire; and what functions they perform. [47599]

Mr. Morley: At the office in Worcestershire, DEFRA currently employs 466 officials. The majority of these staff work either for the State Veterinary Service (dealing with animal welfare, disease control and central support functions) or for the Rural Development Service (dealing with the implementation and delivery of the England Rural Development Programme).

EU Directives

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, on EU directives, what sources of information she uses regarding implementation and enforcement in other member states. [47628]

Mr. Morley: Information may be obtained from bilateral contacts with other member states, usually through their embassies here or our embassies there, or from UK involvement in EU inspection visits which take place in certain sectors.

Research Funding

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of funding her Department intends allocating to support research to help industry take advantage of new technology and higher safety, environmental and other standards of production. [46744]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA jointly funds with industry research under the LINK banner; Government sponsors provide up to half the costs. LINK aims to enhance the competitiveness of UK industry and the quality of life through support for managed programmes of pre-competitive research and development. Funding for LINK is won in a competitive process so it is not possible to be precise about the allocation for 2002–03, however it is likely to be in excess of £5 million.

Rural Policy

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department intends to ensure that the policies of Government are rural-proofed. [46729]

Alun Michael: The Rural White Paper "Our countryside: the future", published in November 2000 (Cm 4909), in Chapter 13, set out the proposed measures which the Government have now put in place, to ensure that all its domestic policies in England are rural-proofed. In summary these are:

- a requirement on Departments to rural-proof all new policies—that is, to ensure that they have taken proper account of the impact on people living in rural areas—and to report annually on how they have done this;
- development by the Countryside Agency of a rural-proofing checklist, sent to all Departments in April 2001, to help them take account of the rural dimension in developing policy;
- publication of an annual report by the Countryside Agency on how effectively rural-proofing has been implemented across Government; the first of the Agency's reports will be published shortly.

The establishment of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with responsibility for all aspects of rural policy, has given fresh impetus and focus to rural-proofing, reinforced by the establishment of a Cabinet sub-committee on rural renewal, and the representation of DEFRA in each of the Government offices for the regions (except London). Both I and Ewen Cameron—the Chairman of the Countryside Agency, whom the Prime Minister also appointed as Rural Advocate—have met ministerial colleagues in all the Departments concerned over the past few months to discuss how rural-proofing is being implemented and to offer our assistance in making it fully effective across Government.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets are set by her Department for the achievements of rural policy. [46710]

Alun Michael: The Department accepted responsibility for the Interim Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets previously assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Of the PSA targets, four cover the environment, rural development, countryside, wildlife and sustainable development responsibilities. These PSA targets are set out on the Department's website at http://defraweb/corporate/busplan/01psa.htm

Future PSA rural targets arising as a result of SR2002 will be published on the DEFRA website in due course.

More specific rural policy targets and commitments are set out in the Government's Rural White Paper published in November 2000, setting out the Government's vision for a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside in which everyone can enjoy a high quality of life.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which proposals in the rural White Paper have been implemented. [46993]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 920W. This announced publication of "England's Rural Future" which included a progress report on implementing the rural White Paper. This demonstrated that considerable progress had been made during the first year despite the massive diversion of effort and resources required to deal with foot and mouth disease. The same document also set out the Government's efforts to help rural recovery and our response to the reports of the rural task force and Lord Haskins. However the rural White Paper set out a long-term approach to meeting the needs of individuals, families and communities in rural areas and we continue to work towards the achievement of all the White Paper's long term goals.

The rural White Paper Implementation Plan which is on the Department's website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/index.htm shows how all the commitments made in the White Paper are being taken forward. An updated version will be available shortly.

Efficiency

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what efficiency measures have been achieved by her Department since its establishment. [46992]

Mr. Morley: Since DEFRA's creation in June 2001, all Directorates have been required to develop efficiency targets. Their achievement will be monitored from 2002–03.

Publications

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of printing and distributing the publication "Working for the Essentials of Life"; and what is the print run. [46989]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA's work affects the lives of everyone and the activities and policies of many other Departments, businesses and community groups. It is important that the Department establishes and maintains high quality dialogue and communications with all whose who we deal with. "Working for the Essentials of Life"

attempts to describe in accessible language and using professional presentation and design our work and how it affects others. The costs of printing and distributing 15,000 copies equates to approximately £2.96 per copy, a cost which is justified if we communicate more effectively and clearly with people.

Biosecurity

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has implemented to increase biosecurity. [46745]

Mr. Morley: The Department has responsibility for a range of biosecurity issues. Throughout the foot and mouth outbreak, the Department has imposed strict animal health biosecurity measures, based on expert veterinary advice, to contain and eradicate the disease. Improvements in biosecurity within the livestock sector were achieved through the rules on the movement of animals and the arrangements for the cleansing and disinfection of vehicles, premises and equipment. Some of these conditions have been amended as the disease situation has improved. We will be carefully considering how animal disease control precautions should be developed in the future in the light of reports from the independent FMD inquiries.

Our approach to improved animal health biosecurity includes steps to reduce disease risks that might be linked to illegal imports of animal products, and a copy of the Government's action plan has been placed in both Libraries of the House.

We are also developing plans to encourage the wider livestock industry and those involved in rural activities to adopt improved standards of biosecurity to the general benefit of animal health in our national flocks and herds.

Biosecurity measures to protect plants from imported pests and diseases are based on legislation which implements the EC Plant Health Directive. Following risk assessments carried out by DEFRA the Plant Health Directive is currently being amended to increase the range of imported plant produce which is subject to phytosanitary certification from the country of origin. Proposals for further changes to the Directive would permit a more risk-targeted approach that has long been advocated by the UK.

DEFRA's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectors enforce plant health import controls in England and Wales in collaboration with HM Customs. They aim to inspect all commercial imports of plants from non-EC countries and a proportion, according to risk, of imported consignments of fruit, vegetables and cut flowers. Trials are under way of a computer link with Customs systems to enable more effective control and inspection of relevant consignments. Further information is available on the plant health pages of the Department's website http://defraweb/planth.ph.htm.

Biosecurity issues also include the problems caused by non-native species which may become established in this country. Some non-native species can become invasive and cause serious problems by altering native ecosystems and threatening native species, and also by causing considerable economic damage, for example to forestry or agriculture. Invasive non-native species have been identified as one of the main causes of biodiversity loss worldwide. The Government are currently undertaking a fundamental review of policy on invasive non-native species, with industry and conservation bodies, considering the causes of, and problems arising from, the introduction and spread of non-native species.

DEFRA Management Board

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the CVs of the non-executive members of the DEFRA management board. [47388]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA's management board includes three non-executive members, Elizabeth Ransom and Alison Huxtable, both with private sector backgrounds, and Richard Wakeford, Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency. Their biographical details are as follows:

Alison Huxtable was formerly a member of the Amerada Hess senior management team for the UK. She was responsible for developing the people, structure and strategies of six distinct areas of professional service provision. She was also instrumental in the Amerada Hess change management programme. She was called to the Bar in 1983, and is a Justice of the Peace in Devon. She was appointed as a non-executive member of the MAFF management board in September 2000.

Elizabeth Ransom was a consultant with KPMG for 15 years, nine years of which as a partner. She led KPMG's work in central Government, focusing on improving performance in Government Departments and Agencies. The Departments she was involved with include the Ministry of Defence, DfEE, FCO and MAFF. She therefore has wide experience of managing change in public services. She was appointed as a non-executive member of the MAFF management board in September 2000.

Richard Wakeford became Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency at its formation in April 1999 and was previously Chief Executive of the Countryside Commission from 1996. Prior to this he worked in the Cabinet Office, where he dealt with economic and environmental affairs across Government. Before that in the Department of the Environment, he developed a range of land use planning policies and implemented the 'plan-led', system. He edited the land use and transport chapters of the 1994 UK Sustainable Development strategy, building on his earlier work on the team which prepared this country's first environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" in 1990. He was appointed a non-executive member of the management board of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in September 2001 and is a member of the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

Market Towns

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many

Lancashire market towns have received grants for regeneration under the new deal for market towns, giving the *(a)* grant amount and *(b)* reason of the grant; and if she will list the market towns which can not bid for the grant in Lancashire. [47426]

Alun Michael: There are five towns in Lancashire in the market towns initiative—Barnoldswick, Padiham, Clitheroe, Garstang and Carnforth. There is no list of towns which cannot bid provided they meet the population size criteria of between 2,000 and 20,000.

The market town initiative is being taken forward on DEFRA's behalf by the regional development agencies, working with the Countryside Agency and local partners and using the £37 million of Government funding announced in the Rural White Paper. We hope that match funding will raise the resources available to market towns through the initiative to some £100 million. The process at a local level of creating a strong local partnership is important in itself. Most towns are still at the stage of community consultation prior to agreeing action plans, and approval of project grants will come at the next stage.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she has issued on a consistent approach by officials across the country to the implementation of the 21-day standstill rule in respect of attendance of animals at agricultural shows in the summer of 2003. [46784]

Mr. Morley: Show animals are exempted from the 20-day standstill rule if they meet certain conditions. The key requirements are that the animals must be individually identified and have been kept in and returned to DEFRA approved isolation facilities on their farm of origin. The Department has issued operational instructions to our veterinary staff regarding these arrangements. The conditions for approving on farm isolation units are available on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/movements/cattle/guidance/ei31.pdf.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what analysis she has made of the proportions of fallen stock which are *(a)* centrally buried, *(b)* centrally burned, *(c)* buried on the farm, *(d)* burned on the farm and *(e)* otherwise disposed of, in respect of (i) cattle and (ii) sheep on average over the last five years. [46787]

Mr. Morley: The central burial or burning of fallen stock is not permitted except in emergency situations such as the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001. We do not collect information on the routine disposal of fallen stock, but the State Veterinary Service carried out small scale surveys in the years 1998–2000. The results (which may not be representative) suggest that the following proportions of fallen cattle and sheep were buried or burned on farm. The remainder were disposed of by alternative routes such as incineration or disposal to a knacker's yard or hunt kennel.

Percentage

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Cattle buried on farm	17	22	21
Cattle burned on farm	1	1	4
Sheep and goats buried on farm	60	76	65
Sheep and goats burned on farm	6	1	7

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what charges are made to farmers for the disposal of fallen *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep. [46786]

Mr. Morley: To facilitate the UK's programme of surveillance for Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies, the Government currently pays the full cost of collecting 6,000 fallen sheep per year and all fallen cattle aged over 24 months. Charges for the disposal of other fallen stock are a matter for negotiation between the farmer and the collector. However, we understand that charges made for the disposal of fallen cattle range from zero to £50, and for fallen sheep from zero to £15.

Stranded Cetaceans

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the number of cetaceans stranded on the UK shorelines by species in each of the last 12 months; what percentage of those post mortemed were recorded as bycatch deaths; and if she will make a statement. [48001]

Mr. Morley: Data on the cetaceans reported as stranding in the period January 2001 to December 2001 on a quarterly basis is contained in the table. Figures for the UK for the first three months of 2002 are not yet available, but for England and Wales, during the month of January 994 cetaceans were reported as stranded. Post mortems were carried out on 34 of these cetaceans, 79 per cent. of which were bycaught.

January-March 2001

Species	*Stranded*	*Post mortemed*	*Percentage bycaught*
Minke Whale	0	0	0
Sei Whale	0	0	0
Humpback Whale	1	1	0
Common Dolphin	57	22	82
Striped Dolphin	3	3	100
Risso's Dolphin	1	1	0
White-sided Dolphin	0	0	0
White-beaked Dolphin	8	0	0
Bottlenose Dolphin	0	0	0
Unidentified Dolphin	16	1	0
Long-finned Pilot Whale	3	0	0
Killer Whale	0	0	0
Harbour Porpoise	50	27	22
Northern Bottlenose Whale	0	0	0
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	0	0	0
Great Sperm Whale	1	0	0
Unidentified Cetacean	14	0	0

April-June 2001

Species	Stranded	Post mortemed	Percentage bycaught[1]
Minke Whale	5	2	0
Sei Whale	0	0	0
Humpback Whale	0	0	0
Common Dolphin	16	2	50
Striped Dolphin	2	2	0
Risso's Dolphin	1	1	0
White-sided Dolphin	1	1	0
White-beaked Dolphin	0	0	0
Bottlenose Dolphin	3	2	0
Unidentified Dolphin	9	0	0
Long-finned Pilot Whale	4	1	0
Killer Whale	0	0	0
Harbour Porpoise	70	31	3
Northern Bottlenose Whale	0	0	0
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	1	1	0
Great Sperm Whale	2	0	0
Unidentified Cetacean	6	0	0

July-September 2001

Species	Stranded	Post mortemed	Percentage bycaught[1]
Minke Whale	4	0	0
Sei Whale	1	0	0
Humpback Whale	1	0	0
Common Dolphin	11	1	0
Striped Dolphin	6	5	0
Risso's Dolphin	3	1	0
White-sided Dolphin	3	3	0
White-beaked Dolphin	3	2	0
Bottlenose Dolphin	3	1	0
Unidentified Dolphin	9	0	0
Long-finned Pilot Whale	6	0	0
Killer Whale	0	0	0
Harbour Porpoise	90	38	13
Northern Bottlenose Whale	1	1	0
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	2	1	0
Great Sperm Whale	1	0	0
Unidentified Cetacean	8	0	0

October-December 2001

Species	Stranded	Post mortemed	Percentage bycaught[1]
Minke Whale	4	0	0
Sei Whale	0	0	0
Humpback Whale	0	0	0
Common Dolphin	15	9	1
Striped Dolphin	1	1	0
Risso's Dolphin	1	0	0
White-sided Dolphin	0	0	0
White-beaked Dolphin	2	2	0
Bottlenose Dolphin	3	0	0
Unidentified Dolphin	13	0	0
Long-finned Pilot Whale	12	2	0
Killer Whale	1	1	0
Harbour Porpoise	45	19	16
Northern Bottlenose Whale	1	0	0
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	0	0	0
Great Sperm Whale	2	0	0
Unidentified Cetacean	2	0	0

Total 2001

Species	Stranded	Post mortemed	Percentage bycaught[1]
Minke Whale	13	2	0
Sei Whale	1	0	0
Humpback Whale	2	1	0
Common Dolphin	99	34	59
Striped Dolphin	12	11	27
Risso's Dolphin	6	3	0
White-sided Dolphin	4	4	0
White-beaked Dolphin	13	4	0
Bottlenose Dolphin	9	3	0
Unidentified Dolphin	47	1	0
Long-finned Pilot Whale	25	3	0
Killer Whale	1	1	0
Harbour Porpoise	255	115	14
Northern Bottlenose Whale	2	1	0
Sowerby's Beaked Whale	3	2	0
Great Sperm Whale	6	0	0
Unidentified Cetacean	30	0	0

[1] Of those animals subject to PM

Fur Farms

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fur farms were licensed in each month from December 2001 to March 2002 inclusive in England; and if she will list their locations by county. [47399]

Mr. Morley: During the period 1 December 2001 to March 2002 the following fur farms were licensed in England:

County	Number of licensed fur farms
Hampshire	1
Lancashire	3
Yorkshire	1
Total	5

All these farms are thought to have ceased fur production.

Departmental Responses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47718]

Mr. Morley: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47200]

Mr. Morley: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for reducing the incidence of BSE will be met in 2002. [47906]

Mr. Morley: The number of clinically suspect cases of BSE reported in Great Britain continues to decline, and the epidemic has now fallen to levels well below those observed when the disease was first made notifiable in 1988.

The Department's Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for the control of BSE is:

> "To reduce the annual incidence of BSE to less than 650 cases by 2001 and by 2004 to be on track for fewer than 30 cases by 2006. This reflects a 99 per cent. reduction compared with 1997 when there were 4,312 cases".

This target is based on confirmed, clinical cases. The actual figure for 2001 is likely to be around 780 confirmed BSE cases in cattle presented as clinical suspects. Progress against the PSA target has been affected by movement restrictions introduced to deal with the foot and mouth outbreak. This has disrupted the slaughter of older cattle under the OTMS because available rendering capacity has been used to dispose of the carcases of animals arising from the control of FMD. This, in turn, has increased the mean age of the cattle population and resulted in more cases than previously anticipated. Nevertheless, the outturn for 2001 still represents a reduction of more than 40 per cent. compared to 2000 when there were 1,311 cases in cattle presented as clinical suspects. The epidemic continues to decline rapidly and there is no particular concern at present in relation to the 2004 and 2006 targets.

Surplus Laboratories

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the two surplus laboratories at Harpenden and Torry referred to on page 21 of the 2001 departmental report, have been sold. [48171]

Mr. Morley: The laboratory at Torry was sold in April 2001. DEFRA has a leasehold interest in the laboratory at Harpenden. A joint conditional sale of the property by DEFRA and the freeholder floundered in January 2002 after planning consent was refused to the prospective purchaser. Negotiations are continuing with the planning authorities to facilitate a successful future sale.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of her Department in the last 12 months; and what plans she has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [48048]

Mr. Morley: One payment of £50.27 has been made to an individual following findings of maladministration by the ombudsman with responsibility for agencies under the remit of my Department in the last 12 months: and there are no plans to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made.

Deer

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated deer population was in each of the last 30 years; by what method the estimates were determined; and if she will make a statement. [48068]

Mr. Meacher: These data are not available to the Department.

Hunting With Dogs

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 26 March, ref. 46360, if she will make a statement on the future duties of Lord Burns in relation to hunting with dogs, with special reference to the issues of cruelty and utility. [47877]

Alun Michael: My noble Friend Lord Burns, was appointed in December 1999 to carry out an inquiry into hunting with dogs. He discharged his task with the submission of his report on 9 June 2000.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Music Teaching

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much money the Department has spent on encouraging schoolchildren to play a musical instrument in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement; [46587]

(2) how many schoolchildren have been offered training on a musical instrument in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement; [46586]

(3) how much money the Department and its predecessors have spent on providing schools with instruments in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [46588]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the national curriculum in music, all pupils up to Key Stage 3 are introduced to playing musical instruments. The Department does not, however, collect information on the numbers of schoolchildren receiving additional instrumental music lessons.

We do recognise the value of instrumental music tuition and have taken a number of steps to support Local Education Authorities Music Services. In 1999 the Music Standards Fund was introduced. Between 1999 and 2004, total funding of £270 million will have been made available to music services across England. The Department's contribution towards this was £35 million in 1999–2000, £40 million in 2000–2001 and £50 million in 2001–2002. LEAs may spend Music Standards Fund in any way which enhances the opportunities for pupils to access musical education of high quality, including providing schools with musical instruments or encouraging children to play a musical instrument.

Our wider opportunities programme will expand existing provision to give all primary school pupils who want to the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. The Department is working with partners, including representatives from LEA Music Services, on the best way to fulfil this pledge. As part of this exercise we are considering what information to ask LEAs to collect in order to monitor the numbers of school children learning a musical instrument.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff, and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40979]

Dr. Howells: The running cost information requested for the Department is shown in the table. It reflects information published in the appropriation accounts and resource accounts. Information in the format requested is not held centrally for previous years and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	DCMS running costs	*Ministers' private office running costs*	*Ministers' private office staff running costs*
1998–99	21.862	1.638	1.048
1999–2000	25.186	1.560	1.031
2000–01	26.234	1.603	1.061

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43679]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1537–38W.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if awards, other than the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, are to be presented during the Jubilee festivities; and if she will make a statement. [44580]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced last December that the 2002 National Training Awards will include a special Jubilee award for individuals or organisations who have made an exceptional contribution to the community through training. The award of city status and a Lord Mayoralty to mark the Queen's Jubilee celebrations have already been announced. No other new awards specifically for the Jubilee are planned to be presented during the festivities.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list Government-sponsored commemorative Golden Jubilee items; what the cost to make each item is; how many of each item will be produced; and if she will make a statement. [44564]

Tessa Jowell: The Golden Jubilee Medal is the only commemorative item being sponsored by the Government. Approximately 370,000 will be produced, at a cost of approximately £21 each.

There are no plans to produce any other Government-sponsored commemorative items.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are working on the planning and organisation of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; what Departments each of those people work for; and if she will make a statement. [44582]

Tessa Jowell: The Golden Jubilee Office in my Department comprises 24 staff (two of whom work part-time) and three temporary staff working on a short-term basis. In the Ministry of Defence, 23 staff are currently employed on planning the Queen's visit to the armed forces in Portsmouth on 27 June. In other Departments the work, which includes representation on the Official Committee for the Golden Jubilee which has met roughly every two months, is spread among staff working on other issues. In so far as this is readily quantifiable, the Northern Ireland Office has the equivalent of four full-time staff; the Foreign and Commonwealth has the equivalent of 1.25 staff; the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has 0.7 of one post; the Department for Education and Skills has 0.7 of one post spread across five members of staff; the Department of Trade and Industry has 0.05 of one post; and the Scotland Office has 0.05 of one post (the work on the Queen's visit programme being largely dealt with by the Scottish Executive).

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over 50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44919]

Dr. Howells: My Department does not hold information on the category of programme under which new dealers employed by this Department and the Royal Parks Agency are included. Information on the overall number of new dealers employed in the last four years follows:

	Number
1998–99	1
1999–2000	2
2000–01	1
2001–02	0

My Department expects to offer employment to at least three new dealers shortly as part of a recent external recruitment campaign for administrative staff.

New dealers take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people employed by her Department under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [45083]

Dr. Howells: My Department and the Royal Parks Agency does not hold this information for people employed under this scheme who then move on. However, three out of the four people employed under this scheme since 1998–99 were subsequently offered permanent appointments in this Department (one in 1998–99 and two in 1999–2000).

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44881]

Dr. Howells: None.

Sports Days

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the ability of schools to hold an annual sports day. [45110]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have so far designated 506 school sport co-ordinators, to be placed within secondary schools across the country, who will have specific responsibility for planning and organising inter and intra-school competitive sport, including sports days. We have set a target of 1,000 co-ordinators in place by 2004, and it is expected that secondary schools—and through them, primary schools—in every LEA will have access to their expertise and support by that date. In addition, guidance is available from Sport England on holding school sports days.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45234]

Dr. Howells: The information in respect of DCMS is contained in the following table.

	Secondments
1999–2000	2
2000–01	5
2001 to date	7

Secondments are defined as all continuous interchange activity of three months or more.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45339]

Dr. Howells: My Department's interface with the public is conducted largely through our 66 NDPBs. Information about our commitment to the Code of Practice and Modernising Government is on our website, under the Open Government heading. Reference is made there to our procedure guidelines on implementing an 'open' policy.

Internal guidance is currently on our internal communications system and e-mail network and will form part of our forthcoming Publication Scheme, as required under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by her and her predecessor since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43388]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* There have been no unpaid advisers appointed, in line with the requirements of paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code, by me or my predecessor since June 1997

For details of unpaid appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I would refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant).

Challenge Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the £15 million Challenge Fund established to fund investment in the designated museums has been spent. [46096]

Dr. Howells: To date a total of £12,254,735 has been claimed from the Designated Challenge Fund. All the funds (£15 million) have been committed to projects and final claims are expected to be made shortly.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting the PSA target to achieve a £23 million

saving through a new strategic body for museums, libraries and archives. [46094]

Dr. Howells: The PSA target covers the savings to be realised as a result of restructuring in most of the Department's sectors. An annual saving of £7 million has already been made through the restructuring of the arts, tourism and heritage sectors, and this money has been redirected into front-line services. Further administration savings of £8 to £10 million are forecast from the imminent merger of the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. The Department is continuing to work with its non-departmental public bodies, particularly through Quinquennial Reviews, to find further efficiency savings.

National Stadium

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, (1) pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 709–10W, what advice she has received from the *(a)* National Audit Office and *(b)* other authoritative sources about the concerns raised by the David James/Berwin Leighton report about the relationship between Wembley National Stadium Ltd and Multiplex; and if these concerns have been satisfactorily addressed; [45712]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 709–10W, when the National Audit Office was notified that it will receive a copy of the David James/Berwin Leighton report; and when she expects to receive its advice. [45711]

Tessa Jowell: *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* As I made clear to the House on 19 December, (*Official Report*, column 292), as soon as I received a copy of the David James/Berwin Leighton Paisner Report on procurement processes relating to the National Stadium project I asked the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to make a copy available to the National Audit Office who received it on 18 December. While the National Audit Office has no role in the decision making process, it gave initial advice to my Department on the report that same day. Subsequently the NAO has also given my officials advice more generally on corporate governance and value for money methodologies and criteria.

As I explained to the House on 19 December, it was because of the concerns raised in the David James/Berwin Leighton Paisner Report that I asked the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to commission an independent value-for-money assessment of the proposed contracts and to ensure that corporate governance and procurement arrangements from now on represent best practice. Cyril Sweett Ltd. are carrying out that study and a copy of their terms of reference were placed in the House Library on 12 March. The Government will determine whether or not the Cyril Sweett Ltd. Report and the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd's work on corporate governance, procurement and other issues satisfies the conditions I set out on 19 December in the light of advice received from Sport England, Patrick Carter's review team and from within Government.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, if she will publish the terms of reference for the final report by Patrick Carter into the review of an English national football stadium; and whether they include an assessment as to the achievement of Government value for money and procurement standards and associated accounting issues. [46254]

Tessa Jowell: The terms of reference for Patrick Carter's remain those which I set out in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W namely:

> "In the light of the FA's announcement of 1 May 2001 about the project to develop a new English National Stadium at Wembley for Football and Rugby League, to examine if the project can be funded and managed at Wembley or if that proved impractical, at another location in England."

I published the Review Team's interim report on 19 December and I intend to publish the Review Team's final report when it is completed in due course.

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her oral statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, on the National Stadium, what assessment she has made of *(a)* the corporate governance changes made to the WNSL Board and *(b)* whether the present management arrangements can deliver the project on time and within a procedure acceptable to the public sector. [46343]

Tessa Jowell: As I set out on 19 December the Government's conditions for support of the Football Association's National Stadium project includes the requirement for changes to corporate governance to produce a management structure capable of delivering a complex project within procedures acceptable to the public sector. The Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. are working to meet the Government's conditions. I expect the FA's work to be completed in April. The Government will determine whether or not that work satisfies the conditions I set out on 19 December in the light of advice received from Sport England, Patrick Carter's review team and from within Government.

Mr. Dennis Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–94, if she plans to publish the Carter report into the

English National Stadium and her final decision on whether to support the National Stadium at Wembley on 30 April. [46188]

Tessa Jowell: The Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd are working with a lead bank on financing the National Stadium project and undertaking the necessary work to fulfil the Government's conditions. I expect the FA's work to be completed in April. The Government will determine whether or not that work satisfies the conditions I set out on 19 December in the light of advice received from Sport England, Patrick Carter's review team and from within Government. It is my intention that Patrick Carter's final report be published. However, in line with the convention on announcements during local elections, I will not be making any statement until after 2 May 2002.

Broadcasting Regulation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which elements of the programme content rules imposed upon broadcasters cover *(a)* responsibility in religious programme content, *(b)* exploitation of audience susceptibilities, *(c)* abuse/incitement to hatred, *(d)* declaration of identity of religious bodies involved in programmes, *(e)* accuracy and fairness, *(f)* recognition of other religions, *(g)* appeals and donations, *(h)* recruitment, *(i)* claims and substantiation, *(j)* blasphemy and obscenity, *(k)* unacceptable organisations or practices, *(l)* religious advertising and *(m)* religious worship; and what assessment she has made of whether these rules adequately regulate the content of religious broadcasting. [46128]

Dr. Howells: The information is set out in the following table:

Question	*Provision*
(a) Responsibility in religious programme content	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 31) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 6: Section 9) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7
(b) Exploitation of audience susceptibilities	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 17) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) (i) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.7) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 6, especially sections 1,2,3 and 6) RAu: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 90 (2)(c) and Programme Code Rule 7.1
(c) Abuse/incitement to hatred	BSC: Code on Standards (Sections 36–43) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) (ii) and ITC Programme Code (Sections 7.2 and 7.6) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 37: Section 9 and Chapter 9: Sections 1 and 4.2) RAu: Broadcasting Act 1990, Section 90 (2) (c); Programme Code Rule 7.1 and Programme Code Rule 7.2
(d) Declaration of identity of religious bodies involved in programmes	BSC: Code on Fairness and Privacy (Section 6) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.4) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 24: Section 10) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.3
(e) Accuracy and fairness	BSC: Code on Fairness and Privacy (Sections 2–13) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (c) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.2) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 2: Part Two and Chapter 3) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.4
(f) Recognition of other religions	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 31) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) (ii) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.2) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 6: Section 9) RAu: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 90(2)(c) and Programme Code Rule 7.2
(g) Appeals and donations	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 13) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Sections 6 (1) (d) (i) and 7 (1) (b) and ITC Programme Code (Sections 6 and 7.5) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 30: Section 4) RAu: Broadcasting Act 1990 Section 2 (c) (i) and Programme Code Rule 7.7 and Programme Code Rule 6
(h) Recruitment	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 13) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.6) BBC: Not applicable RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.6
(i) Claims and substantiation	BSC: Code on Fairness and Privacy (Sections 7–10) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Section 7.8) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 2) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.9
(j) Blasphemy and obscenity	BSC: Blasphemy—Code on Standards (Section 31) Obscenity—Code on Standards (Section 82) ITC: Blasphemy—Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (a) and (d) (ii) & ITC Programme Code (Sections 1.5 and 1.8) Obscenity—Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (a) and ITC Programme Code (Sections 1.5 and 1.6) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 6: Sections 9 and 10 and Chapter 37: Section 7) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.2
(k) Unacceptable organisations and practices	BSC: Code on Standards (Sections 34 and 45–47) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (a) and ITC Programme Code (Section 5) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapters 8, 15 and 18) RAu: Programme Code Rule 7.5

Question	Provision
(l) Religious advertising	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 13) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Sections 7.5–7.9) BBC: Not applicable. RAu: Advertising and Sponsorship Code, particularly Section 3, Rule 3 Religion, Faith and Related Systems of Belief
(m) Religious worship	BSC: Code on Standards (Section 31) ITC: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 6 (1) (d) and ITC Programme Code (Sections 7.1–7.3) BBC: BBC Producers' Guidelines (Chapter 6: Section 9) RAu: Broadcasting Act 1990: Section 90 (2)(c) and Programme Code Rule 7.1

We stated in the Communications White Paper that we will "maintain the requirement that due responsibility be exercised with respect to the content of religious programmes. Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, such programmes must not involve an improper exploitation of any susceptibilities of those watching or any abusive treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination" [6.9.1]. The regulators are responsible for the Codes and guidelines, and from time to time to review them. Copies are available from the regulators.We are considering, in the light of the responses to the various consultations on ownership of the permitted licences by religious organisations, whether or not to retain rules in this respect also.

Religious Broadcasting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what information she has as to the Christian radio stations which broadcast to United Kingdom listeners; and in the case of each such broadcaster, what information she has on *(a)* the size of audience and *(b)* the extend to which it complies with the relevant codes regulating broadcast output. [46122]

Dr. Howells: The Department only has information on radio stations licensed by the Radio Authority. To date, the Radio Authority licence two local analogue religious licensees both in Greater London. These are Premier Christian Radio (176,000 listeners) and Liberty Radio (72,000 listeners). [source—RAJAR audience figures 4 Quarter 2001]

The Radio Authority also licence 17 satellite stations of a Christian nature. These are:

UCB Europe
Stitching Transworld Radio Europe
Transworld Radio Europe (German language)
UCB Cross Rhythms
Transworld Radio
EWTN
Premier Christian Radio
The Spoken Bible
Advèntist World Radio
Family Radio
Family Radio International
UCB—Talk
UCB—Inspirational
The Dream
TalkGospel.com
UCB—Bible
Radio Al Mahabba.

Audience information is not held for these channels.

In addition, the Radio Authority issue restricted short-term licences (RSL's) for a wide range of reasons and events. RSL's are issued for a restricted coverage area as well as being restricted by duration (maximum 28 days) and are for small-scale community use. During 2001, the Radio Authority issued 21 licences to mark notable dates in the Christian calendar. These were awarded to:

Caleb Radio (received 2 RSL licences during 2001)
Flame FM, Bradford
Flame FM
New Life Radio (received 2 RSL licences during 2001)
Hope FM (received 2 RSL licences during 2001)
Branch FM
Revival Radio
GBMR
Stoneleigh FM
Kingdom Faith Camp Radio
New Wine Radio
Flame FM on the Wirral
ARB
Lighthouse
Radio Grove
Adventist Radio—Heavenly Hampstead
Good News Radio
ARMK/Adventist Radio Milton Keynes.

Audience information is not held for these channels.

All these stations must comply with the Radio Authority's relevant codes regulating broadcast output. During 2001, the Radio Authority issued a warning to Premier Christian Radio for several breaches of the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the Programme Code, and to Liberty Radio for breaching the Advertising and Sponsorship Code.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether it is her policy to permit and encourage the Christian broadcasting industry in the United Kingdom; [46129]

(2) what representations she has received from *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members and *(b)* others supporting the lifting of statutory prohibitions on religious broadcasters; [46123]

(3) which categories of broadcasting licence ownership are prohibited for religious bodies; and in the case of each category of licence, what public policy objectives are served by the ban; [46127]

(4) what consideration she has given to the implications for *(a)* listeners, *(b)* competition and *(c)* religious activity of the statutory ban on Christian broadcasters being granted categories of broadcasting licence; and if she will make a statement. [46126]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Dr. Howells: The Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 do not permit the regulators to award licences for: national analogue sound programmes; digital sound programmes; terrestrial television services; an radio and TV multiplex licences (local or national). The Acts do give the regulators discretion to award the following licences to religious organisations: local analogue, satellite and cable sound programme licences; cable and satellite television services; and restricted service sound programme licences.

The White Paper 'A New Future for Communications' published in December 2000 and the more recent paper 'Consultation on Media Ownership Rules' published in November 2001 confirmed that the Government planned to bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local digital sound programme licence. The papers also discussed the background to the restrictions on religious ownership of certain broadcasting licences: "We would welcome views on whether we should further relax the ban on religious ownership. There is a strong demand by some for religious content. But religious content has a particular capacity to offend those with different views and opinions, or, sometimes to exploit the susceptibilities of the vulnerable. Religious issues may also shade into matters of political controversy. These concerns may not be fully dealt with by the regulation of religious content and are particularly acute in relation to terrestrial licences where scarce spectrum means that choice is naturally limited for viewers. We nevertheless welcome views on whether we could relax the prohibition when choice increases in the digital future, or whether it will remain a necessary safeguard which should be retained".

We receive approximately 14,500 (6,500 and 8,000 respectively) responses from MP's, organisations and members of public broadly supporting the lifting of the current restrictions. We are reviewing the restrictions on the holding of certain licences by religious bodies in the light of these responses, and will publish details of our proposals with the draft Communications Bill, which we expect to be in the spring.

It is for organisations in the Christian broadcasting industry to decide if they wish to apply to the Radio Authority for any of the aforementioned licences.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will include consideration of the Christian broadcasting sector in her commitment to consult widely and deeply about outstanding questions of broadcasting regulation; [46125]

(2) what representations she has received on the future regulation of Christian broadcasting in the United Kingdom. [46121]

Dr. Howells: We will be consulting widely and deeply on a draft Communications Bill, and will of course consider all points raised by the Christian broadcasting sector before finalising the proposals which we put before Parliament when the legislative timetable allows. We have already received a large number of representations about the future regulation and ownership of religious broadcasting.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning the Carla Rosa Opera Company; and if she will make a statement. [46228]

Dr. Howells: We have received three letters from members of the public about the Carl Rosa Opera Company. I was pleased to learn that the excellent work of this historic company will reach an even wider audience with the announcement this week by the Arts Council of England of a national touring programme grant for a tour of three operettas to smaller venues in England.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effect of continued statutory prohibition on religious broadcasting on her policies of promoting quality, diversity and plurality in the broadcast sector. [46124]

Dr. Howells: Religious broadcasting is not prohibited in the United Kingdom. The Government take the view that religious programming is an important element of radio and television services. Furthermore, under the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996, the regulators are given discretion to award the following licences to religious organisations: local analogue, satellite and cable sound programme licences; cable and satellite television services licences; and restricted service sound programme licences.

Press Complaints Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received concerning the effectiveness of the Press Complaints Commission. [46209]

Dr. Howells: Over the last six months, DCMS has received 23 letters mentioning the Press Complaints Commission, of which 16 made specific complaints.

Communications Bill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the pre-legislative scrutiny procedure will be for the Communications Bill; and when it will start. [46130]

Dr. Howells: The Government hope that the two Houses will agree to establish a Joint Committee to consider any draft Communications Bill and will bring forward the necessary motions sometime after the Easter Adjournment.

Pugin's "The Grange"

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning The Grange, the home of Augustus Pugin; and if she will make a statement. [46227]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, has received no representations concerning The Grange. The Landmark Trust, an independent UK building preservation charity which restores neglected historic buildings, has been awarded £1.1 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund towards restoration of The Grange. The Landmark Trust has an existing grant offer from English Heritage also towards the conservation and repair of The Grange. English Heritage are currently considering making an increased grant offer for the restoration project.

Sponsorship

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the industries sponsored

by her Department, stating for each the *(a)* amount and *(b)* percentage of GDP they represented in each of the last five years. [45200]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has responsibility for sponsoring the tourism, gambling, video and film, radio and TV, and music industries.

Value added (£ million)

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*
Tourism[1, 2]	45,100	43,900	42,000	39,400	35,200
Gambling[3]	7,300	6,600	6,600	6,400	5,900
Video and film[4]	2,400	1,900	1,600	1,700	1,800
Radio and TV[4]	5,800	4,200	3,700	3,500	2,700
Music and the visual and performing arts[4, 5]	3,600	3,200	2,900	2,700	3,100

Percentage of GDP

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*
Tourism[2]	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.6
Gambling	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8
Video and film[4]	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Radio and TV[4]	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4
Music and the visual and performing arts[4,5]	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4

[1] Figures for the tourism day visits component of these figures are estimated from 1996 and 1998 Day Visits Survey.

[2] Estimates from surveys of overseas visitors and UK residents.

[3] Consumer Trends, Office for National Statistics.

[4] Estimates based on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Annual Business Inquiry.

[5] ONS category "artistic and literary creation and interpretation" does not distinguish between music and other performing arts and therefore I am unable to estimate a specific split for this category.

BBC News 24

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the terms of reference are of the review she announced on 12 March into BBC News 24. [45201]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 510W.

Library Staff

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average salary for *(a)* a professionally trained librarian and *(b)* an untrained library assistant has been in each local authority in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [46590]

Dr. Howells: Information on salary levels for professional and non-professional staff across the 149 English Library Authorities is not held centrally.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* professionally trained librarians and *(b)* untrained library assistants were employed by each local authority in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [46589]

Dr. Howells: This information is not readily available. However, we can extract and then represent the required data from the 149 English Library Authorities from existing reference sources. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as this has been done, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Independent Television Commission

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which representatives of the ITC have attended meetings with minsters and officials from her Department in the last six months; [46593]

(2) how many times *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials from her Department have met representatives of the ITC in the last six months. [46592]

Dr. Howells: The Independent Television Commission are involved in taking forward work on the draft Communications Bill, the Digital Action Plan, the establishment of the new converged communications regulator (OFCOM), and other projects with which my Department engages. Ministers and officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have therefore met representatives of the ITC frequently in the last six months. It would not be possible to list all the meetings or all the individuals involved without disproportionate cost.

Music Advisers

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what figures she has collated on how many music advisers in the Department *(a)* perform or have performed music in the past, *(b)* play an instrument and *(c)* studied music at university; and if she will make a statement. [46585]

Dr. Howells: My Department sponsors the music industry and is committed to working closely with them and other Government Departments to help ensure that all parts of the UK music industry thrive both at home and abroad.

Of the five officials directly involved in providing advice on music industry issues in the Department:

(a) four perform or have performed music in the past,

(b) four play an instrument,

(c) none studied music at university.

Archives

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the Government are establishing regional archivist groups; what movement of archives there will be to such groups from county and national archives; and what representations she has received on the matter. [45925]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* With encouragement from this Department, the National Council on Archives has set up a network of Regional Archive Councils which were formally established in 1999. They co-ordinate the development of archives policy and promote archives within the regions. As they are councils rather than repositories there are no plans to move archives from county and national archives to these groups. The Regional Archive Councils published archives strategies for each region in 2001.

My Department has received the National Council on Archives report "Archives in the Regions", an overview of the English regional archive strategies, and is in discussion with Resource, the Council for museums, archives and libraries and other interested groups on how to take the recommendations of the report forward.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if she will publish the findings. [47307]

Dr. Howells: The Department is actively following the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations in order to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations, efficiently and effectively. These findings are published and consistently updated on the Department's website.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of external correspondence was answered within 18 working days as of December 2001. [47256]

Mr. Caborn: For the period 1 April to 31 December 2001, 89 per cent. of the Department's external correspondence was answered within 18 working days.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent assessment she has made of whether the target to reduce staff absence to nine days per employee by 2003 will be met; [47259]

(2) if the target to reduce absence to seven days per staff year by 2001 was met; [47261]

(3) what recent assessment she has made of whether the target to reduce absence to six days per staff year by 2003 will be met. [47258]

Dr. Howells: No, but significant progress has been made. In 2001, the average sickness absence was 7.86 days per member of staff, compared with 9.28 in 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the target to reduce absence in the Royal Parks Agency to 10 days per employee by 2001 was met. [47260]

Dr. Howells: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, William Weston, and I have asked him to reply.

Letter from William Weston to Mr. John Bercow, dated 10 April 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the target to reduce sick absence rates in the Royal Parks Agency, as this is an operational matter for which the Agency is responsible.

The Agency's target was to reduce the rate to 10 days per employee per year by the end of 2001/02, as a step towards reducing it to 9 days per employee per year by the end of 2002/03.

The average rate for the year ending 31 March 2002 was 20 days per employee. This is higher than that for the previous year, and is largely attributable to significant rates of long term sick leave within the Royal Parks Constabulary. It does not reflect more frequent instances of short-term sick leave among the staff as a whole, which is evidenced by the fact that the average rate for non-uniformed staff was less than 5 days per year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the outturn achieved at 31 December 2001 on the target that all invoices not in dispute should be paid within 30 days. [47262]

Dr. Howells: 99.1 per cent. of invoices not in dispute were paid within 30 days, or agreed contractual terms, by the Department during the period January to 31 December 2001.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will take steps to improve the response time to Parliamentary Questions. [47713]

Tessa Jowell: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on ministerial accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to Parliamentary Questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

Service Reviews

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of departmental services and activities have so far been reviewed, as required by the policy set out in the handbook, "Better Quality Services". [47257]

Dr. Howells: So far reviews of 8 per cent. of departmental services and activities have been completed. A recent study carried out jointly with the Treasury and the Centre for Management and Policy Studies will lead to the completion of reviews of a further 40 per cent. The Department is on course to meet its service delivery agreement target of conducting better quality services reviews of 50 per cent. of its activities by the end of 2004.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47320]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns 547–49, in which it was stated that measures were being taken to resite internal and external surveillance equipment. All departmental premises abut public thoroughfares making more stringent preventative measures impractical.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press officers there were in her Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46886]

Dr. Howells: There were nine press officers in my Department on 1 May 1997, including two working part-time. The figure today is seven.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost of running his press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46815]

Dr. Howells: The total cost of running the Department for Culture, Media and Sport press office in 1996–97 was £236,524.53. The latest year for which figures are available for the total cost of running the press office is 2000–01, which totalled £582,442.74.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47149]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 28 February 2002 *Official Report*, column 1534W.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46834]

Mr. Caborn: Expenditure on official hospitality by special advisers in this Department over the past three years was:

	£
1999–2000	335.05
2000–01	146.80
2001–02[1]	218.51

[1] Provisional.

Information on earlier years is not readily available.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many residents of Dumfries and Galloway are in receipt of free television licences; and how many residents are entitled to this benefit on age grounds. [46976]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 10,700 people aged 75 or over in the constituencies of Dumfries and Galloway and Upper Nithsdale.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will award concessionary television licences to the partially-sighted. [48016]

Dr. Howells: No. The independent review panel on the future funding of the BBC, which reported in 1999, considered the concessionary arrangements but recommended the introduction only of a 50 per cent. reduction in the licence fee for registered blind people. We have implemented that recommendation but have no plans to extend the concession.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of her Department in the last 12 months; and what plans she has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [47950]

Dr. Howells: The Department has responsibility for one executive agency, the Royal Parks Agency. No payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration ombudsmen with responsibility for the Royal Parks Agency in the last 12 months.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of her Department to Scotland. [47951]

Mr. Caborn: There are no such plans at present.

Tourism

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the progress of the English Tourism Council's stepping stones scheme. [46914]

Dr. Howells: The stepping stones scheme is currently in its third year of operation and eight local authority districts are already participating, exceeding the target of six by the end of 2002–03. Of these eight participating districts, five (including North Devon) are in the south-west region where over 600 assessments have taken place to date.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the new grading schemes for hotels, guest accommodation, caravan parks and self-catering accommodation introduced by the English Tourism Council are being evaluated; and if she will make a statement. [46915]

Dr. Howells: The English Tourism Council (ETC) evaluates the quality assurance schemes it has introduced in a number of ways: standards are reviewed periodically in consultation with the industry and consumers; statistics on numbers participating are compiled monthly; quarterly feedback is sought from the 22,000 participants and from the quality assessors; and the industry is also asked three times a year for its views on the assessment process. In addition, Regional Tourist Boards monitor comments and complaints about accommodation in their regions; and the ETC has commenced market research this year on changing public perceptions of accommodation quality.

The Department for Culture Media and Sport has highlighted accommodation quality as one of the most important areas of work for the ETC, who must report under its funding agreement on increased participation in the schemes, which should impact ultimately on occupancy levels.

Golf Tourism

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to promote golf clubs as part of a golf tourism strategy. [47946]

Dr. Howells: The British Tourist Authority (BTA) has developed a mini-marketing plan for golf and works closely with Wales and Scotland on their golf strategies.

The BTA's website features various aspects of golf including participation, event information, history and sports wholesalers who package golf tours to the UK. In addition, BTA is considering producing a publication specifically dedicated to golf tourism.

Public Libraries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of public libraries in the UK had public internet access by December 2001. [46650]

Dr. Howells: The £100 million lottery funded programme to connect public libraries to the internet is proceeding well and by the end of last year 67 per cent. of all UK libraries offered public internet access. The programme is expected to fulfil its target of connecting all libraries to the internet by the end of 2002.

Digital Television Website

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* unique visitors and *(b)* page impressions there have been for the digital television website, digitaltelevision.gov.uk [46913]

Dr. Howells: From the period of 12 October 2001 to 27 March 2002 the details are:

(a) page impressions 64,643;

(b) unique visitors 23,887.

Creative Industries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the *(a)* revenues generated and *(b)* employment created by the creative industries were for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001–02 to the most recent date for which figures are available; [46919]

(2) what has been the total change in output of the creative industries in the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which figures are available; [46921]

(3) how much the creative industries contributed to the balance of trade through exports in the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which figures are available. [46920]

Dr. Howells:

Turnover

	Revenues[1] *£ billion*	*Employment*[2] *£ million*	*Exports*[3] *£ million*
1997	101	1.29	8.4
1998	110	1.37	9.2
1999	118	1.45	9.9
2000	128	1.48	10.8
2001	—	1.60	—

[1] Estimates based on the Office for National Statistics Annual Business Inquiry and Industry estimates.

[2] Estimates relate to each June. Figures are based on the Office for National Statistics Annual Business Inquiry and Labour Force Survey.

[3] Estimates based on the Office for National Statistics International Trade in Services Inquiry and industry estimates.

Gross Value Added

	Change in output[4] *Per cent.*
1997–98	10
1998–99	7
1999–2000	13

[4] Adjusted to remove growth due to inflation. Estimates based on the Office for National Statistics Annual Business Inquiry.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the competitiveness of the creative industries in the UK in each year since 1996–97. [46649]

Dr. Howells: My Department is not able to make an accurate assessment of the competitiveness of the creative industries as figures are not yet available from the Office for National Statistics.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to improve the dissemination of statistics on the creative industries; and what progress has been made towards that aim. [46648]

Dr. Howells: In March 2001 my Department published the second Creative Industries Mapping Document, providing a measure of the economic contribution of the creative industries to the UK. This document remains relevant and is available from my Department's website at www.culture.gov.uk/creative/mapping.html.

My Department is also working closely with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in order to develop estimates that report on the performance of the creative industries nationally. We are also working with the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) on a broad framework for the collation of statistics, including those for the creative industries, in order to provide consistency across the regions.

The Department is considering, in cooperation with other stakeholders, whether there is a need for a further mapping exercise.

Invoices

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of invoices to the Department not in dispute were paid within 30 days or the otherwise agreed contractual terms in 2001. [47393]

Dr. Howells: 99.1 per cent. of invoices not in dispute were paid within 30 days, or agreed contractual terms, by the Department during the period January to 31 December 2001.

European Regional Development Fund

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which of her Department's projects have received finance from the European Regional Development Fund in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01 and *(f)* 2001–02 to the most recent date for which figures are available. [46651]

Mr. Caborn: My Department does not administer any regeneration initiatives nor does it receive finance from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). However, many public bodies in the culture and leisure field, including many funded by DCMS, participate in such initiatives and, during the period in question, applicants from within the fields of tourism, culture and leisure received ERDF finance in excess of £200 million and will continue to receive funding throughout the 2000–06 programme.

Historic Sites (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the sites of historic interest in Worcestershire which have received grant aid in the last five years, indicating *(a)* the date and *(b)* the amount awarded in each case. [47601]

Dr. Howells: The following sites in Worcestershire were offered grant aid from English Heritage:

Site	*Date of offer*	*Amount offered £*
St. Peter, Besford	7 July 1997	24,973
Hanbury Hall, Hanbury	6 March 1998	32,510
Preaching Cross, St. Kenelm's Church, Upton Snodsbury	11 September 1998	725
Abbey Gateway, Malvern	29 September 1998	2,736
Netherton Chapel, Netherton	9 October 1998	1,226
St. Michael and All Angels, Tenbury Wells	19 December 1998	13,268
St. Michael's Ruined Nave and West Tower Walls, Abberley	29 March 1999	21,034
Walker Hall, Evesham	20 May 1999	46,000
Abberley Hall Clock tower, Great Witley	20 September 1999	5,640
Hanbury Hall, Droitwich	26 January 2000	23,410
St. Mary Magdelene, Himbleton	2 February 2000	24,044
St. Michael and All Angels, Knighton on Teme	2 February 2000	10,003
Middle Littleton Tithe Barn, Middle Littleton	22 March 2000	18,160
Baches Forge, Churchill	31 March 2000	23,580
St. Deny, Severn Stoke	31 March 2000	13,689
St. Peter, Powick	31 March 2000	42,401
St. Andrew, Ombersley	10 May 2000	23,338
Hewell Grange (HMP), Bromsgrove	10 November 2000	15,000
St. Mary, Stanford on Teme	21 December 2000	180,691
St. Michael and All Angels, Tenbury Wells	21 December 2000	45,641
St. Giles, Heightington	21 December 2000	16,004
All Saints, Worcester	28 March 001	107,500
St. Michael's Ruined Nave and West Tower Walls, Abberley	20 June 2001	8,000
Total		699,573

The following projects have been awarded grants by the Heritage Lottery Fund:

Project title	*Applicant*	*Award date*	*Award pat £*
Gwen Finch Wetland Reserve Project	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	3 March 1998	354,470
City of Worcester CAPS	Worcester City Council	19 March 1998	150,000
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Reserves Restoration Project	Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust Ltd.	16 July 1998	884,750
St. Peter, Besford, Worcestershire	St. Peter, Besford, Worcestershire	22 October 1998	12,700
Worcestershire Countryside Experience	Worcestershire County Council	26 January 1999	30,000
Severn Valley Railway Heritage Project	Kidderminster Railway Museum Trust Ltd.	13 May 1999	1,757,000
Lifford Hall, Worcestershire—re-roofing and refurbishment	Lifford Memorial Hall	3 August 1999	329,200
St. Mary, Ripple, Worcestershire	St. Mary, Ripple, Worcestershire	3 September 1999	484,400
Elgar Birthplace Museum Development	Elgar Foundation and Elgar Birthplace Trust	12 October 1999	236,500
Worcestershire Soldier	Worcestershire Regiment Museum Trust	7 December 1999	323,000
Worcester Museum of Medicine and Health Care	Charles Hastings Education Centre	29 March 2000	321,000
Malvern Heritage Project	Worcestershire County Council	7 August 2000	30,000
Hunthouse Wood Nature Reserve—extension	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	14 September 2000	24,200
St. Stephen, Redditch, Worcestershire	St. Stephen, Redditch PCC	17 October 2000	227,300
The Elgar Birthplace Museum	The Elgar Foundation	20 December 2000	47,400
Penorchard Meadows—acquisition and restoration	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	19 October 2000	110,500
Worcestershire Heathland Heritage Project	Worcestershire County Council	22 May 2001	82,700
Kidderminster Railway Museum roof and canopy restoration	Kidderminster Railway Museum Trust Ltd.	13 June 2001	177,500
Lasletts Almshouses, Worcester—repair of defective paving	Lasletts Almshouse Charity	26 July 2001	18,000
Castle Three Car—acquisition, Worcestershire	Worcestershire County Museum	9 August 2001	5,200
Natural Connections—Worcestershire	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	12 September 2001	74,800
Restoration of Great Northern Railway Carriage No. 2701	L.N.E.R. (S.V.R) Coach Fund	12 September 2001	84,300

Project title	Applicant	Award date	Award paid
Grimley Brick Pits SSSI—lease purchase and restoration	Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust Ltd.	12 September 2001	84,700
Witley Court—repairs to Nesfield garden and fountains	English Heritage	13 March 2002	727,500
Church House Areley Kings—restoration, Worcestershire	Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust	13 March 2002	371,500
Total			6,948,620

Public Service Broadcasting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the regional dimension to public service broadcasting; and if she will make a statement. [47932]

Dr. Howells: I have received representations from 25 hon. Members on the future of ITV regional programming. I understand that five members of the public have also raised this subject with my Department.

The Government's proposals to retain and to strengthen the regional dimension to public service broadcasting to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of different communities and cultural interests were set out in the White Paper "A New Future for Communications". The necessary provisions will be included in the forthcoming Communications Bill.

Youth Football

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from *(a)* Sport England and *(b)* others in respect of the future funding of youth football associated with Football League clubs; and if she will make a statement. [47039]

Mr. Caborn: Nationwide Football League clubs face the prospect of reduced broadcasting revenues for the next two seasons, and it is possible that this will have consequences for the levels of funding they presently devote to youth development. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are in regular contact with the League and the Football Association, and will discuss this issue with them in detail once the position is clearer. My Department has not received representations from Sport England on this subject.

ITV Digital

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with Granada plc and Carlton Communications plc over the future of ITV Digital; and if she will make a statement. [47041]

Dr. Howells: Over the past few weeks, I have been kept closely in touch by all sides involved in the ITV Digital negotiations. However, the decisions taken by ITV Digital are commercial decisions for them, and them alone, to take. An administrator has now been appointed and is in charge of finding a satisfactory outcome for all the parties.

Lottery Funding

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much National Lottery funding has been received by organisations within the Torbay Unitary Authority. [48196]

Mr. Caborn: Torbay has received grants from the National Lottery worth a total of £4,971,268.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she made of the suitability of including Torbay in the list of areas under the targeted Lottery initiative. [48195]

Mr. Caborn: The selection of Fair Share areas was a matter for the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund, based on broad criteria set by the Government. Torbay was not selected because it is not one of the 100 most deprived Local Authority Districts in England.

Gaming Machines

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate her Department has made of the impact on the *(a)* revenues and *(b)* viability of registered and proprietary clubs of implementing proposals to limit jackpots for gaming machines; and if she will make a statement; [48536]

(2) what plans she has to implement proposals restricting jackpots on gaming machines in registered and proprietary clubs; and if she will make a statement. [48535]

Mr. Caborn: Consultations on the report of the Gambling Review Body established that its recommendation that registered clubs should lose their entitlement under the current law to install jackpot gaming machines would have a significant adverse impact on the revenue and viability of many. We have decided not to accept this recommendation, for the reasons set out in paragraph 4.17 of "A safe bet for success" (Cm 5397) which we laid before Parliament on 26 March, and as I explained in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Fareham on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 549.

Gambling

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all the proposals in A Safe Bet for Success-Modernising Britain's Gambling Laws, which will not require a change in primary legislation and for each proposal state *(a)* the method by which it will be implemented and *(b)* the date on which she expects the implementation to take place. [48379]

Mr. Caborn: Appendix B to Cm 5397 identifies which proposals require changes in primary legislation and which do not. Of the proposals in the latter category which the Appendix indicates that the Government has decided to accept, most will not be implemented in advance of primary legislation, because they involve either action by the proposed Gambling Commission which that legislation will establish, or substantial changes to the current balance of regulation which it would not be desirable to take forward ahead of the establishment of the Commission, with its new powers to supervise, monitor and enforce them.

The proposals which the Government proposed to implement in advance of primary legislation are as follows, as set out in Chapter 9 of Cm 5397.

Recommendation	*Method of implementation*
12	Administrative action by Gaming Board
56	Industry code of practice or Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972
73	Order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994
77	Code of practice issued on behalf of the Gaming Board and BACTA
81	Order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2000
93	Order under the Gaming Act 1968
94	Advice from Gaming Board to licensing justices
98	Order under the Gaming Act 1968
102	Order under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963
118	Order under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963
134	Advice from DCMS to local authorities and pools companies

Recommendations 12 and 73 were implemented on 1 March 2002. Recommendations 93, 94, 98, 102, 118 and 134 should be implemented, subject to Parliament's approval where subordinate legislation is concerned, before the Summer Recess. I intend that the remaining recommendations should be implemented in the course of this financial year.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by her Department. [48334]

Dr. Howells: The DCMS core functions are in a single building and that building alone requires the single television licence that is purchased annually by the Department at a cost of £109.00.

Television Licensing

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the number of prosecutions undertaken by Television Licensing in each of the last five years, stating for each prosecution (i) whether the defendant was convicted, (ii) where convicted, the punishment the defendant received and (iii) the age of the defendant. [48373]

Dr. Howells: The available information relates to prosecutions for all offences under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts of 1949 and 1967 (though the great majority of these involve licence fee evasion) and distinguishes only between people aged under 21 and those aged 21 or over. The figures for England and Wales for each of the years from 1996 to 2000 are shown in the table.

Persons proceeded against at the magistrates' courts and found guilty and sentenced at all courts for offences under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts 1949 to 1967 (mainly television licence evasion), England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1]

				Sentence breakdown			
	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*	*Sentenced*[2]	*Absolute/ conditional discharge*	*Fine*	*Community sentence*	*Otherwise dealt with*
1996	188,108	164,848	164,851	2,703	161,984	7	157
1997	92,728	76,984	76,985	1,331	75,600	16	38
1998	96,616	76,605	76,604	902	75,621	8	73
1999	68,778	55,813	55,813	919	54,799	10	85
2000	121,124	105,714	105,715	2,149	103,542	4	20

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] In some years the number sentenced may exceed the number found guilty as these may include cases where a person is found guilty at the magistrates court and committed for sentence at the Crown Court, but the sentencing at the Crown Court does not take place until the following year.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish statistics on the take up of digital television by age group. [48369]

Dr. Howells: Research commissioned by my Department into consumer attitudes towards digital television will include take-up figures for digital television by age group and is due to be published in May. We published similar research in June 2001. The Report is available on the DCMS website at http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/pdfs/digtv_final_report.pdf

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on access by *(a)* the BBC and *(b)* all other broadcasters to the (i) digital terrestrial, (ii) digital satellite and (iii) digital cable television platforms in the United Kingdom. [48375]

Dr. Howells: In the White Paper "A new Future for Communications", the Government made a commitment to ensure that the public service broadcasting channels (those of the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) are available on all the main platforms, both before and after switchover. The forthcoming Communications Bill will give us the opportunity to include any provisions necessary to achieve this objective. The access of other channels to the digital platforms is a commercial matter for them and the platform operators, subject to fair competition rules.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what *(a)* date and *(b)* grounds the recent change in the affordability element of the digital switchover tests was made. [48370]

Dr. Howells: There has been no such change.

Radio and TV Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the number of holders of (i) the wireless licence and (ii) the TV licence in each year of their operation. [48372]

Dr. Howells: The radio licence was introduced in 1922 and the television licence in 1946. Information on the number of licences in force prior to 1947 is not readily available. The information requested is as follows.

Year	*Radio licence fee*	*Radio licences in force as at 31 March (millions)*	*Mono television licence fee*	*Colour television licence fee*	*Television licences in force as at 31 March (millions)*
1922	10s	—	—	—	—
1946	10s	—	£2.00	—	—
1947	£1.00	10.8	£2.00	—	0.015
1948	£1.00	11.1	£2.00	—	0.046
1949	£1.00	11.6	£2.00	—	0.127
1950	£1.00	11.8	£2.00	—	0.344
1951	£1.00	11.5	£2.00	—	0.764
1952	£1.00	11.2	£2.00	—	1.4
1953	£1.00	10.7	£2.00	—	2.1
1954	£1.00	10.1	£2.00	—	3.2
1955	£1.00	9.4	£2.00	—	4.5
1956	£1.00	8.5	£4.00	—	5.7
1957	£1.00	7.5	£4.00	—	7.0
1958	£1.00	6.5	£4.00	—	8.1
1959	£1.00	5.4	£4.00	—	9.3
1960	£1.00	4.5	£4.00	—	10.5
1961	£1.00	3.9	£4.00	—	11.3
1962	£1.00	3.5	£4.00	—	11.8
1963	£1.00	3.2	£4.00	—	12.4
1964	£1.00	[illegible]0	£4.00	—	12.9
1965	£1 5s	[illegible]8	£5.00	—	13.3
1966	£1 5s	[illegible]6	£5.00	—	13.6
1967	£1 5s	[illegible]5	£5.00	—	14.3
1968	£1 5s	[illegible]5	£5.00	£10.00	15.1
1969	£1 5s	[illegible]4	£6.00	£11.00	15.5
1970	£1 5s	[illegible]3	£6.00	£11.00	15.9
1971	—	[illegible]	£7.00	£12.00	15.9
1972	—	[illegible]	£7.00	£12.00	16.7
1973	—	[illegible]	£7.00	£12.00	17.1
1974	—	[illegible]	£7.00	£12.00	17.3
1975	—	—	£8.00	£18.00	17.7
1976	—	—	£8.00	£18.00	17.8
1977	—	—	£9.00	£21.00	18.1
1978	—	—	£10.00	£25.00	18.1
1979	—	—	£12.00	£34.00	18.4
1980	—	—	£12.00	£34.00	18.3
1981	—	—	£15.00	£46.00	18.7
1982	—	—	£15.00	£46.00	18.6
1983	—	—	£15.00	£46.00	18.5
1984	—	—	£15.00	£46.00	18.6
1985	—	—	£18.00	£58.00	18.7
1986	—	—	£18.00	£58.00	18.7
1987	—	—	£18.00	£58.00	19.0
1988	—	—	£21.00	£62.50	19.4
1989	—	—	£22.00	£66.00	19.4
1990	—	—	£24.00	£71.00	19.6
1991	—	—	£25.50	£77.00	19.5
1992	—	—	£26.50	£80.00	19.6
1993	—	—	£27.50	£83.00	20.1
1994	—	—	£28.00	£84.50	20.4
1995	—	—	£28.50	£86.50	21.1
1996	—	—	£30.00	£89.50	21.1
1997	—	—	£30.50	£91.50	21.3
1998	—	—	£32.50	£97.50	21.7
1999	—	—	£33.50	£101.00	22.2
2000	—	—	£34.50	£104.00	22.6
2001	—	—	£36.50	£109.00	22.8
2002	—	—	£37.50	£112.00	—

BBC

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the criteria by which she assessed applications for BBC new services. [48368]

Dr. Howells: The criteria for assessing BBC public service proposals were published by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Chris Smith) and laid in the Libraries of both Houses in January 2001.

Documents

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all the documents published by her Department since 8 June 2001, for each one stating *(a)* the date of publication, *(b)* the purpose of publication, *(c)* the cost of publication, *(d)* the number of copies produced, *(e)* the cover price, *(f)* the number of copies sold, *(g)* the number of copies sent after request from members of the public or interested parties and *(h)* the number of copies disposed of by other, specified, means. [48380]

Dr. Howells: The table sets out the documents published by my Department since 8 June 2001 with the cover price, copies produced and cost to the Department. Documents with a cover price are printed and distributed by The Stationery Office (TSO) and the number of copies produced and sold is for them.

The purpose of these publications is to provide the Department's stakeholders with information on policy developments and, where appropriate, to provide public information more generally.

Information on the number of copies of free documents sent after request from members of the public or interested parties is not held centrally.

Document	*Publication Date*	*Cover Price (£)*	*Circulation*	*Cost to DCMS (£000)*
Summer Supplementary Estimates	June 2001	3.70	TSO	0.2
Report of the Gambling Review Body	July 2001	38.90	TSO	12.2
London Open House Leaflet	September 2001	Free	3,000	1
Cricket Disorder Report	September 2001	Free	700	3.8
Operation of the National Lottery	October 2001	4.00	TSO	2
Staging International Sports Events	October 2001	5.00	TSO	2
Tourism—The Hidden Giant—and Foot and Mouth	October 2001	4.50	TSO	2.5
Banking on a Hit Report	October 2001	Free	4,000	15
Media Ownership Rules Consultation Paper	November 2001	Free	2,000	7
Winter Supplementary Estimates	November 2001	4.50	TSO	2.5
Lottery Achievements—The First Seven Years	December 2001	Free	9,750	28
A Force for Our Future—Historic Environment Statement	December 2001	Free	10,000	29
Digital TV—Information for Landlords	December 2001	Free	6,000	5.5
Viewers Panel Report	December 2001	Free	1,000	5.5
English National Stadium Review	December 2001	7.50	TSO	3
CIEPAG—Information Leaflet	January 2002	Free	1,000	1.1
Spring Supplementary Estimates	February 2002	5.00	TSO	1.9
Export of Works of Art 2000–01 Report	February 2002	21.00	TSO	12.3
Unpicking the Lock	February 2002	4.00	TSO	1.7
Biennial Conservation Report	March 2002	Free	2,000	[1]15
Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites 1999–2000 Report	March 2002	Free	1,000	6
A Safe Bet for Success—Modernising Britain's Gambling Laws	March 2002	13.50	TSO	12
Testing the Waters—The Sport of Swimming	March 2002	4.50	TSO	1.7
Lottery Funded—National Lottery Leaflet	April 2002	Free	600,000	11

[1] Paid by English Heritage

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of violent crime in Romford. [21015]

Mr. Denham: The information available relates to the borough of Havering as a whole, where there were 3,337 offences of violence recorded by the police in 2000–01. This total included 158 sexual offences and 392 robberies.

Vandalism

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what projects his Department is supporting to combat vandalism in suburban areas. [26941]

Mr. Denham: We are employing a range of measures to combat vandalism. The work of the crime and disorder partnerships, set up under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, in formulating local strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder in their area is crucial in securing local commitment to effective action against vandalism.

Closed circuit television (CCTV) is an effective way to detect and reduce vandalism. Under the crime reduction programme CCTV initiative a potential £170 million has been allocated to 683 CCTV schemes in England and Wales. We introduced neighbourhood wardens and street wardens in suburban areas where they have reduced vandalism. Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts have also been successfully employed to combat vandalism.

The Youth Justice Board has a number of schemes, which focus on the problems of criminal damage such as the Artscape-graffiti Outreach Project, the Youth Inclusion Programme and from next year the Community Payback Scheme. Funding of £13.5 million has been allocated to March 2003 for the Youth Inclusion Programme.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police forces to (i) deal with and (ii) reduce the numbers of instances of disorder and vandalism. [26928]

Mr. Denham: Important guidance for local crime and disorder reduction partnerships on how to deal with anti-social behaviour was issued in January last year in the form of a comprehensive toolkit posted on the Home Office Crime Reduction website which will be kept updated. The Government are also currently providing assistance to all partnerships on the drawing up of their local crime strategies, due by April 2002. Partnerships are required to address the anti-social behaviour problems in their area and have been asked to identify a named person in each local authority district to co-ordinate action on anti-social behaviour.

We also want to see partnerships make use of the full range of measures available to them, such as Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, to deal with these problems. Our extensive review of ASBOs will be published shortly and we are currently proposing further legislative changes in order to streamline the process of applying for ASBOs and extend the circumstances in which they may be granted, to help ensure that local crime and disorder reduction partnerships make maximum use of this measure.

Robbery

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences of robbery there were in each police force area in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 2000–01; what the percentage change between the two periods was; and if he will make a statement. [29623]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is given in the table.

We are determined to reduce the number of robberies across the country as a whole. That is why we have given five metropolitan forces, including the Metropolitan police, an additional £20 million specifically to assist their efforts in tackling robbery, and have set them the challenging target of a 14 per cent. reduction of robbery in our principal cities by March 2005. We are working with those forces, as well as progressing an extensive robbery research programme, to enable us to identify good practice in tackling robbery which we will ensure is disseminated to all forces.

A research study, "Mobile phone theft" (by Victoria Harrington and Pat Mayhew, Home Office Research Study 235) has recently been published. Based on data from those forces which noted whether a recorded robbery involved a mobile phone, the study shows that there was an increase in the proportion of robberies involving mobile phones, from about 8 per cent. in 1998–99 to about 28 per cent. in 2000–01. Also, from robberies in four police Basic Command Units in the first quarter of 2001, the study estimated that in 23 per cent. of mobile phone robberies, victims were using their phone or had it on display.

We are working with the police and the mobile phone industry to reduce mobile phone robbery, undertaking public awareness campaigns and joint tracking exercises. The phone operators are testing ways of putting stolen phones out of action. They have also agreed to improve security as they invest in new systems. We are pressing the handset manufacturers for similar commitments.

A start has been made, but more needs to be done before Britain's mobile phone system can lead the world in security. The mobile phone industry needs to show more interest in the security of phones they are selling to British consumers and, as the motor industry has done, do more to prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime.

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Robberies recorded by the police

Police force	Year ending: March 1999	March 2001	Percentage change
Avon and Somerset	1,831	2,765	51
Bedfordshire	530	663	25
Cambridgeshire	437	539	23
Cheshire	397	486	22
Cleveland	908	932	3
Cumbria	119	94	−21
Derbyshire	504	773	53
Devon and Cornwall	462	452	−2
Dorset	205	309	51
Durham	172	231	34
Essex	523	700	[1]22
Gloucestershire	273	363	33
Greater Manchester	7,632	9,918	30
Hampshire	588	794	35
Hertfordshire	250	508	[1]64
Humberside	839	999	19
Kent	712	1,000	40
Lancashire	982	1,224	25
Leicestershire	967	1,067	10
Lincolnshire	149	191	28
London City of	29	53	83
Merseyside	[1]2,484	2,405	−3
Metropolitan Police	26,330	40,992	[1]57
Norfolk	220	330	50
Northamptonshire	443	604	36
Northumbria	1,347	1,381	3
North Yorkshire	170	186	9
Nottinghamshire	1,312	2,050	56
South Yorkshire	979	1,438	47
Staffordshire	509	796	56
Suffolk	140	177	26
Surrey	171	456	[1]64
Sussex	939	1,241	32
Thames Valley	1,327	2,147	62
Warwickshire	170	252	48
West Mercia	351	423	21
West Midlands	7,315	11,351	55
West Yorkshire	3,072	3,781	23
Wiltshire	195	193	−1
Dyfed-Powys	42	23	−45
Gwent	173	244	41
North Wales	127	163	28
South Wales	511	460	−10
England and Wales	66,836	95,154	42

[1] There was a boundary change between the Metropolitan police and Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey on 1 April 2000. the percentage change given for these forces is an estimate of the change which would have occurred had their boundaries remained constant during this period.

Nuisance Calls

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department is conducting in respect of nuisance calls. [34620]

Mr. Denham: Information on nuisance calls derived from the British Crime Survey (BCS) was published in Home Office Research and Planning Unit paper no. 84 "Obscene, threatening and other troublesome telephone calls to Women in England and Wales: 1982–1992". Results from the 1982 and 1992 sweeps of the BCS indicated that 8 per cent. and 7 per cent. of women aged 16 or over had suffered from one or more obscene call in the course of 1981 and 1991 respectively. This information was derived from special questions included in the BCS for those years.

In 1998 the BCS included a computerised self-completion questionnaire on stalking. Respondents who said that they had suffered such unwanted attention and were also asked whether they had received silent phone calls from the person involved and whether they had received obscene phone calls. Findings of this analysis were published in a Home Office Research Study 210, "The extent and nature of stalking: findings from the 1998 British Crime Survey" which has been deposited in the Library.

A recent study which examined 167 protection from harassment cases provides further information though recorded accounts about the characteristics of each case and how it was processed through the Criminal Justice System. The study identified several different types of behaviours which constituted harassment, including making obscene and silent telephone calls. Findings of this analysis were published in a Home Office Research Study 203, "An evaluation of the use and effectiveness of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997" which has been deposited in the Library.

The BCS 2002 questionnaire asks respondents who use a mobile phone whether they have received in the last 12 months voice or text messages on their mobile phone which they consider offensive, or harassment.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed in his Department on a job share contract; and what percentage of vacant positions was advertised on this basis in the last 12 months. [35362]

Angela Eagle: Job sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individuals need and the needs of their work. For example, 11 per cent. of staff work part-time in a range of ways from reduced days per week to working alternate weeks. 38 staff are currently recorded as being job sharers in the Home Office, United Kingdom Passport Service and Forensic Science Service. Information on staff in the Prison Service who are job sharers is not held centrally and could not be provided without disproportionate costs.

It is Home Office policy (including the Prison Service) to advertise jobs as being open to part-timers or job sharers unless there is an operational reason for not doing so. Information on the percentage of posts advertised to job sharers is set out in the table.

Vacancies advertised over the last 12 months to 31 December 2001

	Percentage
Home Office[1]	95.8
United Kingdom Passport Service	91.9
Prison Service	[2]—
Forensic Science Service	[3]—

[1] Period of advertising 26 April-31 December 2001.
[2] Information not available.
[3] In the Forensic Science Service (FSS) part-time work is readily available without the need to find job share partners.

We are currently establishing a database to assist staff to find job-share partners. We have also volunteered to participate in the similar Cabinet Office cross-Whitehall scheme that they are setting up.

Metropolitan Police (Retirement Age)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will permit serving Metropolitan police officers with specialist anti-terrorist-related skills to extend their service in the force beyond the age of 60 as an exceptional measure. [35808]

Mr. Denham: Under the Police Pensions Regulations the compulsory retirement age ranges from 55 for constables and sergeants to 65 for those above the superintending ranks outside the Metropolitan police area. An officer's retirement on grounds of age is already subject to flexibility in that it can be postponed by up to five years at the discretion of the chief officer or the police authority, depending on the officer's rank.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36174]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Boxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means ministerial boxes are conveyed from private offices in his Department to *(a)* himself and *(b)* his Ministers; how frequently and at what expense private courier firms are employed for such a task; and which courier firms have been used for such duties. [36268]

Angela Eagle: Ministerial boxes originating from this Department are transported to Ministers' homes either by Government car or by a service provided by the Royal Mail. Where exceptional circumstances require it, a courier service may be used.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39348]

Angela Eagle: The list of contracts awarded to the Capita Group by the Home Department since 1997 is as follows:

Project type
Capita[1]
Designing and Managing Building Projects
Capita EC
Environment/Space Planning
Capita Business Service
Recruitment of General Managers
Capita Training
Conferences and Training
Capita Business Service
Consultancy Support
Capita Business Service
Productions of Purchase Manual Efficiency Review
Capita Business Service
Her Majesty's Prison Blakenhurst Bid Team
Capita Business Service
Quantum Project
Capita
Criminal Records Bureau
Capita
Recruitment
Capita
Recruitment

[1] Advisory contracts for which Capita was not the prime contractor.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42475]

Angela Eagle: Parental leave is available to all Home Office staff as one of a number of policies designed to help staff achieve their preferred balance between work and home. These include paid and unpaid maternity leave, paid paternity leave, career breaks, paid and unpaid special leave and a range of flexible and alternative working patterns. As an unpaid entitlement the costs of parental leave to the Department is minimal.

The Home Office is committed to helping staff balance their work and home life and as an employer recognises that work/life balance policies have significant business benefits including: improved recruitment and retention of staff; reduced absenteeism and a happier and therefore more productive work force.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what domestic violence perpetrator programmes and linked partner support services are provided in the London probation area. [42660]

Beverley Hughes: The central area currently has four groups running per week and a women's support service is provided. In the north-west of London current provision is by the Domestic Violence Intervention Project, and the south-east, south-west and north-east areas are piloting the Domestic Violence Pathfinder programme delivering Duluth. The programme for perpetrators is known as 'Duluth'. It gets its title from the programme under development in Duluth in Minnesota, in the United States of America. A multi-agency programme runs in conjunction with support services to women and involves close networking with police, the Probation Service, Social Services, voluntary agencies and any other appropriate organisations. The programme is 24 weeks long and involves pre and post group work. It is currently running in West Yorkshire and London as a pathfinder

project and is currently subject to an evaluation process allied to a research programme concerning the issues around domestic violence.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions for speeding were obtained as a result of evidence from speed cameras in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the United Kingdom in 2001; [39759]

(2) how many speed cameras there are in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the United Kingdom. [39758]

Mr. Denham: The available information on the number of convictions and fixed penalty notices issued for the offence of "speeding detected by camera device" for 2000 is shown in the table. Statistics for 2001 are not yet available. It is not possible from the data collected to identify South Tyneside and there are no central records to indicate the number of speed cameras in operation in England and Wales. However, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) estimates that there are about 4,500 speeding camera sites in England and Wales. Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland (Mrs. Liddell) and Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid).

Prosecutions and fixed penalty notices paid for the offence of speeding detected by camera device[1], in 2000

Number of offences

	Prosecutions	*Fixed penalties paid*
South Tyneside	[2]—	[2]—
North East Region[3]	10,800	38,500
Total England and Wales	109,200	624,300

[1] Offences under Sections 16, 81, 84, 86, 88, 89 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and Motor Vehicles (Speed Limits on Motorways) Regulations 1973.
[2] Not available
[3] Region covers Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria police forces—source Office for National Statistics.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been prosecuted as a result of speed camera evidence in each year since 1997 broken down by *(a)* police force area and *(b)* local authority area. [45587]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information on the number of prosecutions for speeding as a result of camera evidence, by police force area, is shown in the table. Data are not available by local authority area.

Prosecutions at magistrate courts for speeding offences detected by camera by police force area 1997 to 2000

Number of offences

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	2,186	2,997	1,607	1,660
Bedfordshire	1,436	3,518	1,536	1,861
Cambridgeshire	2,661	1,553	1,280	800
Cheshire	—	361	405	2,280
Cleveland	263	576	586	376
Cumbria	1	32	82	87
Derbyshire	1,097	1,416	1,366	950
Devon and Cornwall	2,880	2,684	2,848	3,353
Dorset	241	446	473	471
Durham	—	12	96	3,745
Essex	951	1,808	2,231	3,060
Gloucestershire	793	586	289	315
Greater Manchester	2,659	4,355	13,442	16,405
Hampshire	—	—	508	1,035
Hertfordshire	121	108	485	1,330
Humberside	253	338	695	1,513
Kent	82	296	368	84
Lancashire	539	935	1,105	978
Leicestershire	97	1,193	641	597
Lincolnshire	—	580	1,229	1,703
London, City of	—	—	—	6
Merseyside	3,528	9,477	8,450	5,156
Metropolitan police	8,297	2,983	2,749	5,522
Norfolk	25	60	62	23
Northamptonshire	—	—	857	6,548
Northumbria	1,141	1,168	1,737	6,662
North Yorkshire	—	1	32	13
Nottinghamshire	73	263	508	546
South Yorkshire	174	240	219	273
Staffordshire	366	779	1,160	5,821
Suffolk	—	158	38	132
Surrey	145	124	196	2,353
Sussex	2,292	2,093	2,087	2,018
Thames Valley	2,761	2,943	860	1,118
Warwickshire	—	—	1,069	2,161
West Mercia	—	186	195	210
West Midlands	7,424	13,430	5,790	2,043
West Yorkshire	2,067	2,342	1,886	1,172
Wiltshire	2,674	3,497	4,220	2,440
Total England	47,227	63,538	63,387	86,820
Dyfed Powys	—	—	35	1,359
Gwent	—	—	10,035	11,421
North Wales	—	—	1,024	8,351
South Wales	819	1,534	1,115	1,206
Total Wales	819	1,534	12,209	22,337
Total England & Wales	48,046	65,072	75,596	109,157

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much net income police forces have received from speed camera fines in each year since 1997 broken down by police force area; [45585]

(2) what the aggregate revenue from speed camera fines has been in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* police force area and *(b)* local authority area. [45586]

Mr. Denham: Available information on aggregate revenue is given in the table. This shows the total number of fixed penalties and court proceedings for speeding offences detected by camera from 1997 to 2000. This information is not available by local authority area and to provide a breakdown by police force area would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Fixed penalty and court proceeding data for offences of speeding detected by cameras[1,2] for England and Wales, 1997 to 2000

	Fixed penalties		*Court proceedings*		
	Number of tickets[3]	*Estimated revenue*[4] *£*	*Number of fines*	*Total amount of fine £*	*Average fine £*
1997	288,600	11,544,000	20,800	1,912,200	92
1998	338,800	13,552,000	25,500	2,928,300	115
1999	423,000	16,920,000	32,300	3,434,400	106
2000	624,300	24,972,200	31,800	3,400,000	107

[1] Automatic cameras until 1998, all camera types from 1999.
[2] Offences under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and Motor Vehicles (Speed Limits on Motorways) Regulations 1973.
[3] Paid i.e no further action.
[4] Estimate based on £40 fixed penalty charge from 1997 to 2000.

All revenue from speeding offences is normally paid to Her Majesty's Treasury. But since April 2000, seven partnership areas in England and Wales have been piloting a new netting-off scheme. The partnerships comprise police forces, local authorities, highways authorities and magistrates courts. The scheme allows fixed penalty fine revenue from speed and red-light traffic cameras to be re-invested to meet the costs of camera enforcement. Money left over goes, as before, to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Set out is the amount of netted off income each of the seven police forces in the pilot scheme received, for the financial year 2000–01.

Police force	*Netted-off income received £*
Cleveland	385,280
Essex	1,309,032
Lincolnshire	328,390
Northamptonshire	1,159,907
Nottinghamshire	211,419
South Wales	534,905
Thames Valley	1,400,457
Total	5,329,390

Bootlegging

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions have resulted from fuel bootlegging in each of the last five years. [45410]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Customs central records do not differentiate between the type of fraud or smuggling involved in their successful prosecutions in the road fuel sector across the whole of the UK.

However, Customs do hold records centrally of the successful prosecutions for road fuel smuggling specifically in Northern Ireland and I provided these in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 266W.

Sex Offenders

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to extend treatment of sex offenders in prison; [45375]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of treatment provided to convicted sex offenders. [45374]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service provides five versions of the sex offender treatment programme, that have been independently accredited as likely to be effective in reducing reconviction: a core programme; an extended programme (for high risk sex offenders); an adapted programme (for sex offenders with learning difficulties); a booster (for those that have completed other versions of the programme and are nearing release); and rolling (for low risk sex offenders).

The Service's present and coming targets for completions by prisoners of versions of the programme are 1,020 for the current year, 950 for 2002–03 and 1,240 for 2003–04.

Versions of the programme are currently delivered in 25 prisons; this is planned to rise to 27 prisons in 2002–03 and 28 in 2003–04.

The Prison Service studies rates of reconviction to assess the effectiveness of the programme. Matched cohorts of programme graduates and untreated offenders are compared.

Offenders included in the cohorts need to have completed their sentences and have been at liberty in the community for at least two years. It has therefore been possible to complete only one substantial study so far. In that, the treatment group was of 647 offenders treated between 1992 and 1996, and the comparison group 1,910 offenders. The study indicated reductions in treated group reconviction rates of between one and 10 per cent., depending on level of risk.

Many more studies will be needed over a much longer period before firm conclusions can safely be drawn about the efficacy of the programme. Independent assessments of aspects of the programme and of the reconviction studies will also be carried out.

Police Spending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 481W, on police spending, what the average per capita spending in 2001–02 is in *(a)* the Thames Valley Police Force area and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale police area. [30131]

Mr. Denham: The gross cost of policing on an average per capita basis in the Thames Valley area in 2001–02 is estimated at £126.20. A figure at the Aylesbury Vale area level is not available.

Source for calculating the average per capita basis: The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics (Estimates) 2001–02.

Drink Driving

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of breath tests resulted in arrest for drink driving in December *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000. [30170]

Mr. Denham: 8.2 per cent. of screening breath tests carried out in December 2000 in England and Wales were positive or refused, compared with 7.4 per cent. in December 1999.

Statistics for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which applicants to join the police service are classified as recruits. [45873]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Applicants to the police service are classified as recruits when they take up appointment with a police force.

For the purposes of the Home Office statistical bulletins on Police Service Strength, "recruits" covers officers joining the police service, including those transferring from forces outside England and Wales, but not those transferring from other forces within England and Wales.

World Cup

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his cooperation with the Governments of Japan and South Korea on their deportation processes during the World Cup finals. [43164]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* We are involved in the most extensive co-operation with the Japanese and Korean police and civil authorities in preparation for the World Cup. The police in both countries have assured us that, where individuals have been detained, they will consider prosecution prior to deportation.

Football Hooliganism

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department is having with football clubs on crowd misbehaviour. [43171]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* We work closely with the police, football authorities and football clubs in order to ensure that crowd misbehaviour is addressed and offenders are identified and prosecuted. An extensive array of legislation is in place for tackling football related disorder and the Government expect the police and courts to make full use of the powers that have been placed at their disposal.

Community Wardens

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community wardens will be employed in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Chorley in the next financial year. [45928]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Twenty-six central Government-funded Street Wardens will be employed in Lancashire in the next financial year. Ten will be in Morecambe, nine in Hyndburn, five in Preston and two in Burnley. Sixteen central Government-funded neighbourhood wardens will be employed in Lancashire in the next financial year. Six will be in Burnley, six in Skelmersdale and four in Wyre. No bid was received for central Government-funded neighbourhood or street wardens in Chorley.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the business strategy and business model developed for the effective use of IT by the National Probation Service. [46016]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* "A New Choreography: an Integrated Strategy for the National Probation Service for England and Wales", published in August 2001, sets out the vision for the National Probation Service over the next three years. The information technology strategy is to design and develop a system which fully supports the business needs of the Service enabling it to meet the aims and objectives as set out in "A New Choreography".

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources are available to implement the National Probation Service's IT strategy; and if he will make a statement. [46017]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* For financial year 2002–03 a provisional budget of £34.65 million has been allocated to information technology within the Home Office National Probation Directorate. This figure is part funded by the recovery of £16 million from probation areas (question 254 refers).

For financial years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 the total information technology requirement of £34 million, £35 million, and £36 million respectively will be found from the overall National Probation Service budget.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how recharging arrangements are being negotiated for the National Probation Service's IT desktop services. [46019]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The current contract with Integris centralises the cost of the information technology (IT) provision for the National Probation Service (NPS). Prior to 1 January 2002 the IT provision through the National Probation Service Information System Strategy (NPSISS) contract was met through a mixture of central service costs and area payments to the supplier for IT maintenance. The recharging arrangements for 2002–03 exist to realign the NPS budget to meet the costs where they now fall due.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by the National Probation Service Directorate to direct human resources policies needed to attract, retain and develop staff to deliver IT capabilities. [46018]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The National Probation Directorate has recently administered an external recruitment scheme which selected nine new members of staff in key positions for the Information and Technology Group.

The recruitment and retention of IT staff in local probation areas is the responsibility of each individual local area.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if an outsourcing contract has been signed for the Probation Service's IT; and how the scope and costs of the technology upgrade has been determined. [46020]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* On 26 October 2001, following an open competition, the Home Office signed a 2 and a half year interim contract, on behalf of the National Probation Directorate, for the support and maintenance of the Information Technology infrastructure and the case record management system (CRAMS) with Integris.

An upgrade of the infrastructure forms a vital part of this contract. This technology upgrade will include the replacement of old hardware and the revision of all software to currently maintained versions. The equipment for the technology upgrade was procured via a separate

competitive tender using G-CAT suppliers after an assessment had been made of market rates to ensure best value for money.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38191]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many umbrella bodies have registered with the Criminal Records Bureau; how many of them are open to take registrations from outside their own membership; and if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of arrangements in covering the registration need of the voluntary sector. [45810]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* We have been determined that employers and voluntary organisations wishing to use the service to be provided by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) will have a ready means of access. To meet the needs of those employers and organisations which do not wish to register with the Bureau in their own right, we have encouraged others to consider acting on their behalf, as umbrella bodies, and we shall continue to do so. Up to 21 March 2002, a total of 704 umbrella bodies had registered with the CRB. Of these, 419 organisations had indicated that they are prepared to countersign applications from employers or organisations outside their own circle or sector. A list is available from the CRB on request, and information is also available on the CRB website, www.disclosure.gov.uk.

Prison Population

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the data for women are not disaggregated in Table 6 of the Prison Population Brief for England and Wales, January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [46500]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Table six of the Prison Population Brief deals with receptions into prison establishments. Female prisoners currently account for 7.8 per cent. of all receptions into prisons and 5.9 per cent. of the total prison population. For this reason we have up to now stated the total number of female receptions while providing a more detailed analysis of the male population.

However, the data are readily available and I have arranged for future briefs to include more analysis of the data on women.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have so far been issued. [47232]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Between 1 October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTO) was rolled-out to courts in England and Wales, and 31 January 2002, which is the latest month for which complete figures are available, 5,188 Orders were made.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the PSA target to increase by 10 per cent. the number of offenders dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs was met. [47403]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Data on seizures and offenders is published annually in the Home Office statistical bulletin: "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom". Figures are by calendar year. Data for the year 1999 by comparison to 1998 were published in 2001.

This data show that the number of persons dealt with for supply offences (possession with intent to supply unlawfully, unlawful supply and import/export) involving class A drugs rose by 17.5 per cent. between 1998 and 1999, well above the target of 10 per cent. In fact subsequent data received by the Home Office after publication of the statistics, indicates that the increase was greater still—around 19.8 per cent. These revised figures will be published in the next edition of the bulletin for the year 2000 which will be published shortly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the rate of positive results from mandatory random drugs tests will be met by March. [47223]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) target set following Spending Review 2000 was to reduce the rate of positive results from random mandatory drug tests (MDT) from 20 per cent. in 1998–99 to 10 per cent. by 31 March 2004.

MDT data are collected and reported monthly. The interim target set for achievement by 31 March 2002 was a rate of positive results of 12 per cent. The latest available year to date figures run to the end of February 2002 and show a positive rate of 11.5 per cent. Data for the last three months are provisional.

The target that the Prison Service has been set for achievement by 31 March 2003 is a rate of positive results of 10 per cent. or lower, which brings forward the SDA target by one year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target of a reduction of three percentage points in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for heroin and/or cocaine/crack will be met by December. [47402]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The commitment "to achieve a reduction of three percentage points in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for heroin and/or cocaine/crack from the 1999–2000 half-baseline" is a drugs strategy target for 2002 under the Communities objective, as set out in the United Kingdom Anti-drugs Co-ordinator's Second National Plan.

Information on progress against this target, derived from data from the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, will not be available until the autumn of 2002.

The target contributes, with other measures, towards delivery of the current Public Service Agreement (PSA) target "to reduce levels of repeat offending among drug misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008)".

We are currently reviewing the drugs strategy targets and progress on them, to ensure we still have the right balance and focus.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the PSA target to increase class A drugs prevented and seized by 10 per cent. has been met. [47235]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Data on seizures and offenders is published annually in the Home Office statistical bulletin: "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom". Figures are by calendar year. Data for the year 1999 by comparison to 1998 were published in 2001.

The data published in 2001 showed that the number of seizures within the United Kingdom involving class A drugs increased by 4.3 per cent. in 1999, against the target set of 10 per cent. However, subsequent data received by the Home Office after publication indicated that the number of seizures within the United Kingdom involving class A drugs had in fact increased by 7.3 per cent. This revised figure will be published in the next edition of the bulletin for the year 2000, which will be published shortly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target that all police services should operate face-to-face referral schemes covering all custody suites will be met by March. [47401]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Face-to-face arrest referral schemes were operating in 41 out of 43 police forces as at end February with an estimated 95 per cent. coverage of custody suites by arrest referral workers. These were funded by the Crime Reduction Programme, under the Joint Funding Initiative. All forces will be operating face-to-face arrest referral schemes by the end of April 2002.

Young Offenders (Sentencing)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the time from arrest of persistent young offenders to their sentencing will be down to 71 days by March. [47408]

Beverley Hughes: In 1996, dealing with a persistent young offender took an average of 142 days. We have reached our target of halving this to 71 days. In the last two quarters the number of days was 70 and 68 respectively. This shows what can be achieved with good local and national co-ordination and a determined focus on achieving the objective. We will continue our work to ensure that this progress is maintained.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [47056]

Mr. Blunkett: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38915]

Angela Eagle: The following subsidy costs were paid for the Home Office's main central London buildings for the last four financial years.

Costs for catering subsidy

	£000
2001–02	218
2000–01	229
1999–2000	219
1998–99	161

The costs are expected to reduce to £180,000 in 2002–03.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what performance penalties have been imposed on contractors providing electronic monitoring services in the last 12 months; and for each occasion what the *(a)* reason for and *(b)* amount of the penalty was. [40027]

Beverley Hughes: In the 12 months from February 2001 to January 2002, a total of £141,286.70 was deducted from the payments made to the electronic monitoring contractors in respect of performance measures. The performance measurement system assesses performance across a range of indicators including response times for installing and removing equipment, and making telephone calls and visits in respect of alleged breaches of the curfew requirement.

Police Pay (Advertisements)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of the advertisements in national newspapers relating to his police pay proposals. [39689]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The advertising cost was £30,002, which included both production and media costs.

Police Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of each local authority's police budget *(a)* was accounted for by police pensions in 1997 and *(b)* will be accounted for by police pensions in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2008. [41689]

Mr. Denham: Figures for police pensions as a proportion of net expenditure in 1997–98 are set out in the table. Figures for 2002–03 and 2008–09 are not available.

Police authority	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	15.62
Bedfordshire	11.55
Cambridgeshire	11.88
Cheshire	11.13
City of London	12.71
Cleveland	10.94
Cumbria	12.77
Derbyshire	12.79
Devon and Cornwall	13.53
Dorset	13.03
Durham	16.49
Dyfed Powys	12.01
Essex	10.59
Gloucestershire	13.17
Greater Manchester	16.50
Gwent	11.64
Hampshire	9.55
Hertfordshire	9.52
Humberside	13.19
Kent	11.28
Lancashire	14.17
Leicestershire	11.90
Lincolnshire	13.84
Merseyside	14.93
Metropolitan police	11.39
Norfolk	13.20
North Wales	13.58
North Yorkshire	14.47
Northamptonshire	12.43
Northumbria	15.42
Nottinghamshire	13.74
South Wales	17.61
South Yorkshire	12.12
Staffordshire	17.30
Suffolk	13.25
Surrey	13.66
Sussex	13.29
Thames Valley	9.83
Warwickshire	13.92
West Mercia	11.01
West Midlands	12.24
West Yorkshire	12.97
Wiltshire	10.44
Total	12.73

Source:

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA): Police statistics [Actuals] 1997–98. The figure for Leicestershire was not available, so the figure from the Police Statistics [Estimates] 1997–98 has been used.

Police Candidates

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many approved police candidates are awaiting their training start date; and if he will make a statement. [41597]

Mr. Denham: Records are not held centrally for police forces who send their recruits to National Police Training. However, there is no reported backlog of approved candidates waiting to start their training.

The Metropolitan police has reported that there are no specific delays in successful candidates being assigned to training courses.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about intervention in the operational independence of the Metropolitan Police Force; and if he will make a statement. [41613]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, (Sir John Stevens) meet regularly, both formally and informally to discuss a range of issues relating to policing in London.

Special Constables

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were in service in each police force area in *(a)* March 1997 and *(b)* March 2001; and if he will make a statement. [41615]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The number of serving special constables in each police force area in March 1997 and March 2001 are set out in the table:

Police force	*March 1997*	*March 2001*
Avon and Somerset	759	400
Bedfordshire	182	115
Cambridgeshire	303	218
Cheshire	475	290
Cleveland	160	93
Cumbria	189	156
Derbyshire	428	275
Devon and Cornwall	1,148	796
Dorset	289	267
Durham	184	146
Essex	634	445
Gloucestershire	297	183
Greater Manchester	685	367
Hampshire	621	454
Hertfordshire	297	198
Humberside	340	212
Kent	589	392
Lancashire	483	360
Leicestershire	415	162
Lincolnshire	271	166
London, City of	86	43
Merseyside	401	541
Metropolitan Police	1,714	774
Norfolk	402	259
Northamptonshire	316	188
Northumbria	533	300
North Yorkshire	362	182
Nottinghamshire	620	335
South Yorkshire	308	188

Police force	March 1997	March 2001
Staffordshire	685	402
Suffolk	379	349
Surrey	297	149
Sussex	472	306
Thames Valley	656	418
Warwickshire	381	221
West Mercia	582	399
West Midlands	945	617
West Yorkshire	690	415
Wiltshire	154	152
Dyfed Powys	283	191
Gwent	157	137
North Wales	341	207
South Wales	361	254

Source:

Figures provided by Research Development Statistics Directorate.

The Government are committed to increasing the size of the Special Constabulary and is working on a number of options designed to achieve this. These include improvements to the recruitment, training, conditions, management and deployment of specials—focusing their role on intelligence-led, high visibility patrolling and local crime reduction initiatives.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made for mothers who are in prison to have regular access to their children. [43540]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service provides the necessary facilities for mothers in prison to ensure that they can sustain a relationship with their children, including regular access. Many of these facilities are available to both male and female prisoners, but have a particular benefit to those that are mothers.

On their initial reception at an establishment, women are given a phonecard at the prison's expense or a free telephone call so that they can immediately let their families know their whereabouts. Subsequently they are allowed to purchase phonecards from the prison shop to maintain that contact. Every woman is able to send a free letter on arrival at an establishment and subsequently is allowed to send a letter at the prison's expense every two weeks. Prison staff can assist prisoners in dealing with these letters.

Visits and family contact are encouraged and every effort is made to emphasise the role that can be played by the prisoner in parenting and sharing the responsibility for the family in general. Governors often provide extra facilities for children's visits and, where resources allow, find new ways in which they can assist prisoners to maintain links with their families. For example, where staffing resources permit, some establishments hold family days where children can visit their mothers for a whole day, share meals and participate in other structured activities for families, for example in the gymnasium or education areas.

In certain cases, families may apply for financial assistance to visit their relatives in prison through the services offered by the Assisted Prison Visits Unit.

Prisoners are also enabled to maintain family ties through Release on Temporary Licence. Prisoners may be released on resettlement licence once they have served the requisite period of their sentence and passed a risk assessment. Resettlement leave is usually overnight and can be of up to five days' duration plus travelling time. Prisoners can also be released on compassionate licence. For example, a mother may be granted a compassionate licence to visit her child if the child is unable to visit her.

Mothers are allowed to have their babies with them in prison and at present, there are 64 places spread between four prisons in specialist Mother and Baby Units. There are plans for four more units. The purpose of a Mother and Baby Unit is to enable the mother/baby relationship to develop while safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare. There is an established procedure of admissions boards, assessment and review, involving outside experts. Throughout the whole process the best interests of the child is the guiding principle.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners *(a)* have committed suicide in the last year and *(b)* are on suicide watch. [43538]

Beverley Hughes: In the year 2001 there were a total of six self-inflicted deaths by women.

Her Majesty's Prison Service does not collect data specifically on "suicide watch". If a prisoner is considered at risk of suicide or any form of self-injury a form called an F2052SH is opened. This form initiates a sequence of events to make sure the inmate is cared for. This includes ensuring the prisoner is engaged in conversation at regular intervals, and holding individual case reviews in consultation with health care and other staff. The form remains open until the prisoner appears to coping satisfactorily.

The table shows the total number of F2052SH forms raised in 2001 for female prisoners and the length of time the form was open.

	Number
Under 1 week	1,876
1 to 2 weeks	1,092
2 to 4 weeks	837
Over 4 weeks	912
Total	4,717

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of women prisoners were diagnosed with mental health problems in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what provision is made available for mental healthcare in women's prisons. [43556]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not available in the form requested. A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, was undertaken by the Office for National Statistics in 1997. Some 96 per cent. of remanded and 90 per cent. of sentenced women prisoners showed evidence of at least one of the

five mental disorders considered in the survey (personality disorder, psychosis, neurosis, alcohol misuse and drug dependence).

Women prisoners needing in-patient treatment for mental disorder may be transferred to psychiatric hospitals. The care and treatment of prisoners with mental health problems is shared between the Prison Service and the national health service (NHS). Our plans for improving mental health services for prisoners, including the development of NHS in-reach services in the 70 or so prisons with the greatest mental health need, were set out in "Changing the Outlook. A Strategy for Developing and Modernising Mental Health Services in Prisons", which was published in December 2001. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library. The text of the document is also available on the prison health section of the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/prisonhealth. Since the strategy document was published it has been announced that NHS in-reach services will be established in 25 more prisons, including three for women, during 2002–03.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the female population is in prison *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other EU countries. [43537]

Beverley Hughes: The female prison population in England and Wales on 31 January 2002 was 4,056. This was 0.019 per cent. of the general female population aged 15 and over in England and Wales (21.9 Million). Data for Scotland and Northern Ireland are not held centrally.

The female prison and general population data for other European Union (EU) countries is given for the latest available dates.

	General female population aged 15 and over	*Female prison population*	*Percentage*
Ireland	1,906,000	91	0.005
Finland	2,649,000	143	0.005
France	29,725,000	1,670	0.006
Denmark	2,679,000	164	0.006
Sweden	4,482,000	290	0.006
Belgium	5,233,000	356	0.007
Italy	29,389,000	2,246	0.008
Greece	5,324,000	425	0.008
Germany	41,531,000	3,570	0.009
Luxembourg	218,000	20	0.009
Norway	1,588,000	148	0.009
Austria	4,104,000	407	0.010
Netherlands	7,884,000	803	0.010
Spain	20,124,000	4,066	0.020
Portugal	5,185,000	1,097	0.021

Data on the female population of EU countries are taken from the EU Labour force survey 2000. Data for the female prison population of EU countries are taken from the world prison population list produced by Kings College London.

Dangerous Weapons

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there were for possession of dangerous weapons in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [43416]

Beverley Hughes: The available information for 1999 and 2000 is contained in the table and relates to convictions for offences of possession of offensive weapons, knives, firearms or explosives.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Persons convicted[1] at all courts of offences of possession of dangerous weapons, England and Wales 1999 and 2000

Offence description	*Statute*	*Persons convicted* 1999	2000[2]
(See footnote (3) for definition of Firearm Groups)			
Possession etc. of explosives with intent to endanger life	Explosives Substances Act 1883, section 3 (in part)	—	—
Possession of firearms etc., with intent to endanger life (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968. Section 16 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(2)	87	60
Possession of firearms etc. with intent to endanger life (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968, section 16 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972 section 28(2)	2	1
Possession of firearms etc. with intent to endanger life (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 16 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972 section 28(2)	11	3
Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse	Prevention of Crime Act 1953, section 1	4,123	4,064
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in schedule 1 of the Act (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968, section 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	36	49
Possessing firearm or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in schedule 1 of the Act (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968, section 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	2	1
Possessing firearm or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in schedule 1 of the Act (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	3	3

Persons convicted[1] at all courts of offences of possession of dangerous weapons, England and Wales 1999 and 2000

Offence description	*Statute*	*Persons convicted* 1999	2000[2]
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence or resist arrest etc. (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968, section 18(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	55	65
Possessing firearm or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc. (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968, section 18(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	—	—
Possessing firearm or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc. (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 18(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, section 28(3)	2	4
Possession of a firearm or imitation firearm, with intent to cause fear of violence (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968, section 16A. (As amended by Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994)	218	279
Possession of a firearm or imitation firearm, with intent to cause fear of violence (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968, section 16A. (As amended by Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994)	12	1
Possession of a firearm or imitation firearm, with intent to cause fear of violence (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968, section 16A. (As amended by Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994)	35	20
Having an article with a blade or point in a public place	Criminal Justice Act 1988 section 139	3,832	3,487
Having an article with a blade or point on school premises	Criminal Justice Act 1988 section 139 A(1) as added by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 section 4(1)	16	44
Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse on school premises	Criminal Justice Act 1988 section 139(2) as added by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 section 4(1)	20	11
Possessing etc. firearms or ammunition without firearm certificate (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 1(1)(Group I) as amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157, schedule 8 part III	264	216
Possessing etc. shotgun without certificate (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 2(1)(Group II) as amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	107	94
Possessing or distributing prohibited weapons or ammunition (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 5(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	812	721
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 19 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	63	49
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 19 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	21	17
Trespassing with firearm or imitation firearm in a building (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	3	1
Trespassing with firearm or imitation firearm in a building (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	—	—
Possession of firearms by persons previously convicted of crime (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 21(4) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	79	66
Possession of firearms by persons previously convicted of crime (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 21(4) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	12	15
Possession of firearms by persons previously convicted of crime (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 21(4) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157 schedule 8 part III	47	36
Carrying loaded firearm in public place etc. (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 19	176	170
Trespassing with firearm in a building (Group III	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(1)	—	3

Persons convicted[1] at all courts of offences of possession of dangerous weapons, England and Wales 1999 and 2000

Offence description	*Statute*	*Persons convicted 1999*	*2000[2]*
Trespassing with firearm on land, (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(2)	13	12
Trespassing with firearm on land, (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(2)	3	—
Trespassing with firearm on land, (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 20(2)	23	18
Person under 14 having firearm in his possession, without lawful authority, (Group I)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(2)	1	—
Person under 15 having with him a shot gun without adult supervision, (Group II)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(3)	—	—
Person under 14 having with him an air weapon or ammunition therefor (Group III)	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(4)	12	16
Person under 17 having with him an air weapon in a public place	Firearms Act 1968 section 22(5)	54	52
Total all offences		9,844	9,578

[1] Figures provided are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.
[3] For the purposes of recording offences, firearms are divided into the following three groups:
Group I—All firearms etc. other than those described in Group II and III.
Group II-Shot guns as defined in section 1(3)(1) of the Act.
Group III—Air weapons as defined in section 1(3)(b) of the Act.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of staff in his Department are members of the territorial forces; and if he has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the territorial forces. [44075]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not held centrally.

Staff in the Home Office (including the Prison Service) who are members of, or who intend to join, the reserve forces are granted up to eight days special leave for the purpose.

The Home Office is the lead Government Department for the active community initiative. Staff can take paid leave for volunteering in certain public capacities (e.g. school governors up to six days, magistrates up to 18 days). Staff can also take up to five days paid leave a year for any other voluntary activity.

A Volunteering Manager has recently been appointed, seconded from the voluntary sector, actively to promote volunteering among Home Office staff, ensure that a wide range of opportunities is available, monitor participation and evaluate the benefits to the individual and the Department.

Road Traffic Penalties

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to bring forward proposals arising from the road traffic penalties review. [43859]

Mr. Denham: We are currently in the process of formulating the Government's response to the consultation exercise on road traffic penalties. We hope to publish this soon.

This report has taken some time to complete due to the high number of responses we received. We have also been waiting for the outcome of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions commissioned research project into the law on dangerous driving by the Transport Research Laboratory. The publication of this report was delayed until January 2002 and we are now considering its findings.

Sonja Ojerholm

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the case of the appeal lodged by Sonja Ojerholm against the refusal of permanent settlement in the UK, he will state the date on which the first copy of the appeal papers was dispatched by the British Consulate General in Los Angeles and received by his Department, the date on which the second copy of the appeal papers was dispatched by the British Consulate and received by his Department and the date his Department submitted the explanatory statement to the Appellate Authority. [44231]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The appeal papers were first dispatched by the British Consulate in Los Angeles on 7 September 2001. These papers were received by the Home Office on 6 November 2001, but were misfiled. A second copy of the appeal papers was faxed by the British Consulate on 14 January 2002. The case is now awaiting the production of an explanatory statement.

Prison Officers

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he defines prison officers as members of the emergency services. [44422]

Beverley Hughes: The prison service is defined as a discipline service, not an emergency service. Emergency service status is reserved for those services available to respond to emergency 999 calls.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what London allowance is paid to prison officers working at London prisons. [44623]

Beverley Hughes: London allowance is paid by way of a local pay allowance to all Prison Service staff at sites in London and around the south-east. The annual rates payable from 1 January 2002 at the following sites are:

£3,500 rate—Brixton, Wandsworth, Holloway, Pentonville, Wormwood Scrubs, Feltham, Huntercombe, Headquarters Westminster.

£2,300 rate—Belmarsh, Latchmere House, Downview, Highdown, Send, The Mount, Coldingley, Aylesbury, Headquarters Croydon.

£1,000 rate—Reading, Woodhill, Bullingdon, Grendon/Spring Hill, Chelmsford, Bullwood Hall and Bedford.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* plans he has and *(b)* funding has been allocated for the refurbishment and rebuilding of E Wing at Wandsworth prison. [44634]

Beverley Hughes: E wing at Wandsworth prison is included in the Prison Service's Safer Cell Programme and the work on site was funded and planned to start this September. Owing to population pressures at the prison, and across the penal estate, this work is to be held in abeyance temporarily to enable E wing to remain in use. There is, however, to be no reduction on the focus of Wandsworth prison as one of the five safer local pilot sites. A re-ordering of the overall programme will result in work being carried out on reception first, then on health care with the work to E Wing following later. Should the population pressures still be such that the capital work in E Wing cannot go forward, some safer custody initiatives will still be undertaken.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total prison budget is for Wandsworth prison in the current year; and what total allocated funding has been made available to the prison in each of the last five years. [44632]

Beverley Hughes: The present budget for Wandsworth prison for the financial year 2001–02, which is expressed in resource accounting terms, is for £24.184 million resource and £0.204 million capital spending within Departmental Expenditure Limits.

The final budgets for the previous five years, which were allocated as cash budgets, were:

£ million

	Current	*Capital*	*Total*
1996–97	18.850	0.165	19.015
1997–98	19.984	0.339	20.323
1998–99	21.627	0.194	21.821
1999–2000	22.397	0.294	22.691
2000–01	22.434	0.113	22.547

The capital budgets do not include major capital investment projects undertaken during this period for the refurbishment or replacement of existing facilities, which have been funded through the central building programme.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there are for prison officers in Wandsworth Prison; and if he will make a statement. [44631]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1223W.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what arrangements have been made for local authorities to be compensated for additional costs incurred as a result of the announcement of possible sites for accommodation centres; [44573]

(2) what additional resources are given to local authorities to meet additional calls on their services resulting from the presence of asylum seekers. [44572]

Angela Eagle: We expect that, nationally, accommodation centres will reduce the burden on local authorities due to the range of facilities provided on site. This includes education for children and adults, and primary healthcare facilities. We will, however, take funding considerations into account as we continue to develop our policy.

Driving Offences

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years for offences of causing *(a)* dangerous and *(b)* careless driving on motorways. [44653]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* Information on prosecutions collected centrally does not distinguish the classification of road on which the offence took place.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44850]

Angela Eagle: Central records of the occurrences or cost of criminal damage to the Home Office buildings are not kept and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44871]

Angela Eagle: The Department provides 146 nursery places for children under the age of five years. These places are available to Home Office staff (including the agencies) at a variety of locations. In addition to these facilities the Forensic Science Service runs a Childcare Support Scheme which provides staff with the opportunity to receive a contribution towards professional child care.

In addition around 1,250 days of school holiday provision are provided throughout the Department in the form of play schemes for children aged between five and 12 years.

These arrangements involve a subsidy to the parent of up to 50 per cent. of the contractual running costs depending on local circumstances. The cost to the Department for providing these facilities is approximately £435,000 per year, depending on take up of the places available.

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1223W, on the design champion, which two projects within the Department's remit the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), sponsored in her role as the Department's design champion. [45006]

Angela Eagle: Officials are currently working on an action plan to deliver the Home Office commitment to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative. Selection of projects to sponsor is a matter currently under consideration, and I will make these known in the very near future.

Irish Terrorist Murders

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in the police investigations into the murders of *(a)* Airey Neave MP and *(b)* Ian Gow MP. [44331]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The investigation into any crime is, in the first instance a matter for the Chief Constable/Commissioner of the force concerned. I understand, however, that up to now there has been no firm evidence to establish responsibility for these murders. Should any new information or intelligence be received then this will be investigated immediately.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date his Department sent to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs correspondence from the hon. Member for Aylesbury dated 6 September 2001 (ref. PO 17699/1). [45142]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Departmental records show that this correspondence was sent to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for a reply on 10 October 2001.

West Mercia Police

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new recruits to West Mercia police transferred from other police forces in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [48292]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information has been provided by the Chief Constable and is for each calendar year.

Year[1]	*Number of transfers from other police forces*
1998	2
1999	0
2000	24
2001	52

[1] Figures are for period 1 January to 31 December.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Business

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the sources of regulations that affect small business. [36972]

Nigel Griffiths: United Kingdom, European Union and local government legislation are the main sources of regulation that affect small business. There are also a significant number of regulations that come from outside Government, for example from professional bodies and institutions.

Motor Sport

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what support the Government are giving to the motor sport industry in the current financial year; and if she will make a statement; [44775]

(2) which individuals in the UK motor sport industry have had discussions with her Department about possible Government financial assistance; [44785]

(3) on what grounds the UK motor sport industry qualifies for Government assistance; and if she will make a statement; [44774]

(4) what financial assistance has been provided to the UK motor sport industry in each of the last 20 years. [44786]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has been involved in discussions with the Motorsport Industry Association, several Regional Development Agencies and industry on an industry-led performance engineering and motorsport strategy.

The group is examining plans to develop a motorsport and performance engineering cluster development programme, based on organising business networking and education and skills events and activities.

There has been no direct funding of the motorsport industry in this financial year or in previous years. Companies in the motorsport industry (which primarily comprises a range of niche engineering SMEs) are subject to the same criteria as companies in other sectors to qualify for any form of Government support.

MOX Fuel

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what type of processing BNFL plans to undertake on the faulty MOX fuel supplied to Japan. [45470]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The fuel will be placed in a storage pond at Sellafield. BNFL has yet to decide finally what to do with the fuel. Whatever it decides will be in accordance with all necessary regulatory approvals.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure that there are no additional transports of radioactive material to Sellafield before October 2002, with particular reference to the return of the faulty MOX fuel which BNFL supplied to Japan. [45471]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* No. It is a matter of public knowledge that there will continue to be routine transports to Sellafield of spent fuel from Europe in fulfilment of existing reprocessing contracts and also that BNFL aims to return to Sellafield the MOX fuel currently at Takahama in Japan as soon as practicable—possibly during the course of this year. The Government has made this position clear both to the Irish Government and to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea. These transports do not take place as a consequence of the commissioning and operation of the Sellafield MOX Plant.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the necessary domestic regulatory approvals are which British Nuclear Fuels must obtain before it can return the MOX fuel it has supplied to Japan in respect of which data had been falsified; and whether these approvals have been granted. [45469]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* BNFL must obtain the approval of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions for the shipment and the transport package in which the fuel will be transported; the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate must be satisfied with the safety of BNFL's arrangements for the receipt, handling and storage of the fuel on the Sellafield site. BNFL has satisfied these requirements. The Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS) must approve the arrangements for the security of the fuel in transport and its security once received at Sellafield. OCNS has approved the security arrangements for the fuel once received at the Sellafield site. The arrangements for the security of the fuel in transport are subject to ongoing consultation between BNFL and OCNS and transport will not commence until OCNS has granted formal regulatory approval for all of the detailed security plans.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent report she has received in respect of the state of *(a)* concrete and *(b)* steel structures at the reactor at Sellafield where the fire took place in 1957. [47036]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not received any recent reports about the concrete or steel structures in Windscale Pile One.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response she has received from the Atomic Energy Authority, regarding the review which has been undertaken in respect of the reactor at Sellafield where the fire took place in 1957. [47035]

Mr. Wilson: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has initiated a comprehensive technical review of the second stage decommissioning of Windscale Pile One. This review is on-going, and is likely to take several years to complete. UKAEA and the regulator, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the HSE, will need to be satisfied with the final proposal for decommissioning before the project progresses and will ensure the reactor remains in a safe and stable condition throughout.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what efforts have been made towards establishing a decommissioning strategy for the reactor known as Pile 2 reactor at Sellafield. [47034]

Mr. Wilson: All the fuel was removed from the Windscale Pile Two reactor soon after it was shut down in 1957. Since then it has been maintained in a safe and passive state of care and maintenance, pending decommissioning and dismantling at a later stage.

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is currently discussing a strategy for the future management of Pile Two with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the HSE. The current plan is to decommission and dismantle the reactor in 2040–50.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will establish a liabilities management agency to manage the closing down and decommissioning of old nuclear power stations. [47045]

Mr. Wilson: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 990, the establishment of the liabilities management authority (LMA) will require primary legislation. A Bill will be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Nuclear Safety

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ask Her Majesty's Chief Nuclear Inspector to review the adequacy of the nuclear installations inspectorate's safety assessment principles numbers 126 and 127 in respect of aircraft crashes. [46197]

Mr. Wilson: No. HSE keeps its safety assessment principles for nuclear plants under review as a matter of course. These principles provide a robust framework for regulatory decisions by the HSE's nuclear installations inspectorate (NII). NII's regulatory assessments also take into account current relevant knowledge.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent funding her Department has provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency's programme to combat nuclear terrorism and protect nuclear materials; what additional resources have been made available to strengthen physical protection measures at United Kingdom nuclear facilities since 11 September 2001; and if she will make a statement on the work done by the International Physical Protection Advisory Service. [46196]

Mr. Wilson: On 18 March 2002, the UK Governor announced at the IAEA Board of Governors meeting a £250,000 voluntary contribution to the IAEA's Protection Against Nuclear Terrorism fund.

No additional resources have been made available to the UK nuclear industry to strengthen physical protection measures at civil nuclear sites since 11 September 2001. Costs for security are met by the site licensees.

The IAEA's International Physical Protection Advisory Service (IPPAS) provides member states with advice on their legal and regulatory infrastructure and the implementation of physical protection arrangements. At the request of an IAEA member state, the IAEA convenes an international team of specialists experienced in the physical protection of nuclear material to review the requesting member state's physical protection system and compare it to international guidelines and internationally recognised best practices. Based on this review, the team provides the member state, in confidence, with recommendations for improvements and recognises current good practices already instituted by that State. IPPAS missions have been conducted in eastern/central Europe, Africa, South America and SE Asia. The UK has led three of these missions and participated in a number of others.

Vickers OMC

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers the Government have to prevent Vickers Defence Systems' South African subsidiary Vickers OMC from entering into a joint venture with Indian company Tata Engineering to produce Casspir armoured personnel carriers in India. [40285]

Mr. Wilson: The Casspir mine protected vehicle is a product of Vickers OMC of South Africa. Any proposed joint venture to produce the vehicle in India is a matter for the South African and Indian Governments.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the written parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Banbury of 27 February on Vickers Defence Systems' South African subsidiary. [46646]

Mr. Wilson: I have replied today.

Cluster Munitions

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what end-use documentation was provided with the export licence application from Hunting Engineering for the export of the BL755 cluster munitions (Batch No. 82529); and if she will make a statement on discussions her Department has had with the manufacturer and the Government in the original country of destination regarding the *(a)* diversion and *(b)* re-export of the original transfer to Ethiopia. [46149]

Nigel Griffiths: Information on end use documentation provided in support of an export licence application is confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part 2, Sections 1, 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Department of Trade & Industry's Export Control Organisation maintains regular contact with exporters on a range of export control issues. Discussions with individual exporters on such issues are confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part 2, Sections 1, 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

No discussions with overseas Governments have as yet taken place with regard to their possible re-export of this particular item, since it is not yet clear whether any country might have re-exported these items to Ethiopia.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what export licences were granted between 1972 and 1989 for the export of BL755 cluster munitions (Batch No. 62529); and if she will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes, and *(c)* final end-use destination; [46154]

(2) what export licences were granted between 1972 and 1989 for the export of cluster munitions; and if she will provide *(a)* the number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes and *(c)* final end-use destination; [46159]

(3) what export licences were granted for the export of BL755 cluster munitions to Ethiopia between 1972 and 1989; and if she will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes and *(c)* final end-use destination; [46151]

(4) what export licences were granted for the export of BL755 cluster munitions to Israel between 1972 and 1989; and if she will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes and *(c)* final end-use destination; [46153]

(5) what export licences were granted between 1972 and 1989 for the export of BL755 cluster munitions; and if she will provide the *(a)* number of cluster munitions exported, *(b)* category codes and *(c)* final end-use destination. [46152]

Nigel Griffiths: Previous administrations have not considered it appropriate to publish information on individual licensing decisions. This information is not held centrally, and a manual search of all the case files would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if an export licence is required for the refurbishment, and subsequent re-export, of cluster munitions. [46253]

Nigel Griffiths: An export licence is required from the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation to export cluster munitions, controlled under entries ML3 and ML4 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended, from the UK.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will describe the end-use procedures in place to monitor and prevent the re-export and proliferation of British supplied cluster munitions. [46158]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

There are no end-use controls applied specifically to exports of this equipment. Our overseas posts have standing instructions to report on allegations of misuse of any UK-origin defence equipment to take into account in the licensing process. We focus our efforts on assessment of potential end-use at the export licensing stage. Carrying out effective risk assessment on end-users before making the export licensing decision is the surest way to prevent UK arms falling into the wrong hands. We will not issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the equipment for export could be used for internal repression or international aggression, or where there is an unacceptable risk of diversion to an undesirable end-user.

In determining whether any such risk exists, we take into account all reliable information on proposed end-use and end-users of potential concern, including reporting from our overseas posts, other countries and non-governmental organisations. We are pursuing improved information sharing with like-minded countries through the EU and the Wassenaar Arrangement.

The Government remain committed to carrying out end-use monitoring in those circumstances where this will genuinely add value to our efforts to minimise the risk of misuse and diversion and where such monitoring is practicable. The Government have the legal power to revoke export licences in the event of substantive misuse or diversion.

Administration Procedure

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in how many cases the administration procedure was initiated by *(a)* company directors and *(b)* creditors in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001. [44997]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* This information is not available. Administration is an insolvency procedure which is initiated by the presentation of a petition to court. The requirements for information regarding the company's financial affairs and prospects in support of such a petition mean that very few are presented other than by the company concerned.

Broadband

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance is being received from the EU in pursuit of expanded broadband access in the UK. [45312]

Mr. Alexander: The Lisbon Summit on Economic Reform in 2000 launched work on the eEurope Action Plan, which reprioritises all EU and national policies, assistance and support, in order to help increase access to the internet. The European Council meeting in Barcelona on 15–16 March concluded that the next phase of the eEurope strategy should give priority to the widespread availability of broadband networks throughout the EU. The ways in which the EU and the member states can support and assist this objective in the period to 2005 will be set out in a new eEurope Action Plan, to be presented to the Seville European Council in June.

The following websites of the European Commission set out the activities covered by the eEurope Action Plan, and list sources of EU assistance for information and communications technology:

http://www.europa.eu.int/informationsociety/eeurope/indexen.htm

http://europa.eu.int/informationsociety/programmes/indexen.htm

World Bank

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the consequences for British international investors of the decision of the World Bank's Ad Hoc Committee to uphold the arbitration award of the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes in favour of WENA Hotels against the Government of Egypt; and if she will make a statement. [39722]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on Tuesday 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 869W.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings *(a)* she and *(b)* her officials attended, and which meetings are scheduled, for discussion of GATS. [48618]

Ms Hewitt: My ministerial colleagues and I and my officials regularly meet with a wide range of organisations (NGOs, trade unions, business, academics, the European Commission, other EU member states, other WTO Members, intergovernmental organisations and others) at which the current World Trade Organisation negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services are often discussed.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what services the United Kingdom *(a)* as part of the European Union and *(b)* unilaterally will be requesting from other states under the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services. [47564]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom negotiates in the World Trade Organisation as part of the European Union. Liberalisation requests are still being formulated. The EU's broad objectives are set out in negotiating proposals already tabled in the WTO and available publicly.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the commitments already made under the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services. [47418]

Ms Hewitt: Commitments already made by WTO members under the General Agreement on Trade in Services generally reflect, or are less than, the existing levels of market access prevailing at the time of the conclusion of the Uruguay Round. The United Kingdom maintains very few restrictions in its GATS schedule of commitments.

The full range of GATS commitments can be found on the WTO website at www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/serv_commitments_e.htm.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she estimates the full implementation of the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services will affect public services in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [47417]

Ms Hewitt: The General Agreement on Trade in Services permits World Trade Organisation members to define and maintain their own public services, and does not require them to make liberalising commitments where they choose not to.

Miners' Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if an asset liability study has been carried out by *(a)* the Mineworkers Pension Schemes and *(b)* the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme. [48301]

Mr. Wilson: Yes. The Trustees of both schemes commissioned asset and liability modelling studies last year.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W, on miners' compensation, what performance and quality targets are given to Healthcall to secure delivery of accurate reports within acceptable time scales. [48035]

Mr. Wilson: Healthcall should provide a fit for purpose report within 28 days of an assessment.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she will ensure that claims for special damages from mineworkers suffering from vibration white finger are settled rapidly. [47972]

Mr. Wilson: The main outstanding issue concerns claims for "services" which compensates those who need additional assistance in carrying out household tasks. The pilot to progress these claims has been completed and the Department is currently working closely with the claimants' solicitors in reviewing the results. All parties concerned are interested in settling claims as soon as possible.

Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how existing multilateral environmental agreements will be incorporated into the new trade round. [48621]

Ms Hewitt: Under paragraph 31 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, WTO Members agree to negotiations on the relationship between existing WTO rules and specific trade obligations set out in multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and to procedures for regular information exchange between MEA Secretariats and the relevant WTO Committees. These negotiations will take place in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment meeting in special session.

The EU tabled a paper exploring this important issue at the first meeting of the Committee on Trade and Environment since Doha several weeks ago. This will shortly be available on the WTO website at www.wto.org

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings she has had with *(a)* DEFRA and *(b)* the Sustainable Development Commission to discuss the impact of multilateral environmental agreements on current trade negotiations. [48620]

Ms Hewitt: I liaised closely with the Minister of State for Environment on this issue during the fourth Ministerial meeting in Doha last November and my Department works very closely with all interested Departments, particularly DEFRA on the relationship between multilateral environmental agreements and World Trade Organisation Rules. I have not discussed this particular issue with the Sustainable Development Commission.

European Directives

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many European regulations and directives affecting businesses were implemented in the last calendar year; and what assessment she has made of what the total cost of their implementation was on business. [45317]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department was responsible for 92 regulations introduced in the calendar year from 1 March 2001. Of these regulations 71 imposed negligible or no costs on business and 11 have saved costs.

Records relating to the origin of regulations are not held centrally. The information requested could be obtained and collated only at disproportionate cost.

All Government Departments and agencies are required to produce regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for proposed regulations that could impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector. This is the case for legislation emanating from Europe. Copies of all RIAs are published and are available from the Libraries of the House.

Export Credit Assistance

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is possible for companies receiving ECGD assistance for their involvement in a project, to subcontract work to other companies without affecting their agreement with the ECGD. [44619]

Ms Hewitt: Yes, companies in receipt of ECGD support are free to subcontract work to others, but under the terms of that support they must remain responsible for the overall performance of the contract, and for any failures by their subcontractors. This responsibility includes ensuring compliance with any environmental, social, financial, or other covenants and pre-conditions specified by ECGD.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list by name and location the fossil fuel power projects that the ECGD has approved for support, but which have not yet been built. [44621]

Ms Hewitt: There are seven cases that ECGD has supported which are still under construction. These projects are as follows:

Project name	*Country*	*Fuel type*
Shandong	China	Coal
Manjung	Malaysia	Coal
Afsin-Elbistan	Turkey	Coal
Nantong	China	Coal
Blackpoint	Hong Kong	Gas
Ghubrah	Oman	Oil
San Pedro	Dominican Republic	Oil

In addition, ECGD has provided Overseas Investment Insurance support for one case which is under construction but details are commercial in confidence.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which UK companies have received ECGD services since 1997 for contracts involving fossil fuel power transmission in the energy sector, in *(a)* Thailand and *(b)* the Philippines; and what projects are involved. [44618]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has not supported any export contracts involving fossil fuel power transmission since 1997 in Thailand and the Philippines. However, support was provided for an overseas investment insurance case, which is not disclosed, since such cases are treated as commercial in confidence.

Urban Post Office Network

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department lodged an application with the European Commission for permission to use state aid to subsidise the urban post office network. [44712]

Mr. Alexander: A notification was made to the European Commission on 27 March relating to the proposed programme of reinvention of the urban post office network.

Postal Charges

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what annual revenue would accrue from a one pence increase in the price of *(a)* first and *(b)* second class stamps; if Consignia plans to increase postal charges; and if she will make a statement. [45959]

Mr. Alexander: Increases in the prices of first and second class stamps require the approval of Postcomm. The company estimates that an increase of one pence on both first and second class stamps would generate additional income of £170 million over the financial year.

Postal Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she had made of the costs and benefits of Postcomm's proposals to bring in market opening in postal services in advance of other EU member states. [47580]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) on 26 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 803W.

Bank Holidays

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she next intends to review the pattern of bank holidays in England and Wales. [47128]

Alan Johnson: There are no current plans to review the existing bank holiday arrangements.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will maintain 2002 arrangements under which the spring bank holiday falls on the first Monday in June for future years. [47127]

Alan Johnson: Changes that were made to existing bank holiday arrangements in 2002 as part of the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations will not be maintained in future years and the spring bank holiday will revert to the last Monday in May in 2003.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications for the length of school terms when deciding bank holiday dates. [47176]

Alan Johnson: The timing of school terms is the responsibility of local education authorities, who were consulted on the one-off bank holiday arrangements for the forthcoming Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Supermarket Competition

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list recommendations received from the Meat and Livestock Commission and other bodies designed to improve competition in the supermarket sector, stating for each *(a)* from whom received and when and *(b)* what action is (i) planned and (ii) in place to implement such recommendations. [48270]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry has not received any such recommendations. However, evidence from the Meat and Livestock Commission and a number of other bodies was considered by the Competition Commission in their investigation into the supply of groceries from supermarkets. Views of interested parties are listed primarily in Chapters 14 and 15 of the Commission's report "Supermarkets: A report on the supply of groceries from multiple stores in the United Kingdom", Cm 4842, published October 2000).

Doha

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement in respect of UK involvement in the follow up to Doha. [48619]

Ms Hewitt: We are working hard to implement all of our commitments in respect of the Doha Ministerial Declaration together with our European partners and other WTO members.

ADSL Lines

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the *(a)* provision of ADSL lines in Wales and *(b)* future development of that provision. [47614]

Mr. Alexander: ADSL is not the only technology for the delivery of broadband, and a map showing availability of broadband including cable modem services is contained

in the UK Online annual report (December 2001) and has been placed in the Libraries of the House. I have recently challenged BT to extend ADSL coverage within the United Kingdom.

Social Chapter

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the total cost to business of the Social Chapter since it was implemented; and if she will make a statement. [46853]

Alan Johnson: European directives adopted as a result of the Social Chapter for which my Department is responsible are parental leave, part-time work, the European works councils, the fixed term contract, information and consultation of employees and the working time (excluded sectors) directives. The directive on the burden of proof in sex discrimination is the responsibility of the Women and Equality Unit at Cabinet Office.

I refer the hon. Member to answer given on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 807–809, which gave the costs of the regulations implementing the parental leave, part-time work and the European works councils directives.

The fixed term contract, information and consultation of employees and the working time (excluded sectors) directives have not yet been implemented. Estimated costs for the fixed term contract directive are to be found in the consultation document URN 02/547 published in January 2002 and estimated costs for the Information and Consultation of Employees were attached to the Explanatory Memorandum 13099–98 of 15 January 1999. Both documents are in the Library of the House. A regulatory impact assessment for the working time directive (excluded sectors) will be prepared prior to going out to consultation on the implementing regulations next year.

The regulatory impact assessment to the burden of proof directive in Sex Discrimination (Council Directive 97/80/EC) is also available in the Libraries of the House.

Dog and Cat Fur

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to European Commissioner Byrne regarding his proposed ban on the import into the EU of domestic dog and cat fur; and if she will make a statement. [48170]

Ms Hewitt: The Commission, like the UK Government are aware of some concerns on animal welfare grounds of the import into the EU of domestic cat and dog fur. We understand there are presently no Commission proposals to ban these products. The UK Government, as my noble Friend the Minister for Trade said in a statement to the Lords and in a letter to all Members of Parliament last November, has undertaken to explore the current situation in the UK before considering the issue on the grounds of what is practical, proportionate and enforceable.

Wind Farm (Cefn Croes)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters her Department received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* opposing the decision on developing a wind farm site at Cefn Croes in Wales. [48595]

Mr. Wilson: Pursuant to the Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990, the Department received the following:

Letters of objection—257

Petitions against—586 signatures

Letters of support—106

Petitions for—215 signatures.

In addition to the above, over 750 letters of objection and three letters of support were received after the period allowed for pursuant to the regulations.

Polyester Film Products

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations have been made to the EU on the implications for UK jobs of dumping of polyester film products by Indian manufacturers. [48007]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has received no recent representations from UK industry on this matter, and have made no recent representations to the European Commission. European Community definitive anti-dumping measures were imposed on imports of polyester film from India on 24 August 2001.

Chapelcross Power Station

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the date of decommissioning of Chapelcross power station. [48009]

Mr. Wilson: I am advised by BNFL that closure of the Chapelcross nuclear power station is currently projected to take place between 2008 and 2010. It is anticipated that decommissioning will begin immediately thereafter.

Structural Funding

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions she has had with the European Commission about the Structural Funds after 2006; [47973]

(2) what her philosophy is on the underlying principles which will determine EU regional policy after 2006. [47974]

Alan Johnson: Although the debate on the future of European cohesion policy post 2006 has started, very few national governments have so far committed themselves to a particular position.

The next reform of the Structural Funds must ensure that they contribute better to the Lisbon agenda of improving Europe's competitiveness and modernising its economies. I believe that improvements are needed in both the effectiveness of the funds and the means to evaluate their impact and added value. Also, greater efforts must be made to simplify the funds and remove unnecessary bureaucracy, while maintaining proper financial control.'

While my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not attended any formal discussions with the European Commission on this issue, officials in the Department of Trade and Industry have participated in a number of relevant meetings and events including the Cohesion Forum organised by the

Commission in Brussels in May 2001. In addition, I attended the Namur Informal Council on Regional Policy in July of last year. In May of this year officials in the Department will participate in the Commission's seminars on the 10 priorities highlighted in the "Second Cohesion Report" in May.

Accounting Companies

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the extent of competition between accounting companies; and if she will refer to the competition authorities the five largest firms which operate in the United Kingdom. [48305]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under UK competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti competitive behaviour. The Director General is best placed to consider these issues.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the average figures for European unleaded petrol in each country of the EU in price per litre, with the amount of tax paid and the percentage of tax this represents. [45814]

Mr. Wilson: The latest available information for unleaded petrol prices and taxes is for December 2001 and is shown in the table.

European unleaded petrol prices
Prices as at mid-December 2001

Pence per litre[1]

	Pump price	*Amount of tax*	*Tax component per cent.*
Austria	56.19	41.19	73
Belgium	61.61	45.38	74
Denmark	58.18	44.79	77
Finland	41.35	24.88	60
France	45.36	29.29	65
Germany	58.75	45.20	77
Greece	49.34	29.82	60
Ireland	61.33	43.81	71
Italy	43.82	27.76	63
Luxembourg	65.05	48.09	74
Netherlands	50.99	34.21	67
Portugal	56.58	26.15	46
Spain	63.93	46.22	72
Sweden	56.71	41.19	73
United Kingdom	69.27	56.14	81

[1] Prices converted to pounds sterling using mid-December exchange rates.
Source:
European Commission Oil Bulletin

Electronic Procurement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the result is of the scoping study for the delivery of electronic procurement. [47327]

Ms Hewitt: The scoping study took account of developments in the IT market and recommended some interim steps to be taken as part of developing a way forward on e-procurement within the Department. The Department is now involved in an e-procurement pilot with OGC which is due to conclude at the end of June.

Science Enterprise Challenge Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many spin-outs in the university sector have been created *(a)* since 1997–98 and *(b)* in 2001–02 by the Science Enterprise Challenge Scheme. [47348]

Ms Hewitt: The Science Enterprise Challenge was set up to establish a network of centres in UK universities, specialising in the teaching and practice of commercialisation and entrepreneurialism in the field of science and technology. The creation of spin-outs is not an explicit objective. However, in their first two years of operation (period ending September 2001), the centres established under the scheme have provided help and support with the development of over 400 credible business ideas. Over 80 have led to early stage businesses, including both spin-outs and start ups from individuals receiving training or advice from the centres.

University Activities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the pilot survey due to be conducted in the first quarter of 2001–02 on university exploitation activities. [47349]

Ms Hewitt: The survey is encouraging and shows that the higher education sector is increasing exploitation activities, resulting in more spin-off companies and a higher proportion of research income from business. Creating stronger links between universities and businesses is an important part of improving our economic performance while maintaining excellence in higher education. The results of the survey are informing the Cross-Cutting Review of Science and Research which is being carried out as part of the Spending Review.

Science Citation Index

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what change there has been in UK performance on the Science Citation Index since 1999. [47351]

Ms Hewitt: Data from the Science Citation Index are used as an indicator of the relative quality of the UK Science and Engineering Base in my Department's Public Sector Agreement. The latest calculations show that there has been no change since 1999. Fuller details will be published shortly in my Department's Expenditure Plans report.

Business Performance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how and by whom is a judgment reached on progress in UK business performance overseas. [47352]

Ms Hewitt: Engaging in international trade is an important element in improving business competitiveness and productivity.

My Department has an objective, shared with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to enhance the competitiveness of companies in the UK through overseas sales and investments. Information on performance against the PSA target supporting that objective is published annually in the Government Expenditure

Plans reports for my Department and British Trade International, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Power Cuts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many electricity power supply interruptions there were in 2001 per customer; and how many minutes per customer were lost in the same year. [47344]

Mr. Wilson: In 2000–01, there were 84 electricity supply interruptions per 100 customers. The number of minutes lost was 86 per 100 customers.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial electricity prices compared with the EU/97 median in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [47726]

Mr. Wilson: In 2000, average UK domestic electricity prices, including taxes, were 9.5 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median based upon data for 11 countries. On an excluding tax basis, the average price in the UK was 14.5 per cent. higher than the EU/G7 median, based upon data for 12 countries.

In 2000, the UK's price for industrial electricity including taxes, was 1.5 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median based upon data for eight countries. On an excluding tax basis, the price in the UK was 13 per cent. higher than the EU/G7 median, based upon data for nine countries.

Data for 2001 are not yet available from the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Gas Prices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial UK gas prices compared with the EU/97 median in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [47728]

Mr. Wilson: In 2000, average UK domestic gas prices, including taxes, were 16 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median, based upon data for 13 countries. On an excluding tax basis, the UK price was 2.5 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median, based upon data for 11 countries.

Average UK industrial gas prices in 2000, including taxes, were 38 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median, based upon data for nine countries. On an excluding tax basis, the price in the UK was 35 per cent. lower than the EU and G7 median based upon data for eight countries.

Data for 2001 are not yet available from the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Benchmarking

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the ranking of the United Kingdom is on the Department's International Benchmarking Study. [47346]

Ms Hewitt: The International Benchmarking Study 2001 was published in October 2001 and is available in the Libraries of the House. The 2002 study is being undertaken at the moment and will be published later this year. The 2001 study showed that the UK continues to be one of a 'leading' group of countries in the general use of e-commerce, along with the US, Canada and Germany. There is no single ranking figure used as the report contains many different facets of e-commerce uptake and development. However in 2001 there was an overall improvement in the UK's relative position against some key indicators—for example:

Connectivity: UK small and micro businesses now ranked third instead of fifth;

Trading Online: UK micros up to third from fifth

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the National Weights and Measures Laboratory's total overhead costs were at the end of December 2001 as a percentage of total costs. [47337]

Ms Hewitt: Overhead costs at NWML represent 54.7 per cent. of total costs for the period April to December 2001, against a target of less than 55 per cent.

Companies House

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage unit cost reduction was in real terms on document registration achieved by Companies House in 2000–01; and what she expects the reduction to be in 2001–02. [47340]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The percentage for 2000–01 was 7 per cent, as published in the Annual Report and Accounts.

The corresponding figure for 2001–02 will not be known until the accounts are prepared and audited.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage change was in the unit cost of investigating bankruptcy and compulsory liquidation at December 2001, by comparison with *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* December 1999. [47338]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The unit cost of case investigation at December 2001 had *(a)* decreased by 7.2 per cent. in comparison with December 2000 and *(b)* decreased by 19.5 per cent. in comparison with December 1999.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources was in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [47343]

Mr. Wilson: The percentage of electricity generated in the UK from all renewable sources in 2000 was 2.8 per cent. Detailed renewable energy statistics for 2001 are not yet available, but provisional figures show that large scale hydro schemes provided about 0.8 per cent. of electricity generation in 2001 compared with 1.2 per cent. in 2000. This was because of lower precipitation in Scotland

during the winter of 2000–01. However, it is expected that generation from other renewable sources will have increased in 2001.

Transport and Telecommunications Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Transport and Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 25–26 March; what the Government's stance was on issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [46923]

Mr. Alexander: The Deputy UK Permanent Representative to the European Union, Bill Stow, attended the Council on 25 March on my behalf.

There was a Presidency briefing, followed by an exchange of views, on the follow-up to the Barcelona European Council conclusions on the eEurope 2005 Action Plan. There was broad agreement on the importance of third generation mobile and digital television alongside computer-based internet access to deliver broadband services. A UK-led call to focus as much on content as infrastructure, creating demand for broadband services as well as the supply of networks, received the support of six member states. The Commission announced that they aim to have the eEurope 2005 Action Plan ready for the 17 June Telecommunications Council.

The council adopted general orientations on amendments to the existing decisions on electronic interchange of data between administrations (IDA), and the trans-European telecommunications networks (TEN) decision. The Presidency is now expected to pursue informal contacts with the European Parliament to try and secure first reading deals on both dossiers.

The council adopted a resolution on web accessibility, to encourage member states to implement the Web Accessibility Initiative's (WAI) guidelines in respect of public sector websites, aimed at making it easier for the EU's 37 Million elderly and disabled citizens to access the internet. Social and geographic digital exclusion are likely to feature prominently under the Greek Presidency the first half of 2003.

The commission gave a presentation on international governance of the internet, following which member states exchanged views on reform issues under consideration by ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers)—the private US corporation established to manage the internet domain name system. The council gave a mandate to COREPER to develop a common EU position to be fed into the EU-US Information Society Dialogue and the ongoing discussions of the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) to ICANN.

Final adoption of the regulation to establish the .eu internet top level domain was among the A points adopted by the council.

Trade Partners UK

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the work of Trade Partners UK in facilitating dialogue between the British Film Council and its counterparts in India. [48157]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK is in regular contact with the British Film Council, and is helping to develop contacts between the British Film Council and its counterparts in India. The Chief Executive of the British Film Council is a member of the Creative Export Group, one of the Creative Industry Advisory Groups run by Trade Partners UK and DCMS. Trade Partners UK helped to arrange the programme of the Chief Executive and senior colleagues from the British Film Council during their visit to India in March 2002, when they met leading representatives of the Indian film industry and the Indian Minister for Information and Broadcasting. Trade Partners UK is also involved in arranging the programme for an inward mission by top Bollywood producers to the UK in May 2002, in collaboration with the British Film Council and the Manchester Investment and Development Agency Service (MIDAS).

Energy Market

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to increase consumer protection in the energy market. [48162]

Mr. Wilson: Gas and electricity consumers are protected by general competition and consumer legislation, including the Doorstep Selling Regulations, which were enhanced in 1998, and the new Distance Selling Regulations, which were introduced in 2000. They are also protected by specific regulations, which are the responsibility of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM). In the Utilities Act 2000, OFGEM was given the principal objective of protecting the interests of consumers. The Act also established the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council (Energywatch) to represent the interests of consumers. OFGEM maintains licence conditions governing the sale and marketing of gas and electricity supply, and has recently given a commitment to extending these for a further two years. Where appropriate, OFGEM takes action against suppliers that breach these conditions. On 1 April, OFGEM introduced new Guaranteed Standards of Performance for gas transporters and electricity distributors.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with regard to the European Parliament's First Reading position of 13 March on the proposal for a directive amending Directives 96/92/EC and 98/30/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity and natural gas, if she will indicate, with particular regard to the interests of those consumers living in rural areas, the position that she will take in council on the Parliament's Amendment 42 that seeks to strengthen the terms of the universal service (Article 3(3), 96/92/EC). [47642]

Mr. Wilson: It is a Government priority to bring the benefits of market liberalisation to all consumers, including those living in rural areas. The Government will have this objective in mind when it takes a position on the proposal which the commission will submit to the council in the light of the European Parliament's amendments. Individual amendments are not voted on by the council; rather, the commission presents a revised text which includes those European Parliament amendments which it accepts. I note that Amendment 42 does not mention rural consumers, merely vulnerable consumers.

Regional Development Agencies

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the budget is for each of the regional development agencies in England; and what it is expressed as a percentage of total identifiable public expenditure in each English region. [46946]

Alan Johnson: The allocation of budgets for each regional development agencies for 2001–02 is as follows:

	£ million
One North East	162
North West	280
Yorkshire Forward	246
East Midlands	97
West Midlands	170
East of England	62
South East	110
South West	91
London	298

The percentage of total identifiable public expenditure in each English region is highlighted in Table 8.12 of the 'Public Expenditure, Statistical Analyses 2001–02' report.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W, on mobile phones, what stage has been reached in discussions between her Department and mobile phone manufacturers on how mobile phone handset security might be improved; and when she estimates such measures will be introduced. [46429]

Mr. Alexander: The manufacturers have responded positively to the joint request made by DTI and Home Office Ministers and are co-operating in a study of the current level of security and of plans for the future in this regard. The Home Office will publish this study that is expected to be completed shortly and consideration will then be given as to what action needs to be taken.

In the meantime, all the UK licensed cellular operators are co-operating to develop a shared register of stolen mobile handsets, which will be used to de-activate those handsets. I welcome this positive initiative by the mobile industry.

Trading Links (Baltic States)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department is giving to the promotion of trading links between Scotland and the Baltic states. [45767]

Nigel Griffiths: Businesses in Scotland can access British Trade International national schemes, such as the trade mission to all three Baltic countries in October 2002. BTI also works with Scottish Development International in highlighting export and investment potential through awareness-raising events, including an EU enlargement event to be held in Glenrothes on 25 April.

Scotland is an important trading partner for the Baltic states, with much interaction in the forestry sector. A new investment in Riga by a Scottish based timber-processing company, BSW, was inaugurated by the Prince of Wales last November.

Gender Pay Gap

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to commission data on the gender pay gap in Stevenage. [46299]

Alan Johnson: The Office for National Statistics publishes data on the gender pay gap in the New Earnings Survey. However, in the case of Stevenage constituency, the data are not sufficiently reliable for publication.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies published last year by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website:

http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/researchandpublications.htm.

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website:

http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/gender_briefing/home .htm.

There are no plans to commission further research into the gender pay gap in Stevenage.

Mair Barnes

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1486W, if she will list the boards of which Mair Barnes is a non-executive director. [46346]

Ms Hewitt: Mair Barnes is a non-executive director of Scottish Power plc, Patientline plc and the South African retailer Woolworth Holdings Ltd. She is also a director of Minkley Ltd. (Jersey).

Japanese Investment Projects

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Japanese investment projects there were into Britain in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01; what their size was; and how many of those projects were (i) engineering and (ii) manufacturing based. [46344]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures provided are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs associated with each investment.

There is no requirement on companies to notify inward investment decisions to Invest.UK and so the figures include only those projects where Invest.UK or its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They are therefore likely to be an underestimate. The number of manufacturing projects notified by year is provided but Invest.UK does not record the number of all engineering projects during the period concerned.

	Number of projects	Number in manufacturing	Total investment £
1996–97	43	30	838,729,000
1997–98	59	38	330,510,000
1998–99	43	30	786,227,000
1999–2000	62	28	372,919,000
2000–01	52	24	358,020,000

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations the Small Business Service has received from the Small Business Council on regulatory impact assessments. [46303]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Council is working with the Small Business Service to develop and implement an updated version of the so-called Litmus test, which forms part of the regulatory impact assessment procedure. It has also asked the Small Business Service to analyse the cumulative burden of regulation on small businesses.

Construction Industry

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of employment legislation in the construction industry; and if she will make a statement. [45757]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's programme of employment legislation represents a balanced package of measures. The goal is to ensure that the UK has a modern productive workplace for the 21st century and a flexible labour market to be competitive and at the same time ensure minimum standards for workers.

The Government do evaluate, as far as possible, employment legislation across the economy. However, they have not assessed separately the effectiveness of employment legislation in the construction industry. The effects of new employment legislation on the economy as a whole and the labour market are assessed through the Government's Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) process. Where appropriate these RIAs include an industry based assessment. This is the case where industries are affected to different degrees. The regulatory impact assessments are carried out on each new proposal to evaluate the likely costs and benefits.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of the DTI's budget has been allocated to support Business Links over the past five years. [46192]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The proportion of the DTI's budget that has been allocated to support Business Links over the past five years is:

£ million

	Business link	DTI	Per cent.
1996–97	115	2,861	4.0
1997–98	129	2,847	4.5
1998–99	118	2,909	4.0
1999–2000	120	3,370	3.6
2000–01	137	4,355	3.1

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if she will publish the findings. [47311]

Ms Hewitt: In June last year I announced two major reviews—one of the priorities and structure of my Department, and the other of its support for business. During those reviews almost 1,500 organisations and individuals gave us their views. These were gathered through regional workshops, face to face discussions, direct correspondence and specially commissioned market research. Views were also received via the DTI website mailbox.

Details can be found in the "House of Commons Trade and Industry Committee, Reviews of DTI Structure and Business Support—Minutes of Evidence, Wednesday 12 December 2001 (HC 454–1)".

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of her Department to Scotland. [47947]

Ms Hewitt: The locations of my Department's executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies are determined by business need and, accordingly, they already have a strong presence in Scotland. All but one of the Agencies have offices throughout Scotland and the non-departmental public bodies are also well represented with offices in 24 different locations. In addition my Department's headquarters has four offices in Scotland.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the timescale is for achievements of the PSA target to put in place policies to narrow the productivity gap relative to other industrialised countries over the cycle. [47354]

Ms Hewitt: The joint DTI/HM-Treasury PSA target is to improve UK competitiveness by narrowing the productivity gap with the US, France, Germany and Japan over the economic cycle. The Government has put in place a wide range of policies to drive up productivity by improving innovation, investment and skills and by fostering enterprise and fair competition. A full assessment of performance against the PSA target can only be made once the current economic cycle has ended. The methodology for identifying the economic cycle is given in the document "Fiscal policy: public finances and the HM Treasury", published in March

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to narrow the productivity gap relative to other industrialised countries over the cycle will be met by June 2005. [47356]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI and HM Treasury are monitoring performance against the PSA target to improve UK competitiveness by narrowing the productivity gap with the US, France, Germany and Japan over the economic

cycle. They will make a full assessment of whether the PSA target has been achieved at the end of the current economic cycle.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on performance in 2000–01 against the PSA target to narrow the productivity gap relative to other industrialised countries over the cycle. [47355]

Ms Hewitt: The most recent data published by ONS show that the UK had a labour productivity gap, on both a per worker and a per hour worked basis, with the US, France and Germany in 2000. It also shows that since 1997 the productivity gap on both a per worker and per hour basis has remained broadly unchanged with France and Germany. The gap with the US has remained broadly the same on a per hour basis, but has widened on the per worker measure. However, a full assessment of the PSA target can only be made once the current economic cycle has ended. The latest data are available from ONS's website

www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/economy/Articles/nationalaccounts/international_comparisons_productivity.asp.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47202]

Ms Hewitt: General information on the work carried out by the Department during 2001–02 in pursuit of its Public Service Agreement targets will be incorporated in the Departments' 2002–03 to 2003–04 Expenditure Plans Report, due to be published in May. Copies of the report will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase the productivity and profitability of SMEs assisted by Business Link Partnerships, and to show year by year improvements in the quality of services delivered under the Business Link brand will be met throughout the period June 2001 to June 2006. [47357]

Ms Hewitt: An impact assessment framework has been established to track the productivity and profitability of SMEs assisted by Business Link Partnerships. The time lags involved in collection of these data mean 2001 figures will not be available until at least 2003 and this will continue throughout the specified period. Early results show that a large majority of BLO clients first assisted in 1997–98 demonstrated increases in productivity. The average increase was 30 per cent. for Business Link clients compared to 18 per cent. for non-clients. Profitability also increased with 42 per cent. of clients having a positive profile compared to 40 per cent. for non-clients.

The quality of services delivered under the Business Link brand will be measured via customer satisfaction. Results of a new Customer Satisfaction Framework, requiring each operator to carry out independent customer satisfaction surveys every six months, will be available from spring 2002. In the interim the SBS Omnibus Survey (using a relatively small sample of Business Link users) suggests that satisfaction is in the 75–80 per cent. range of regular users, but less so for past and infrequent users.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to maintain or improve levels of energy security, diversity, sustainability and competitive energy price will be met. [47345]

Ms Hewitt: The public service agreement target to maintain or improve levels of energy security, diversity, sustainability and competitive prices has been updated for 2001–2004 to:

> "to develop strong, competitive markets within a regulatory framework which promotes fairness and sustainability".

This was set out in the "Spending Review 2000: Public Service Agreements 2001–04" White Paper (Cm 4808).

The specific energy targets relating to this objective are as follows:

> Ensure competitive gas and electricity prices in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket, while achieving security of supply and social and environmental objectives.
>
> Improve the environment and sustainable use of natural resources, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. from 1990 levels and moving towards a 20 per cent. reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010 (joint target with DEFRA).

An assessment of progress towards the targets currently monitored is as follows:

Competitive energy prices

> Overall, in 2000, based on incomplete data, it appears that UK industrial and domestic gas prices were in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket. UK domestic electricity prices including taxes and industrial prices including taxes were also in the lower half of the EU/G7 basket during 2000. Figures for the UK show that electricity prices have fallen in 2001.

Security

> The Department's target to maintain or improve the number of electricity power supply interruptions per 100 customers, and average time lost was not met in 2000–01 as it increased to 84 interruptions per 100 customers with 86 minutes lost per customer from 81 interruptions per 100 customers and 71 minutes lost per customer in 1999–2000. Oil stocks are also monitored, with a target to maintain national emergency oil stocks at, or above, levels required by international obligations. At the end of January 2002 the UK held stocks equal to 82 days of consumption, compared with an obligation of 67½ days.

Diversity

> The Department has a target to achieve 10 per cent. of electricity generated from renewable resources by 2010, subject to the costs to consumers being acceptable. The percentage of electricity generated in the UK from all renewable sources in 2000 was 2.8 per cent. Detailed renewable energy statistics for 2001 are not yet available, but provisional figures show that large scale hydro schemes provided about 0.8 per cent. of electricity generation in 2001 compared with 1.2 per cent. in 2000. This was because of lower precipitation in Scotland during the winter of 2000–2001. However, it is expected that generation from other renewable sources will have increased in 2001.

Social

> The Department has introduced a social target of fuel expenditure as a percentage of income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) for the lowest three income deciles to be reducing and below 5 per cent. by 2003–04. Over the last four years fuel expenditure as a percentage of income has generally been reducing and in 2000–01 was 7 per cent.

Sustainability/Environment

> Although provisional figures indicate that CO_2 emissions were higher in 2001 than 1999 and 2000, due to increased coal burn in power stations as a result of higher gas prices, and colder weather in the winter months, CO_2 emissions are nevertheless 6 per cent. below 1990 levels. It is estimated that the quantified measures in

the UK Climate Change Programme could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 19 per cent. below 1990 levels in 2010. The programme is also designed to stimulate a wider response from all parts of society, which could reduce emissions still further and deliver the 20 per cent. goal.

In 2000 greenhouse gas emissions were 13 per cent. lower than in 1990. Projections suggest that the UK remains on course to meet its Kyoto commitment to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. by 2008–12 from 1990 level.

Sulphur dioxide emissions in 2000 were 76 per cent. lower than in 1980. The Department remains on course to meet the sulphur dioxide emissions target of 80 per cent. below 1980 levels by 2010.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she had made of the date by which the PSA target to secure an increase in the number of successful high growth business start ups will be met. [47358]

Ms Hewitt: An estimate of the number of successful high growth business start-ups has been made annually for the last four years. The estimates are shown in the table. There is an inevitable lag in recording high-growth start ups. For example the 1998 figures relate to businesses first registering for VAT in 1994. An estimate relating to firms first registering for VAT in 1998 will be available later this year.

Year started	*Number of firms*	*Year progress known*
1994	12,300	1998
1995	11,800	1999
1996	11,100	2000
1997	11,200	[1]2001

[1] Provisional

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out the criteria and timescale for the measurement of progress against the PSA target to secure an increase in the number of successful high growth business start-ups. [47360]

Ms Hewitt: The aim of the target is to raise the number of successful high growth business start-ups to 20,000 a year by 2002. A successful high growth start-up is defined as a firm having 10 or more employees and/or turnover of at least £1 million by the fourth year of trading. an estimate of the number of successful high growth start-ups is produced annually. The estimate for 2002 will be available in 2007, as there is an inherent four year time lag and a further one year time lag in collating the data.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the definitions are of *(a)* successful and *(b)* high growth in the PSA target to secure an increase in the number of successful, high growth business start-ups. [47353]

Ms Hewitt: A successful high growth start-up is defined as a firm having 10 or more employees and/or turnover of at least £1 million by the fourth year of trading.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to increase by 50 per cent. the 1997–98 number of companies spun out from universities by 2001–02. [47350]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 118W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target to make the UK the best place in the world to trade electronically will be met by *(a)* June 2005 and *(b)* June 2006. [47347]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI's e-commerce PSA target is to make and keep the UK the best place in the world to trade electronically, as measured by the cost of internet access, and the extent of business to business and business to consumer transactions carried out over e-commerce networks by 2004. The DTI works with Oftel and the Office for National Statistics in order to measure these indicators.

Recent figures show that:

The UK is ranked third lowest with regards to narrow band internet access costs in OECD countries and second lowest in the G7.

The UK is among the leading group of countries on the number of businesses trading online and other key measures.

The UK has the one of the largest e-commerce markets in Europe, with e-sales representing over 5 per cent. of the value of total sales

In May 2001 the total value of business to business transactions in sectors covered amounted to 6 per cent. of total value of sales.

In May 2001 figures showed that £10 billion of sales over the internet were from businesses to households.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on performance in 2001 against the PSA target to ensure 98 per cent. of EU single market measures to be transposed into UK law. [47341]

Ms Hewitt: By November 2001 the UK had transposed 97.2 per cent. of EU single market directives due by that date. By the time of the Barcelona Council in March 2002, the UK had increased its transposition rate to 98.7 per cent.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45393]

Ms Hewitt: According to records held centrally, the administrative manuals and internal guidance listed are currently publicly available as required by paragraph 3 (ii) of Part I of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Documents marked [1] were first made available after May 1997.

Business Links

Business Links: Guidelines for Officials.

Coal

Redundant Mineworkers Payment Schemes procedures.

Redundant Mineworkers Payment Scheme Incapacity Benefit Equivalent.

Competition Policy

Guidance to officials on procedures for handling decisions made under Section 23 (3) of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976.

Guidance to officials on procedures for handling directions made under Section 21 (2) of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976.

Guidance for DTI officials on procedures for handling inquiries under Section 11 of the Competition Act 1980: efficiency audits of nationalised industries.

Guidance to officials on procedures for handling newspaper mergers under s.57ff of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Guidance to officials on procedures for publication of MMC reports following a reference under the Competition Act 1980.

Monopolies: guidance to officials on procedures for handling monopoly references by the Director General of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973, publication of MMC monopoly reports and follow up action.

UK (non newspaper) mergers: guidance notes.

Disclaimers

Giving advice and information to members of the public and outside organisations: use of disclaimers.

Exports

Export Control Compliance Unit: Compliance visit procedures.

Export Control Organisation (ECO) Handbook.

Overseas Trade Services guidelines[1].

Market Testing

DTI Guide to Market Testing.

Metals

The Iron and Steel Employees Re-adaption Benefits Scheme: men aged 55 and over: women aged 50 and over.

The Iron and Steel Employees Re-adaption Benefits Scheme: men aged under 55: women aged under 50.

Oil and gas

Offshore Research and Development Programme (OSSCAR): Guidance notes for staff.

Open Government

Open Government: Documents lodged for public consultation in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, January 2002[1].

General guidelines for staff working in the DTI Inquiry Unit[1].

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Handling requests for information[1].

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: DTI scheme of charges and charging procedures[1].

Open Government Obligations[1].

The role of the Open Government Liaison Officer[1].

Guidance for Directorates wishing to deposit documents in the Open Government section of Information and Library Services[1].

Guidance Notes on Procedures for Paying for Photocopies of Open Government Documents[1].

A Guide for Night Duty Officers[1].

Personnel

Internal guidance for DTI personnel staff on conducting external staff recruitment in accordance with legal obligations and the Civil Service Commissioner's Recruitment Code.

Private Business Radio Systems

Private Business Radio Systems procedures manual[1].

Procurement

DTI Procurement manual.

Procurement Guide: EC Services Directive.

Procurement Guide: EC Supplies Directive and GATT GPA.

Shipbuilding

Guidance notes on the Shipbuilding Intervention Fund.

Technology

International secondments: information pack[1].

LINK best practice guidelines.

TCS (Teaching Company Scheme): supervisor handbook.

TCS (Teaching Company Scheme): associate handbook.

The SMART (1997) Scheme—Guidelines for Officials[1].

The SMART (1999) Scheme—Guidelines for Officials[1].

The SMART (1999–2002) Scheme—Guidelines for Officials[1].

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 673W, on public bodies, what information she receives on possible appointees to non-departmental public bodies prior to their appointment; and what method her Department uses to notify people of their appointment to a non-departmental public body. [44083]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The procedures for making appointments to non-departmental public bodies are governed by the rules of the Commissioner for Public Appointments as set out in her Code. This includes the requirement for completion of an application form by each individual being considered for appointment. In addition to information relevant to the specific appointment application forms request monitoring information on ethnicity, gender and disability. It is also a requirement of the OCPA Code that information is collected from all applicants on political activity in the five years prior to application.

Individuals who are appointed through the procedures receive a letter of appointment. Details of appointees to individual bodies are made public in press releases at the time of appointment or in the annual report of the NDPB and details of all appointees are published in the Departmental Annual Expenditure Plans Report copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42151]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The numbers of men and women appointed to bodies for which my Department is responsible during the periods in question are:

Period	*Men appointed*	*Women appointed*
1 April 2000—31 March 2001	347	129
1 April 2001—28 February 2002	207	62

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people have been appointed by her to official bodies and NDPBs coming under the aegis of her Department in the last three years; and who they were. [33346]

Ms Hewitt: Details of all individuals appointed to NDPBs falling within the responsibility of my Department are set out in the DTI's annual Expenditure Plans reports, copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House. The reports set out the body to which the appointment has been made, the name of the appointee, the position to which they have been appointed, the period of the appointment, the remuneration where applicable and the time commitment required of the appointee.

Details for all appointments made in 1999 are given in the report for 1999–2000 published in April 2000 (Cm 4611) and those for 2000 are given in the report for 2000–01 published in March 2001 (Cm 5112). Details for appointments made in 2001 will be included in the next report for 2001–02, due to be published in May. In advance of that publication I have placed a table giving the details in the Libraries of both Houses.

Knowledge Transfer Initiatives

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* cost of knowledge transfer initiatives sponsored by her Department in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [42595]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The knowledge transfer initiatives supported by the Department for Trade and Industry in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are listed in the table.

£

Initiative	*Purpose*	*Cost to DTI* 2000–01	2001–02
The Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)	To enable HEIs to respond to the needs of business, through both the continuing development of capacity in universities to interact with business and the community (building on HEROBC[1]), and large, strategic, collaborative projects to strengthen university-business partnerships.	n/a	20,000,000
The Science Enterprise Challenge Fund (SEC)	To establish a network of centres in UK universities, specialising in the teaching and practice of commercialisation and entrepreneurialism in the field of science and technology.	15,750,000	5,782,000
The University Challenge Fund (UC)	To enable universities to access seed funds in order to assist the successful transformation of good research into good business.	n/a	12,500,000
The Public Sector Research Exploitation Fund (PSRE)	To enable public sector research establishments to develop their capacity to exploit their science and technology potential and to access seed funding to support the commercialisation of research.	n/a	10,000,000
Cambridge-MIT Institute (CMI)	To provide a catalyst to improve economic competitiveness and productivity, while working with UK universities to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit in higher education.	1,450,000	14,000,000
LINK (inc. Foresight LINK Awards)	To promote research partnerships between UK industry, universities and other research base organisations. The research is pre-competitive and strategic and undertaken within a well-defined project management framework.	31,000,000[2]	n/a[3]
Business Fellowships	To focus on recognising and developing creative activities carried out within HEIs to build their response to the needs of business across the full range of their academic activity.	n/a	103,125
Faraday Partnerships	To promote closer interaction between the UK science, engineering and technology base and industry through the involvement of intermediate organisations. To strengthen the way technology is developed and exploited within the UK by stimulating closer communication and co-operation between researchers and new product developers.	2,040,000	6,200,000
Eureka	To encourage industry-led projects in applied R&D involving large and small firms, research organisations and HEIs. To contribute to development of European network infrastructure for collaborative R&D—32 members in network.	3,500,000	3,500,000
International Technology Service	To ensure that British businesses are able to keep abreast of the latest developments overseas and are able to afford the costs of access—to promote technology transfer between UK businesses and international businesses.	3,760,000	5,700,000
Britech	To support effective technology partnerships between UK and Israeli companies that, individually, achieve additional benefits. Also to create a climate whereby UK and Israeli firms will wish to collaborate more, with benefit to themselves and wider benefits to the UK.	600,000	700,000

£

Initiative	Purpose	Cost to DTI 2000–01	Cost to DTI 2001–02
TCS (previously known as the Teaching Company Scheme)	To facilitate the transfer of technology, knowledge and skills between businesses and HEIs and other research-based organisations, to provide business-based training and experience for high-calibre graduates, and to enhance the business relevance of teaching and research in HEIs.	11,500,000	14,200,000

[1] The Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community Fund. Aim is to develop the capability of higher education institutions to respond to the needs of business of all sizes and sectors and a range of bodies within the wider community.
[2] Expenditure by DTI and five Research Councils (EPSRC, BBSRC, NERC, MRC, ESRC).
[3] Expenditure figure not yet available for 2001–02, because it is an aggregate of figures from various Government Departments and Research Councils.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what legal costs have been incurred by her Department in each of the last four years. [34349]

Ms Hewitt: Information on legal costs is not held centrally, except for costs awarded against the Department, details of which were as follows:

Year	£000
1998–99	1,915
1999–2000	288
2000–01	532
2001–02	450[1]

[1] Estimated

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36149]

Ms Hewitt: The support costs underpinning the operation of the Department's websites are included in the service charges paid under the DTI's overall IT service contract. The website costs are not identified separately in these charges and therefore the figures requested are not available.

The core DTI site www.dti.gov.uk has been updated twice in the last four years, involving design costs of £13,075 in FY 1999–2000, and £16,560 in FY 2000–01 (figures include VAT, and at FY 2001–02 prices). A more substantial redevelopment of the site went live on 9 April 2002, at a cost of £60,294 including VAT.

The Department has been collecting access statistics on a comparable basis since July 1998. The number of hits to the site www.dti.gov.uk since then has been:

July 1998—December 1998: 16,265,698

January 1999—December 1999: 59,498,841

January 2000—December 2000: 81,730,285

January 2001—December 2001: 95,226,594.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45231]

Ms Hewitt: The numbers of inward secondments commenced, continued or completed in each of the years requested are:

Period	Number
1 April 1999—31 March 2000	163
1 April 2000—31 March 2001	176
1 April 2001—28 February 2002	158

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff in her Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31769]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the information given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1130W, which gave these details for all Departments.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the names of staff who have been seconded to her Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and civil service grade within her Department and *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary; [32550]

(2) if she will list the secondees to her Department from the private sector and their roles. [32553]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The information requested was last provided on 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 143W in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Northampton, South. I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses the original table as at 28 June 2001 and an update to that information showing all secondees into my Department since then. The table shows the name of each secondee, the company from which they have come, the grade of the post which they are filling in the Department, the Directorate in which they are working, the period of their secondment and a brief description of their duties. In all cases secondees are paid by their employing company.

It is not possible for me to give this information on all secondees from May 1997 onwards as the non-disclosure provisions of the Data Protection Act prevent me from doing so without the express consent of the individuals concerned.

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the appointments made by her Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if she will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33893]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested for NDPBs and NDPB commissions within the responsibility of my Department is as follows:

Body	*Name*	*Period*	*Salary (£)*
British Shipbuilders	Christopher Campbell	4 June 1998–3 March 2002	34,736pa
Coal Authority	John Harris	19 September 1999–18 September 2004	25,000pa
British Coal Corp	Philip Hutchinson	June-December 1997	95,085 (total)
	Mike Atkinson	January 1998–18 June 2009	Nil (ex officio)
	Peter Mason	18 June 2000-on-going	Nil (ex officio)
British Nuclear Fuels	Hugh Collum	1 October 1999–30 September 2004	150,000pa
National Consumer Council	David Hatch	1 January 1999–31 December 2000	23,033pa
	Deirdre Hutton	1 January 2001–31 December 2003	30,900pa
Scottish Consumer Council	Graeme Millar	8 May 2000–30 April 2003	15,450pa
Welsh Consumer Council	Barbara Hicks	1 October 1997–30 September 2003	6,695pa
Hearing Aid Council	John Raine	1 September 1997–31 December 2003	172.13
Energywatch	Ann Robinson	1 January 2000–31 December 2003	45,000
Design Council	Sir Chris Frayling	1 April 2000–31 March 2003	Nil
Competition Commission	Dr. Derek Morris	1 February 1998–31 January 2006 (inc. reappt)	150,000pa
Simpler Trade Procedures BoardLord	Amir Bhatia	15 July 2001–14 July 2004	Nil
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	Sir Kenneth Eaton	1 April 1999–31 March 2002 (inc. reappt)	30,000pa
Aerospace Committee	Colin Green	31 March 1999–31 March 2002	Nil
Industrial Development Advisory Board	Sir Anthony Cleaver	1 November 1998–31 October 1999	Nil
	Sir Victor Blank	1 November 1999–31 July 2004 (inc. 2 reappts)	Nil
North West Industrial Development Board	Anil Ruia	1 January 1999–31 December 2001	Nil
	Mrs. Lorraine Clinton	1 January 2002–30 April 2004	Nil
East of England Industrial Development Board	Mrs. Elaine Oddie	1 August 1997–30 June 2003 (inc. reappt)	Nil
West Midlands Industrial Development Board	Merrick Taylor	1 January 1998–31 December 1999	Nil
	John Hudson	1 January 2000–31 December 2001	Nil
	Paul Sabapathy	1 January 2002–31 January 2003	Nil
North East Industrial Development Board	John Ward	1 January 1999–31 December 2000	Nil
	Richard Maudslay	1 January 2001–31 December 2002	Nil
Yorks/Humberside/East Midlands Industrial Development Board	Ron Lasseter	1 January 1998–31 December 1999	Nil
	Mrs. Julie Kenny	1 January 2000–30 December 2002	Nil
London/South East Industrial Development Board	Ian Herman	1 January 1998–31 March 2000	Nil
	Christopher Dane	1 April 2000–31 December 2001	Nil
South West Industrial Development Board	David Hancock	1 January 1998–31 December 1998	Nil
	Ian Lowe	1 January 1999–31 July 2003 (inc. reappt)	Nil
Measurement Advisory Commission	Bill Goldfinch	1 July 1997–31 March 2002 (inc. reappt)	Nil
Intellectual Property Advisory Committee	Ian Harvey	1 September 2001–31 August 2004	1,500pa
Energy Advisory Panel	Sir John Collins	July 2001-July 2004	450 per meeting
British Trade International (BTI)			
BTI British Airports Advisory Council	Mike Hodgkinson	1 September 2001–31 August 2004	Nil
BTI Education and Training Export Group	Rob Meakin	1 June 1998–31 January 2004	Nil
BTI Healthcare Sector Group	John Robinson	16 March 2001–15 March 2003	Nil
BTI Offshore Supplies Office Board	Ian Bill	15 April 1998–14 April 2004	Nil
BTI Railway Sector Group	Michael Welton	28 September 2001–27 September 2003	Nil
Trade Partners UK: Americas Advisers	Martin Laing	5 January 2001–4 January 2003	Nil
Trade Partners UK: Asia Pacific Advisers	Anthony Cleaver	18 December 1998–7 March 2003	Nil
Trade Partners UK: Europe Advisers	Peter Cheshire	5 January 2001–4 January 2003	Nil
Trade Partners UK: Middle East/Africa Advisers	George Kennedy	5 January 2001–4 January 2003	Nil
UK Ports Sector Group	David Jeffrey	1 October 1998–31 December 2004	Nil
Water Sector Group	Stuart Doughty	2 October 1997–3 October 2004	Nil
Power Sector Group	Graham Ward	31 July 2001–30 July 2004	Nil
Regional Advisory Group	Stella Pirie	1 May 2001–30 April 2004	Nil
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	Dr. Peter Doyle	1 May 1998–30 April 2002	13,700pa
Council for Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	Paul Williams	1 May 1997–31 March 1998	72,994 (total)
	Bert Westwood	1 April 1998–31 March 2000	91,526 (total)
	Dr. Brian Eyre	1 April 2000–30 September 2001	13,300pa
	Sir Graeme Davies	1 October 2001–30 September 2005	26,600pa (Yr1) 13,700pa (Yr2–4)
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	Anthony Ledwith	1 April 1999–31 March 2003	13,700pa
Economic and Social Research Council	Dr. Bruce-Smith	1 April 1998–31 March 2001	13,300pa
	Frances Cairncross	1 April 2001–31 March 2004	13,700pa
Medical Research Council	Sir Anthony Cleaver	1 October 1998–30 September 2002	13,700pa
Natural Environment Research Council	Rob Margetts	1 January 2001–30 December 2003	13,700pa

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Body	Name	Period	Salary (£)
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	Sir Peter Williams	1 May 1997–31 March 1999	13,300pa
	Dr. Robert Hawley	1 April 1999–30 September 2001	13,300pa
	Peter Warry	1 November 2001–31 October 2005	13,700pa
Central Arbitration Committee	John Rideout	July 1999-March 2000	Daily allowance [1]
	Sir Michael Burton	27 March 2000-on-going	—
Council of Science and Technology	Secretary of State	On-going	Nil (ex officio)
Foresight Steering Group	David King	1 October 2000–31 March 2002	Nil (ex officio)
Low Pay Commission	Sir George Bain	September 1997-April 2002	450 per meeting
Ethnic Minority Business Forum	Yvonne Thompson	July 2000-July 2003	Nil
Partnership Fund Assessment Panel	William Coupar	20 December 1999–19 December 2003	Nil
Small Business Council	William Sargent	March 2000-March 2003	Nil
Advisory Committee for Work-Life Balance	Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions	On-going	Nil (ex officio)
Advantage West Midlands	Alex Stephenson	14 December 1998–13 December 2002 (inc reappt)	45,276pa
East of England Development Agency	Vincent Watts	14 December 1998–13 December 2003 (inc reappt)	45,276pa
East Midlands Development Agency	Derek Mapp	14 December 1998–13 December 2004 (inc reappt)	45,276pa
North West Development Agency	Lord Thomas of Macclesfield	14 December 1998–31 March 2002	45,276pa
	Bryan Gray	1 April 2002–31 March 2005	45,276pa
One North East	Dr. John Bridge	14 December 1998–13 December 2003 (inc. reappt)	45,276pa
South East England Development Agency	Allan Willett	14 December 1998–13 December 2002 (inc reappt)	22,000pa [4]
South West England Development Agency	Sir Michael Lickiss	14 December 1998–13 December 2002 (inc. reappt)	45,276pa
Yorkshire Forward	Graham Hall	14 December 1998–13 December 2003 (inc reappt)	45,276pa
Import Parity Price Panel	Andrew Horsler	1 December 2000–30 November 2003	5,000pa
Small Business Investment Task Force	Sir David Cooksey	September 2000-September 2003	Nil
Distributed Generation Working Group	Neil Hirst		
	John Nielson (Joint)	30 November 2001-on-going	Nil (ex officio)
Basic Technologies Programme	Jeremy Watson	5 December 2001-on-going	Nil
Business Incubation Fund Investment Panel	Dr. John Bridge	2 January 2002–1 January 2004	Nil
Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications	Jeremy Mitchell	1 April 2001–31 March 2004	150 per day [5]
Consumer Communications for England	Moira Black	1 April 2001–31 March 2004	150 per day [5]
Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications	Mike Tedd	1 April 2001–31 March 2004	150 per day [5]
North Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications	Courtenay Thompson	1 April 2001–31 March 2004	150 per day [5]
Spectrum Management Advisory Group	Dr. John Forrest	13 May 1998–14 May 2002 (inc. reappt)	Nil
British Hallmarking Council	Sir Adam Butler	January 1998-on-going	12,000pa
ACAS	John Hougham	1 February 1998–31 December 2000	86,818pa
	Rita Donaghy	9 October 2000–8 October 2005	55,801pa
Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission	Malcolm Grant	15 May 2000–31 January 2003	188 per day [6]
Consignia	Dr. Neville Bain	16 March 1998–31 December 2001	90,816pa
	Allan Leighton	1 January 2002–24 March 2005	20,000pa
Postcomm	Graham Corbett	6 November 2000–31 March 2003	110,000pa
Postwatch	Peter Carr	1 January 2001–30 November 2003	30,870pa
Fuel Cell Advisory Panel	Adrian Hyde	January 1998–30 September 2000	Nil (ex officio)
	Alan Heyes [3]	1 October 2000–31 December 2001	Nil (ex officio)
	Ray Eaton	1 January 2002-on-going	Nil (ex officio)

[1] Daily attendance allowance.
[2] Paul Williams and Bert Westwood were paid as both Chairman and Chief Executive.
[3] 20 per cent. of his High Court judge salary.
[4] Mr. Willett has opted to receive £22,000pa rather than the full amount to which he is entitled.
[5] Up to 60 days per year.
[6] 42 days per year.

Information on political affiliation of public appointees is not collected.

Information on task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 to 31 October 1999. Subsequent reports covering the periods between November 1999 to March 2001 have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46798]

Ms Hewitt: The cost of running DTI press office was: *(a)* 1,439,000 (1996–97); *(b)* 1,984,000 (2000–01). These figures consist of staff and operating costs and reflect the increase in departmental responsibilities in the period.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by her and her predecessors since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43386]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* For details of unpaid appointments made by this department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer you to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), on 16 November, *Official Report,* column 958W.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45602]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Department and its agencies have signed three PFI contracts in the last four years—Elgar (which provides the Department's IT infrastructure), the re-development of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington and the Radiocommunications Agency's Strategic Partnership.

In the case of the Elgar and RA Strategic Partnership contracts, the procurement process (or competition) did not involve the selection of a 'preferred' bidder.

The net present cost of the National Physical Laboratory PFI contract (excluding support services) was estimated to be £92 million at the time of the selection of the preferred bidder and £116 million at contract signature, primarily reflecting a re-definition of the scope of the project by the Department.

Procurement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the procurement payment target for 2000–01 was met. [47328]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has a payment performance target to pay 100 per cent. of its suppliers within 30 days of a correctly presented invoice. Against this target for financial year 2000–01, the Department achieved 94 per cent.

Departmental Administration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total of efficiency savings for departmental administration were in 2000–01 in *(a)* money and *(b)* percentage terms. [47727]

Ms Hewitt: The efficiency savings achieved by my Department in 2000–01 have been calculated at £19.3 million. This figure represents a percentage saving of 4.6 per cent.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47811]

Ms Hewitt: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the budget Report on 17 April.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47323]

Ms Hewitt: My Department uses a range of measures to protect its property from theft or damage, including security guarding, CCTV, intruder alarms and asset marking of valuable items. A review of security measures is a standard response to any incident and increased measures, such as additional security patrols in vulnerable areas and bag searches are brought in as appropriate. Advice is also sought from the local police crime prevention officer.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the likely change in the price of construction materials following the introduction of the aggregates levy. [46478]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The levy's impact on the price of construction materials will depend upon the amount of virgin aggregate used in their manufacture and the extent to which aggregates suppliers pass on the cost of the levy to customers.

HEALTH

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of patients were not readmitted within a month of their operation being cancelled in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority in each year since 1997–98; [44368]

(2) what was the percentage of operations cancelled at short notice for non-clinical reasons in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority for each year since 1997–98. [44290]

Mr. Hutton: Information for 1997–98 to 2000–01 is shown in the tables.

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

NHS Region/OrgID	*Name*	*Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year*	*Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation*	*Percentage of patients not admitted within one month*	*Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
Y00	England	77,818	16,454	21	1.5
Y01—QDD	Bradford HA	451	14	3	0.7
Y01—QDE	County Durham HA	265	52	20	0.6
Y01—QDF	East Riding HA	323	54	17	0.6

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y01—QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	200	24	12	0.6
Y01—QDH	Leeds HA	602	249	41	0.6
Y01—QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	1,661	422	25	1.8
Y01—QDK	North Cumbria HA	767	104	14	2.5
Y01—QDM	Northumberland HA	48	4	8	0.1
Y01—QDN	Sunderland HA	206	6	3	0.5
Y01—QDP	Tees HA	998	74	7	1.2
Y01—QDQ	Wakefield HA	966	235	24	2.5
Y01—QDR	North Yorkshire HA	791	63	8	1.0
Y01—QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	744	173	23	1.4
Y02—QCG	Barnsley HA	37	3	8	0.2
Y02—QCH	North Derbyshire Health	339	5	1	1.4
Y02—QCJ	Southern Derbyshire Health	231	—	0	0.4
Y02—QCK	Doncaster HA	344	43	13	0.9
Y02—QCL	Leicester HA	987	124	13	1.1
Y02—QCM	Lincolnshire Health	508	65	13	0.9
Y02—QCN	North Nottinghamshire Health	360	—	0	1.0
Y02—QCP	Nottingham HA	501	52	10	0.6
Y02—QCQ	Rotherham HA	159	40	25	0.8
Y02—QCR	Sheffield Health	1,398	42	3	1.5
Y02—QDL	South Humber HA	292	—	0	0.6
Y07—QD9	Birmingham HA	2,633	85	3	1.7
Y07—QEA	Coventry Health	759	156	21	2.0
Y07—QEC	Dudley HA	360	10	3	1.1
Y07—QED	Herefordshire HA	356	108	30	2.0
Y07—QEE	Sandwell HA	181	22	12	0.8
Y07—QEF	Shropshire HA	285	110	39	0.7
Y07—QEG	Solihull HA	—	—	—	—
Y07—QEH	North Staffordshire HA	766	87	11	1.1
Y07—QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	516	90	17	1.0
Y07—QEK	Walsall HA	149	—	0	0.8
Y07—QEL	Warwickshire HA	278	51	18	0.7
Y07—QEM	Wolverhampton HA	85	4	5	0.2
Y07—QEN	Worcestershire HA	337	72	21	0.8
Y08—QC1	South Lancashire HA	426	2	0	2.3
Y08—QC2	Liverpool HA	571	130	23	0.8
Y08—QC3	Manchester Health	2,330	1,057	45	1.6
Y08—QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	803	135	17	2.2
Y08—QC5	St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	808	220	27	2.7
Y08—QC6	Salford and Trafford HA	507	85	17	0.9
Y08—QC7	Sefton HA	479	54	11	0.8
Y08—QC8	Stockport HA	404	16	4	1.1
Y08—QC9	West Pennine HA	609	121	20	1.1
Y08—QCT	Bury and Rochdale HA	31	5	16	0.1
Y08—QCV	North Cheshire Health	464	112	24	1.4
Y08—QCW	South Cheshire HA	1,185	341	29	2.1
Y08—QCX	East Lancashire	579	49	8	1.0
Y08—QCY	North West Lancashire HA	492	17	3	0.4
Y08—QDA	Wigan and Bolton HA	1,032	359	35	1.8
Y08—QDC	Wirral Health	223	44	20	0.6
Y09—QA6	Bedfordshire HA	894	52	7	1.7
Y09—QAX	North Essex HA	1,246	182	15	1.8
Y09—QAY	South Essex HA	1,299	234	18	2.4
Y09—QCF	Suffolk Health	955	326	34	1.8
Y09—QEP	East and North Hertfordshire HA	490	197	40	1.4
Y09—QEC	West Hertfordshire HA	425	17	4	1.1
Y09—QA9	Cambridgeshire HA	1,467	526	36	1.5
Y09—QCA	Norfolk HA	824	194	24	0.8
Y010—QA2	Hillingdon HA	390	8	2	2.5
Y10—QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1,349	151	11	1.5
Y10—QA4	Enfield and Haringey HA	592	126	21	3.3
Y10—QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	1,038	532	51	2.5
Y10—QAA	Bexley and Greenwich HA	320	—	0	1.0
Y10—QAC	Bromley HA	615	66	11	2.2
Y10—QAD	Croydon HA	430	174	40	2.2
Y10—QAG	Kingston and Richmond HA	277	24	9	1.5
Y10—QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	1,339	386	29	1.5
Y10—QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	1,466	368	25	2.1
Y10—QAP	Barking and Havering HA	1,984	534	27	6.5
Y10—QAQ	Barnet HA[1]	380	194	51	1.1
Y10—QAR	Brent and Harrow HA[2]	924	123	13	3.6
Y10—QAT	Camden and Islington HA	1,612	439	27	1.3

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 2000–01

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y10—QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	953	107	11	1.5
Y10—QAW	East London and The City HA	1,787	642	36	2.8
Y11—QA7	Berkshire HA	1,840	141	8	2.9
Y11—QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	2,082	302	15	4.6
Y11—QAE	East Kent HA	785	307	39	1.3
Y11—QAF	West Kent HA	1,027	321	31	1.5
Y11—QAK	East Surrey HA	436	28	6	2.4
Y11—QAL	West Surrey Health Commission	1,705	544	32	2.7
Y11—QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	1,426	300	21	2.2
Y11—QAN	West Sussex HA	777	191	25	1.8
Y11—QCC	Northamptonshire HA	489	101	21	1.0
Y11—QCE	Oxfordshire HA	2,221	599	27	3.9
Y11—QD1	North and Mid Hampshire HA	422	151	36	1.2
Y11—QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	599	47	8	1.1
Y11—QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,154	239	21	2.0
Y11—QD4	Isle of Wight HA	412	86	21	5.2
Y12—QD5	Somerset HA	510	125	25	1.2
Y12—QD6	South and West Devon HA	1,199	225	19	1.5
Y12—QD7	Wiltshire HA	790	227	29	1.0
Y12—QD8	Avon Health	3,544	963	27	3.3
Y12—QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	464	186	40	1.0
Y12—QDW	Dorset HA	877	122	14	0.9
Y12—QDX	North and East Devon HA	728	196	27	1.1
Y12—QDY	Gloucestershire Health	669	62	9	1.0

[1] Figures for Q1 2000–01 reflect changes in local recording and reporting arrangements.
[2] Includes estimates.

Note:
Charter Standard: Operations should not be cancelled (for non-clinical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital and that, if this happens, patients should be admitted to hospital within one month of the first cancellation.

Source:
Department of Health form QMPC, Hospital Episode Statistics

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1999–2000

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y00	England	60,242	12,421	21	1.1
Y01—QDD	Bradford HA	442	13	3	0.7
Y01—QDE	County Durham HA	318	34	11	0.7
Y01—QDF	East Riding HA	382	83	22	0.7
Y01—QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	70	7	10	0.2
Y01—QDH	Leeds HA	717	202	28	0.8
Y01—QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	1,189	124	10	1.3
Y01—QDK	North Cumbria HA	374	69	18	1.2
Y01—QDM	Northumberland HA	55	10	18	0.1
Y01—QDN	Sunderland HA	157	0	0	0.4
Y01—QDP	Tees HA	756	119	16	0.9
Y01—QDQ	Wakefield HA	574	79	14	1.5
Y01—QDR	North Yorkshire HA	536	57	11	0.7
Y01—QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	464	103	22	0.9
Y02—QCG	Barnsley HA	37	1	3	0.2
Y02—QCH	North Derbyshire Health	301	2	1	1.3
Y02—QCJ	Southern Derbyshire Health	13	0	0	0.0
Y02—QCK	Doncaster HA	237	20	8	0.6
Y02—QCL	Leicester HA	905	86	10	1.0
Y02—QCM	Lincolnshire Health	621	109	18	1.1
Y02—QCN	North Nottinghamshire Health	182	0	0	0.5
Y02—QCP	Nottingham HA	398	5	1	0.5
Y02—QCQ	Rotherham HA	118	33	28	0.6
Y02—QCR	Sheffield Health	964	40	4	1.1
Y02—QDL	South Humber HA	333	0	0	0.8
Y07—QD9	Birmingham HA	2,499	118	5	1.7
Y07—QEA	Coventry Health	843	234	28	1.9
Y07—QEC	Dudley HA	106	23	22	0.3

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1999–2000

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y07—QED	Herefordshire HA	161	30	19	1.0
Y07—QEE	Sandwell HA	157	57	36	0.8
Y07—QEF	Shropshire HA	319	99	31	0.7
Y07—QEG	Solihull HA	—	—	—	—
Y07—QEH	North Staffordshire HA	827	158	19	1.2
Y07—QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	261	70	27	0.5
Y07—QEK	Walsall HA	99	0	0	0.5
Y07—QEL	Warwickshire HA	326	56	17	0.9
Y07—QEM	Wolverhampton HA	90	8	9	0.2
Y07—QEN	Worcestershire HA	195	53	27	0.5
Y08—QC1	South Lancashire HA	102	0	0	1.5
Y08—QC2	Liverpool HA	707	253	36	1.0
Y08—QC3	Manchester Health	2,069	520	25	1.0
Y08—QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	309	60	19	0.7
Y08—QC5	St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	235	33	14	0.8
Y08—QC6	Salford and Trafford HA	513	100	19	0.9
Y08—QC7	Sefton HA	299	25	8	0.5
Y08—QC8	Stockport HA	405	31	8	1.1
Y08—QC9	West Pennine HA	263	21	8	0.5
Y08—QCT	Bury and Rochdale HA	42	3	7	0.1
Y08—QCV	North Cheshire Health	143	26	18	0.4
Y08—QCW	South Cheshire HA	1,031	316	31	1.9
Y08—QCX	East Lancashire	437	45	10	0.8
Y08—QCY	North West Lancashire HA	583	31	5	0.5
Y08—QDA	Wigan and Bolton HA	621	207	33	1.1
Y08—QDC	Wirral Health	87	28	32	0.3
Y09—QA6	Bedfordshire HA	368	36	10	1.0
Y09—QAX	North Essex HA	1,266	271	21	1.9
Y09—QAY	South Essex HA	1,045	55	5	2.0
Y09—QCF	Suffolk Health	509	144	28	1.0
Y09—QEP	East and North Hertfordshire HA	532	151	28	1.4
Y09—QEC	West Hertfordshire HA	214	13	6	0.6
Y09—QA9	Cambridgeshire HA	1,449	402	28	1.6
Y09—QCA	Norfolk HA	796	112	14	0.8
Y010—QA2	Hillingdon HA	423	4	1	2.7
Y10—QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	577	89	15	0.7
Y10—QA4	Enfield and Haringey HA	551	181	33	2.7
Y10—QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	938	334	36	2.3
Y10—QAA	Bexley and Greenwich HA	235	0	0	0.7
Y10—QAC	Bromley HA	371	47	13	1.4
Y10—QAD	Croydon HA	603	203	34	2.6
Y10—QAG	Kingston and Richmond HA	392	58	15	1.1
Y10—QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	1,067	320	30	1.2
Y10—QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	1,211	328	27	1.7
Y10—QAP	Barking and Havering HA	665	235	35	2.2
Y10—QAQ	Barnet HA[1]	0	0	0	0.0
Y10—QAR	Brent and Harrow HA[1]	784	307	39	2.1
Y10—QAT	Camden and Islington HA	1,612	355	22	1.3
Y10—QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	678	205	30	1.1
Y10—QAW	East London and The City HA	919	670	73	1.5
Y11—QA7	Berkshire HA	1,272	27	2	1.9
Y11—QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	903	112	12	2.0
Y11—QAE	East Kent HA	799	128	16	1.2
Y11—QAF	West Kent HA	1,006	237	24	1.5
Y11—QAK	East Surrey HA	342	88	26	1.9
Y11—QAL	West Surrey Health Commission	1,564	313	20	2.2
Y11—QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	1,053	459	44	1.6
Y11—QAN	West Sussex HA	848	188	22	2.1
Y11—QCC	Northamptonshire HA	284	45	16	0.6
Y11—QCE	Oxfordshire HA	1,880	491	26	3.0
Y11—QD1	North and Mid Hampshire HA	454	153	34	1.4
Y11—QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	704	123	17	1.7
Y11—QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,404	310	22	2.2
Y11—QD4	Isle of Wight HA	110	14	13	0.9
Y12—QD5	Somerset HA	426	129	30	1.0
Y12—QD6	South and West Devon HA	854	136	16	1.0
Y12—QD7	Wiltshire HA	448	173	39	0.6
Y12—QD8	Avon Health	2,102	454	22	2.0
Y12—QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	589	185	31	1.1

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1999–2000

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y12—QDW	Dorset HA	1,066	173	16	1.0
Y12—QDX	North and East Devon HA	563	128	23	0.9
Y12—QDY	Gloucestershire Health	474	34	7	0.7

[1] Figures for Q1 2000–01 reflect changes in local recording and reporting arrangements.
[2] Includes estimates.
Note:
Charter Standard: Operations should not be cancelled (for non-clinical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital and that, if this happens, patients should be admitted to hospital within one month of the first cancellation.
Source:
Department of Health form QMPC, Hospital Episode Statistics

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1998–99

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y00	England	56,150	9,380	17	1.1
Y01—QDD	Bradford HA	438	20	5	0.7
Y01—QDE	County Durham HA	347	96	28	0.8
Y01—QDF	East Riding HA	277	43	16	0.5
Y01—QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	112	12	11	0.4
Y01—QDH	Leeds HA	1,223	366	30	1.3
Y01—QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	863	73	8	1.0
Y01—QDK	North Cumbria HA	349	35	10	1.1
Y01—QDM	Northumberland HA	84	3	4	0.2
Y01—QDN	Sunderland HA	260	2	1	0.6
Y01—QDP	Tees HA	651	83	13	0.8
Y01—QDQ	Wakefield HA	546	28	5	1.5
Y01—QDR	North Yorkshire HA	775	76	10	1.1
Y01—QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	574	28	5	1.1
Y02—QCG	Barnsley HA	35	8	23	0.2
Y02—QCH	North Derbyshire Health	307	0	0	1.3
Y02—QCJ	Southern Derbyshire Health	47	0	0	0.1
Y02—QCK	Doncaster HA	124	9	7	0.4
Y02—QCL	Leicester HA	853	84	10	0.9
Y02—QCM	Lincolnshire Health	922	104	11	1.8
Y02—QCN	North Nottinghamshire Health	119	3	3	0.3
Y02—QCP	Nottingham HA	775	0	0	0.9
Y02—QCQ	Rotherham HA	123	21	17	0.7
Y02—QCR	Sheffield Health	710	14	2	0.8
Y02—QDL	South Humber HA	274	1	0	0.7
Y07—QD9	Birmingham HA	2,358	11	0	1.6
Y07—QEA	Coventry Health	1,510	471	38	3.7
Y07—QEC	Dudley HA	163	33	20	0.4
Y07—QED	Herefordshire HA	46	0	0	0.3
Y07—QEE	Sandwell HA	97	22	23	0.5
Y07—QEF	Shropshire HA	325	296	91	0.8
Y07—QEG	Solihull HA	—	—	—	—
Y07—QEH	North Staffordshire HA	498	24	5	1.0
Y07—QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	152	48	32	0.3
Y07—QEK	Walsall HA	114	0	0	0.6
Y07—QEL	Warwickshire HA	219	0	0	0.6
Y07—QEM	Wolverhampton HA	100	10	10	0.3
Y07—QEN	Worcestershire HA	253	44	17	0.6
Y08—QC1	South Lancashire HA	99	5	5	0.4
Y08—QC2	Liverpool HA	734	144	20	1.1
Y08—QC3	Manchester Health	1,600	187	12	0.8
Y08—QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	154	18	12	0.4
Y08—QC5	St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	203	54	28	0.7
Y08—QC6	Salford and Trafford HA	527	99	19	1.0
Y08—QC7	Sefton HA	261	51	20	0.5
Y08—QC8	Stockport HA	323	78	24	1.0
Y08—QC9	West Pennine HA	285	10	4	0.6
Y08—QCT	Bury and Rochdale HA	45	1	2	0.1
Y08—QCV	North Cheshire Health	168	30	18	0.5
Y08—QCW	South Cheshire HA	815	131	21	1.0
Y08—QCX	East Lancashire	456	40	9	0.8

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1998–99

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y08—QCY	North West Lancashire HA	380	15	4	0.4
Y08—QDA	Wigan and Bolton HA	488	136	28	0.9
Y08—QDC	Wirral Health	65	24	37	0.2
Y09—QA6	Bedfordshire HA	457	26	6	1.2
Y09—QAX	North Essex HA	1,000	98	10	1.4
Y09—QAY	South Essex HA	1,260	27	2	2.4
Y09—QCF	Suffolk Health	246	33	13	0.5
Y09—QEP	East and North Hertfordshire HA	592	131	22	1.6
Y09—QEC	West Hertfordshire HA	569	142	25	1.5
Y09—QA9	Cambridgeshire HA	255	55	22	0.3
Y09—QCA	Norfolk HA	1,863	495	27	1.9
Y010—QA2	Hillingdon HA	437	33	8	3.4
Y10—QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	372	127	34	0.4
Y10—QA4	Enfield and Haringey HA	632	106	17	1.9
Y10—QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	594	138	23	1.5
Y10—QAA	Bexley and Greenwich HA	289	9	3	0.9
Y10—QAC	Bromley HA	54	22	34	2.1
Y10—QAD	Croydon HA	433	170	39	2.1
Y10—QAG	Kingston and Richmond HA	437	169	39	3.3
Y10—QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	944	160	17	1.1
Y10—QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	850	224	26	1.4
Y10—QAP	Barking and Havering HA	834	73	9	2.6
Y10—QAQ	Barnet HA[1]	0	0	0	0.0
Y10—QAR	Brent and Harrow HA[2]	530	141	27	1.3
Y10—QAT	Camden and Islington HA	1,267	336	27	1.0
Y10—QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	683	58	8	1.1
Y10—QAW	East London and The City HA	996	359	36	1.6
Y11—QA7	Berkshire HA	1,019	17	2	1.6
Y11—QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	640	75	12	1.5
Y11—QAE	East Kent HA	432	101	23	0.7
Y11—QAF	West Kent HA	1,006	248	25	1.5
Y11—QAK	East Surrey HA	794	143	18	3.2
Y11—QAL	West Surrey Health Commission	1,192	236	20	1.7
Y11—QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	1,148	403	35	1.9
Y11—QAN	West Sussex HA	664	101	15	1.2
Y11—QCC	Northamptonshire HA	431	100	23	0.8
Y11—QCE	Oxfordshire HA	1,849	342	18	3.0
Y11—QD1	North and Mid Hampshire HA	378	112	30	0.9
Y11—QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	340	53	16	0.7
Y11—QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,381	268	19	2.2
Y11—QD4	Isle of Wight HA	124	8	6	1.0
Y12—QD5	Somerset HA	335	52	16	0.7
Y12—QD6	South and West Devon HA	719	42	6	0.9
Y12—QD7	Wiltshire HA	664	286	43	0.9
Y12—QD8	Avon Health	1,897	235	12	1.7
Y12—QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	229	47	21	0.5
Y12—QDW	Dorset HA	948	125	13	1.0
Y12—QDX	North and East Devon HA	389	55	14	0.6
Y12—QDY	Gloucestershire Health	465	8	2	0.7

[1] Figures for Q1 2000–01 reflect changes in local recording and reporting arrangements.
[2] Includes estimates.

Note:
Charter Standard: Operations should not be cancelled (for non-clinical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital and that, if this happens, patients should be admitted to hospital within one month of the first cancellation.

Source:
Department of Health form QMPC, Hospital Episode Statistics

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1997–98

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y00	England	50,505	7,250	14	1.0
Y01—QDD	Bradford HA	749	40	5	1.2
Y01—QDE	County Durham HA	169	3	2	0.4
Y01—QDF	East Riding HA	260	33	13	0.5
Y01—QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	90	9	10	0.3

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1997–98

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y01—QDH	Leeds HA	1,364	372	27	1.5
Y01—QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	987	62	6	0.9
Y01—QDK	North Cumbria HA	243	23	9	0.8
Y01—QDM	Northumberland HA	52	3	6	0.3
Y01—QDN	Sunderland HA	202	0	0	0.5
Y01—QDP	Tees HA	394	45	11	0.5
Y01—QDQ	Wakefield HA	896	128	14	2.7
Y01—QDR	North Yorkshire HA	539	60	11	0.8
Y01—QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	479	26	5	1.0
Y02—QCG	Barnsley HA	70	8	11	0.4
Y02—QCH	North Derbyshire Health	348	0	0	1.7
Y02—QCJ	Southern Derbyshire Health	77	0	0	0.2
Y02—QCK	Doncaster HA	291	19	7	0.9
Y02—QCL	Leicester HA	666	38	5	0.9
Y02—QCM	Lincolnshire Health	646	21	3	1.4
Y02—QCN	North Nottinghamshire Health	118	0	0	0.4
Y02—QCP	Nottingham HA	1,188	0	0	1.7
Y02—QCQ	Rotherham HA	97	15	15	0.6
Y02—QCR	Sheffield Health	427	16	4	0.5
Y02—QDL	South Humber HA	193	0	0	0.6
Y07—QD9	Birmingham HA	1,973	19	1	1.5
Y07—QEA	Coventry Health	961	297	31	2.8
Y07—QEC	Dudley HA	172	39	23	0.5
Y07—QED	Herefordshire HA	86	0	0	0.6
Y07—QEE	Sandwell HA	136	47	35	0.8
Y07—QEF	Shropshire HA	409	147	36	1.1
Y07—QEG	Solihull HA	—	—	—	—
Y07—QEH	North Staffordshire HA	395	100	25	0.8
Y07—QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	23	15	65	0.0
Y07—QEK	Walsall HA	103	0	0	0.5
Y07—QEL	Warwickshire HA	211	10	5	0.5
Y07—QEM	Wolverhampton HA	97	18	19	0.3
Y07—QEN	Worcestershire HA	242	44	18	0.6
Y08—QC1	South Lancashire HA	89	2	2	0.4
Y08—QC2	Liverpool HA	949	136	15	1.4
Y08—QC3	Manchester Health	1,404	267	19	0.7
Y08—QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	135	8	6	0.3
Y08—QC5	St. Helen's and Knowsley HA	92	7	8	0.3
Y08—QC6	Salford and Trafford HA	539	69	13	1.0
Y08—QC7	Sefton HA	248	24	10	0.5
Y08—QC8	Stockport HA	487	91	19	1.6
Y08—QC9	West Pennine HA	302	2	1	0.7
Y08—QCT	Bury and Rochdale HA	99	0	0	0.3
Y08—QCV	North Cheshire Health	287	17	6	1.0
Y08—QCW	South Cheshire HA	302	69	23	0.6
Y08—QCX	East Lancashire	351	29	8	0.7
Y08—QCY	North West Lancashire HA	478	0	0	0.5
Y08—QDA	Wigan and Bolton HA	322	35	11	0.6
Y08—QDC	Wirral Health	108	55	51	0.3
Y09—QA6	Bedfordshire HA	347	67	19	1.1
Y09—QAX	North Essex HA	700	78	11	1.1
Y09—QAY	South Essex HA	767	25	3	1.7
Y09—QCF	Suffolk Health	169	38	22	0.4
Y09—QEP	East and North Hertfordshire HA	624	117	19	1.9
Y09—QEC	West Hertfordshire HA	426	112	26	1.0
Y09—QA9	Cambridgeshire HA	142	11	8	0.2
Y09—QCA	Norfolk HA	1,376	277	20	1.4
Y010—QA2	Hillingdon HA	698	55	8	2.8
Y10—QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	314	100	32	0.4
Y10—QA4	Enfield and Haringey HA	633	156	25	1.9
Y10—QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	337	79	23	0.9
Y10—QAA	Bexley and Greenwich HA	316	5	2	1.1
Y10—QAC	Bromley HA	155	0	0	0.7
Y10—QAD	Croydon HA	544	121	22	2.6
Y10—QAG	Kingston and Richmond HA	182	43	24	2.2
Y10—QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	1,213	190	16	1.5
Y10—QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	887	335	38	1.8
Y10—QAP	Barking and Havering HA	691	81	12	2.4
Y10—QAQ	Barnet HA[1]	24	1	4	0.2
Y10—QAR	Brent and Harrow HA[2]	363	138	38	1.0
Y10—QAT	Camden and Islington HA	1,637	327	20	1.3
Y10—QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	580	61	11	0.9

Cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons, health authorities in England, 1997–98

NHS Region/OrgID	Name	Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the last year	Number of patients not admitted within one month of last minute cancellation	Percentage of patients not admitted within one month	Last minute cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions
Y10—QAW	East London and The City HA	786	187	24	1.3
Y11—QA7	Berkshire HA	930	107	12	1.7
Y11—QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	897	82	9	2.1
Y11—QAE	East Kent HA	355	17	5	0.6
Y11—QAF	West Kent HA	715	85	12	1.1
Y11—QAK	East Surrey HA	524	119	23	2.3
Y11—QAL	West Surrey Health Commission	1,576	311	20	2.3
Y11—QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	644	103	16	1.1
Y11—QAN	West Sussex HA	693	118	17	1.3
Y11—QCC	Northamptonshire HA	225	60	27	0.5
Y11—QCE	Oxfordshire HA	1,957	388	20	3.3
Y11—QD1	North and Mid Hampshire HA	194	23	12	0.8
Y11—QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	418	18	4	0.9
Y11—QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,345	236	18	2.2
Y11—QD4	Isle of Wight HA	129	4	3	1.1
Y12—QD5	Somerset HA	272	50	18	0.7
Y12—QD6	South and West Devon HA	524	13	2	0.7
Y12—QD7	Wiltshire HA	413	129	31	0.8
Y12—QD8	Avon Health	1,364	155	11	1.3
Y12—QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	282	67	24	0.8
Y12—QDW	Dorset HA	802	32	4	0.9
Y12—QDX	North and East Devon HA	316	46	15	0.5
Y12—QDY	Gloucestershire Health	474	15	3	0.8

[1] Figures for Q1 2000–01 reflect changes in local recording and reporting arrangements.
[2] Includes estimates.

Note:
Charter Standard: Operations should not be cancelled (for non-clinical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital and that, if this happens, patients should be admitted to hospital within one month of the first cancellation.

Source:
Department of Health form QMPC, Hospital Episode Statistics

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled or delayed in each of the last 12 months in each health authority in England. [46994]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled more than one day before the due date, broken down by health authority in the last 12 months. [47545]

Mr. Hutton: Copies of quarterly statistics on cancelled operations by health authority are available in the Library. The publication gives the number of operations cancelled (for non-medical reasons) on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of the operation.

Treatment Costs

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average gross cost in pounds per course of treatment in England for *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in 2000–01, [44289]

Mr. Hutton: The costs of courses of treatments for adults and children are not routinely recorded at national level.

The NHS records different elements of care in different ways. Inpatient and day case treatments are counted using Finished Consultant Episodes. In 2000–01, the average costs for an Inpatient Episode and a Day Case Episode are £1,188 and £386 respectively.

Outpatient attendances are reported separately and reported on a cost per attendance basis. In 2000–01, the average cost per attendance, across all specialties was £78. It is not possible from current data to split these costs between adults and children.

The NHS records activity and costs at a more detailed level than the aggregate costs shown above. The average unit costs of individual treatments, procedures and types of appointments etc. for each NHS provider are collected annually. From this data national average unit costs are produced and published annually. This detailed cost and activity data is published in the Reference Costs publication and can be combined in various combinations to reflect the course of treatment for individual conditions. These costs do not include associated costs incurred in general practice.

Full details of these unit costs for 2000–01 can be found in the Reference Costs 2001 publication located in the Library. This information is also made more widely available through the Department's Internet site at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm.

Food Supplements

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed EU Directive on Foods and Supplements on the ability of patients who choose to treat themselves to continue to do so; and if he will make a statement. [44271]

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Yvette Cooper: The proposed Directive would establish lists of permitted vitamin and mineral sources and a framework for setting maximum permitted levels. The lists would remain open for seven years pending safety assessments for additional substances, and individual maximum permitted levels have not yet been set. The Directive would not immediately outlaw any products that are currently on the market in the United Kingdom; in the longer term its impact would depend on future developments on additions to the lists and setting of maximum levels.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to take to implement the EU Directive on Food Supplements; what impact the Directive will have on the continued availability of products that can currently be used; and if he will make a statement. [44288]

Yvette Cooper: The Government intend to implement the proposed EU Directive as agreed, taking full advantage of the opportunity we have secured for Member States to allow continued sale for up to seven years of products containing vitamin and mineral sources not on the permitted lists. The Food Standards Agency is responsible for preparing implementing legislation and will be consulting widely on draft Regulations.

The impact of the Directive on the continued availability of products currently on the market would depend on future developments on maximum limits and lists of permitted nutrients. We are firmly committed to the view that, in the interests of consumer choice, the law should allow food supplements which are safe and properly labelled to be freely marketed.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the EU Directive on Food Supplements; and if he will make a statement. [44270]

Yvette Cooper: Several letters and telephone calls have been received recently from industry, consumers and health practitioners such as nutrition therapists. Broadly, these have expressed concerns over the potential for the Directive on food supplements to restrict the availability of some vitamin and mineral supplements, especially those which contain high doses of individual nutrients.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public service agreements his Department *(a)* passed and *(b)* failed to meet in each year since 1999; and if he will make a statement. [44309]

Mr. Hutton: Information about progress on public service agreements targets has been published in the department's Departmental Reports for 2000 and 2001. Further details will be published in the next Departmental Report, due in spring 2002.

Work Loads

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates on the average lifetime workload of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* hospital doctors and *(c)* nurses. [44282]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not currently hold this kind of data. The NHS workforce censuses do identify individuals, and in theory it is possible to track doctors through their working life over time. However, this data source has only existed since 1987, and does not provide enough data to allow us to analyse doctors' whole careers.

This type of analysis may be possible in the future. The Electronic Staff Record, which is anticipated to be fully operational from early 2005, should enable more direct analyses of flows of staff into and out of the NHS. The Department is investigating the practicality of this.

The Department is aware of the importance of participation rates and lifetime working patterns to inform workforce planning. It uses labour force survey data and reviews labour market research to estimate average wastage rates from the qualified workforce. The average wastage rate reveals how many people we might expect to lose from the workforce each year, before we add in the new qualifiers.

Health Ladder Programme

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future arrangements for the Health Ladder programme as it affects Waltham Forest; and if he will make a statement. [45181]

Mr. Hutton: From 1 April 2002, accountability for the SRB Health Ladder Scheme in Redbridge and Waltham Forest will transfer from Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority to the North East London Strategic health authority.

The scheme's management team will be transferred to the North East London NHS Workforce Confederation.

The team will continue to be based locally in Becketts House in Ilford and the work will continue to be overseen by a local Partnership Board.

Lou Gehrig's Disease

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom by nation and region, are diagnosed as having Lou Gehrig's disease; and what percentage of these are veterans of the Gulf War in the last year for which figures are available. [23207]

Jacqui Smith *[pursuant to her reply, 14 January 2002, c. 65–66]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect.

Lou Gehrig's disease is classified as Motor Neurone Disease (MND) in this country and there are between 5,000 and 6,000 sufferers of MND in the UK. Worldwide, the annual incidence of MND is estimated to be 1.5 new cases per 100,000 people. To date, the Ministry of Defence is aware of four veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict who have been diagnosed with motor neurone disease, three of whom have died. The table shows the hospital admission figures for motor neurone disease in 2000–2001.

Admissions for motor neurone disease by region of residence Nhs Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Number
Northern and Yorkshire Regional Office	396
Trent Regional Office	330
West Midlands Regional Office	169

Admissions for motor neurone disease by region of residence Nhs Hospitals, England 2000–01

	Number
North West Regional Office	320
Eastern Regional Office	347
London Regional Office	269
South East Regional Office	359
South West Regional Office	295
England(NOS)	1
Scotland	2
Wales	16
Foreign	6
Not known	4
Total	2,514

Hospitals (Shropshire)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the specialties provided at *(a)* the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and *(b)* the Princess Royal Hospital, Telford. [45733]

Yvette Cooper: The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital provides the following inpatient specialties:

General Surgery
Urology
Trauma and Orthopaedics
ENT
Ophthalmology
Oral Surgery
Anaesthetics
General Medicine
Gastroenterology
Haematology (Clinical)
Cardiology
Dermatology
Medical Oncology
Neurology
Paediatrics
Obstetrics for patients using a hospital bed or delivery facilities
Gynaecology
General Practice with Maternity Function
Radiotherapy.

The Princess Royal Hospital provides the following in-patient specialties:

General Surgery
Urology
Trauma and Orthopaedics
ENT
Ophthalmology
Oral Surgery
Plastic Surgery
Anaesthetics
Pain Management
General Medicine
Haematology (Clinical)
Dermatology
Neurology
Paediatrics
Gynaecology

Note:
The specialties were present for the year 2000–01. Specialties recorded for fewer than six in-patient episodes have been omitted.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultants, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* nurses there are at (i) the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and (ii) the Princess Royal Hospital, Telford. [45734]

Yvette Cooper: The information is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Medical and dental staff and nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed by the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust and the Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust as at 30 September 2001

	Headcount
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust	
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1,000
of which:	
Qualified	930
Medical and dental staff	160
of which:	
Consultants	100
Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust	
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	480
of which:	
Qualified	420
Medical and dental staff	140
of which:	
Consultants	40

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.

Sources:
1. Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
2. Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

Air Pollution

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the threat to human health from emissions of *(a)* benzene and *(b)* 1,3 butadiene, *(c)* particulates (i) PM10 and (ii) PM2.5, *(d)* carbon monoxide, *(e)* sulphur dioxide and *(f)* oxides of nitrogen from road transport; and if he will make a statement. [45947]

Yvette Cooper: The Department of Health's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) and its predecessor the Advisory Group on the Medical Aspects of Air Pollution has collated information and written subsequent reports on:

Oxides of Nitrogen

Sulphur Dioxide, Acid Aerosols and Particulates

Health Effects of Exposures to Mixtures of Air Pollutants

Non-Biological Particles and Health

Asthma and Outdoor Air Pollution

Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the United Kingdom (this report covers particles, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone and carbon monoxide)

Long-term Effects of Particles on Mortality.

COMEAP has also written Handbook on Air Pollution and Health. Details of these publications are available from the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/airpolh.htm.

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) Committee, the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards (EPAQS), which has a joint DH/DEFRA Secretariat, has also written reports on:

Benzene

1, 3-Butadiene Particulates (2 reports, the latest including $PM_{2.5}$ as well as PM_{10})

Carbon Monoxide

Sulphur Dioxide

Nitrogen Dioxide.

These reports cover the effects of health of each of the substances and further details about each report can be found on DEFRA's website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality/index.htm.

These reports provide support for the objectives in The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These objectives aim to reduce levels of these pollutants from all sources, including road transport.

Health Services (Barnet)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the demands on health services in *(a)* Barnet and *(b)* Hendon of (i) the growth in population in the last 10 years and (ii) the predicted growth in population over the next 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [45823]

Mr. Hutton: It is anticipated that the overall population of Barnet will grow over the next 15 years by around 12 per cent. (ONS). Barnet Primary Care Trust is currently finalising a health improvement and modernisation plan which sets out principal areas for action over the coming years to improve the health and well being of the people of Barnet. This takes account of the needs of the local population (including population size, deprivation and other determinants of health), as well as national requirements. As well as taking forward plans for NHS modernisation, key priority area for action have identified as:

Smoking

Health development and community development

Coronary heart disease and stroke

Cancer

Diabetes

Children

Accidents.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of people in *(a)* Barnet and *(b)* Hendon who are not registered with a GP; and if he will make a statement. [45826]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Edgware Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards the new hospital development at Edgware. [45821]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 699.

Nurse Training

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurse training organisations were operating the new model of nurse education and training outlined in the NHS Plan by Q3 2001–02. [46283]

Mr. Hutton: A total of 54 higher education institutions had been approved by the former English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) to deliver the new pre-registration nursing programmes at diploma and/or degree level—equating to over 95 per cent. of existing organisations.

Health Inequalities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what national targets have been developed by stakeholders to narrow the health gap *(a)* in childhood and *(b)* throughout life between socio-economic groups. [46292]

Yvette Cooper: Following the comment made in the NHS Plan, the two national health inequalities targets were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in February 2001, and are as follows:

(a) Starting with children under one year, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent. the gap in mortality between manual groups and the population as a whole.

(b) Starting with health authorities, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent. the gap between the fifth of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole

Negligence Compensation

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regional health authority, the compensation payments paid to members of the general public in response to claims of negligence upheld against the authority in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [46287]

Ms Blears: Regional health authorities were abolished in 1996 by the Health Authorities Act 1995. It is not therefore possible to break down figures relating to clinical negligence by regional health authority.

Overall figures for expenditure on clinical negligence are available for the following years, as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	235
1997–98	144
1998–99	221
1999–2000	373

Note:
The figure for the year 2000–2001 is not yet available.

The figures are taken from the National Audit Summarised Accounts for health authorities, NHS trusts and NHS Litigation Authority. Changes to accounting policies mean that these amounts are not directly comparable.

These figures represent all expenditure for clinical negligence which will include compensation payments and legal expenses. Figures relating specifically to compensation payments for successful clinical negligence claims against NHS bodies are not available.

Fertility Treatment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts provided IVF treatment on the NHS as of 1 March; how many patients have received IVF treatment in the last year; how many patients he expects to be provided with IVF treatment in the next year; and if he will make a statement. [46030]

Yvette Cooper: A baseline survey of national health service infertility provision was carried out by the Department in 1999. The report on "Survey of NHS Infertility Services 1997–98" has been published and copies are available in the Library. Information about the number of patients who have received IVF treatment in the last year will be made available shortly by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Cancer

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to improve the cervical cancer screening programme. [45778]

Yvette Cooper: The Government are currently piloting new technologies in order to improve the cervical screening programme. These are Liquid Based Cytology (LBC) and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) testing. If evaluation proves that the pilots are successful, and if recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, they will be introduced across the NHS.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra major pieces of diagnostic equipment have been purchased under the Cancer Plan. [45776]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan provided details of diagnostic equipment to be purchased for the NHS. This included 88 MRI scanners, 200 CT scanners and over 300 items of breast screening equipment.

Programmes to deliver this essential equipment are well under way. By March 2002, 28 new MRI scanners, 81 CT scanners and almost all of the breast screening equipment had been delivered to the NHS. The remaining equipment is due for delivery by 2004.

As well as investment in diagnostic radiology equipment, the NHS Cancer Plan makes a commitment to providing £15 million for the modernisation of 23 pathology services.

Dentistry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist for NHS dentists concerning the removal of wisdom teeth. [46178]

Ms Blears: In March 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued the following guidance.

1.1 The routine practice of prophylactic removal of pathology-free impacted third molars should be discontinued in the NHS.

1.2 The standard routine programme of dental care by dental practitioners and/or paraprofessional staff, need be no different, in general, for pathology free impacted third molars (those requiring no additional investigations or procedures).

1.3 Surgical removal of impacted third molars should be limited to patients with evidence of pathology. Such pathology includes unrestorable caries, non-treatable pulpal and/or periapical pathology, cellulitis, abcess and osteomyelitis, internal/external resorption of the tooth or adjacent teeth, fracture of tooth, disease of follicle including cyst/tumour, tooth/teeth impeding surgery or reconstructive jaw surgery, and when a tooth is involved in or within the field of tumour resection.

1.4 Specific attention is drawn to plaque formation and pericoronitis. Plaque formation is a risk factor but is not in itself an indication for surgery. The degree to which the severity or recurrence rate of pericoronitis should influence the decision for surgical removal of a third molar remains unclear. The evidence suggests that a first episode of pericoronitis, unless particularly severe, should not be considered an indication for surgery. Second or subsequent episodes should be considered the appropriate indication for surgery.

BSE

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* operation and *(b)* effectiveness of the Beef Assurance Scheme in the prevention of BSE infected cattle entering the food chain; and what proportion of the cattle slaughtered for human consumption in the last year for which figures are available were produced under the Beef Assurance Scheme. [46382]

Yvette Cooper: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that while normally animals over 30 months are not permitted to enter the food chain under the Beef Assurance Scheme (BAS) certain cattle exceptionally may do so up to the age of 42 months. Under the scheme, a number of stringent conditions apply, for example that cattle must be drawn entirely from specialist grass reared beef herds known not to have consumed mammalian meat and bone meal. In addition, in common with other cattle, certain specified risk material where any BSE infectivity is thought likely to reside, must also be removed. There have been no clinical cases of BSE in bona fide BAS herds.

From 1 January 2001, EU rules were introduced to require all cattle over 30 months of age—including those registered under the BAS—to be tested for BSE and only enter the food chain if found negative. The agency has advised that 20 BAS cattle entered the human food chain last year without having been tested in this way. Prior to 2001, these animals were regarded as sufficiently low-risk to enter the human food chain without testing.

There are currently 66 BAS herds in Great Britain. The total number of BAS cattle is 4,000, out of a total UK herd of 5.3 million. Last year 181 cattle were slaughtered for human consumption under the scheme.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47706]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Milburn) gave the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 756W-59W).

Prescribing Rate

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average general prescribing rate for all practices was in 2001–02. [47290]

Ms Blears: The average number of prescription items per head of population dispensed in the community in England in the period October 2000 to September 2001 was 11.5.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the PSA target to improve continuity of care given to children looked after by local authorities by reducing to no more than 18 per cent. in all authorities the proportion of such children who leave three or more placements in one year by 2001 was achieved; [47284]

(2) if the PSA target to increase to at least 50 per cent. by 2001 the proportions of children leaving care aged 16 or above with nine GCSE or GNVQ qualifications was met; [47282]

(3) if the PSA target to increase to at least 75 per cent. by 2003 the proportion of children leaving care aged 16 or above with a GCSE or GNVQ qualification will be met. [47283]

Jacqui Smith: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to reduce the national average emergency psychiatric re-admission rate by two percentage points by 2002 will be met. [47286]

Jacqui Smith: The most recent assessment made on whether the PSA target to reduce the national average emergency psychiatric re-admission rate by two percentage points by 2002 will be met is shown in the table. This indicates that the target was achieved for the third quarter of 2001–02 but that the current forecast is for the average for the whole year to be 0.4 percentage points above the target reduction.

Number of emergency psychiatric re-admissions of patients aged 16 to 64 within 90 days of discharge from the care of a psychiatric specialist as a percentage of such discharges

	Number of re-admissions within 90 days	*Total number of discharges*	*Re-admission rate (percentage)*
Total			
1998–99	15,461	113,585	13.60
1999–2000	14,875	114,616	13.00
2000–01	14,068	110,312	12.80
Q3			
QA 2001–02[1]	3,214	26,119	12.3
FOT 2001–02[2]	13,377	105,735	12.7

[1] Actual position for Q3 2001–02 (relates to quarter 3 only).
[2] Forecast outturn position for 2001–02 taken at Q3 (relates to whole year).
Source:
Common Information Core, (now known as Service and Financial Framework Return—SaFFR).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the PSA target for the appointment of new practice nurses by 2002 will be met on time; [47296]

(2) if the PSA target for the improvement of the quality of primary care premises targeted towards areas of deprivation will be met on time; [47295]

(3) if the PSA target of a national average annual increase of 1 per cent. whole-time equivalent GPs by 2002 will be met on time. [47297]

Mr. Hutton: We are on track to achieve each of these targets.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to review at least 60 per cent. of services will be met. [47279]

Jacqui Smith: Information about progress on public service agreement targets, including Better Quality Services, will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental report.

PFI Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated average cost of preparing and submitting tenders for PFI projects in his Department; and how much he expects to spend reimbursing such costs under the PFI hospital building programme to be completed by 2010. [47791]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the costs to the private sector of preparing and submitting tenders is not collected. There has been no change in policy regarding the reimbursement of bid costs. At present, the winning contractor recovers their bid costs as part of the overall tender price. Losing bidders are not reimbursed.

Following a review of the PFI process, with the objective of speeding up and simplifying the PFI process, two changes were announced on 18 March. Firstly, if Trusts require further clarification after Best and Final Offers (BAFOs) have been submitted, and Trusts want these clarifications to be undertaken by both bidders in a competitive environment, then the additional bid costs of both bidders will have to be refunded. Trusts will need to agree how these additional costs will be calculated. The reimbursement only applies to the additional cost of the clarification work done in a competitive situation. The second change is that a budget for bid costs will be set at BAFO stage, within which the winning bidder will have to keep. If their costs to financial close are less, then they keep the difference. If they are greater, the cost must be met by them. The losing bidder will not be entitled to receive anything as by definition they cannot reach financial close.

These changes have been made to incentivise both Trusts and the private sector to reach financial close. As overall costs will be less as a result of these changes, no estimates of cost have been prepared.

Mixed-Sex Wards

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to end the use of mixed sex wards in NHS hospitals in England. [46988]

Ms Blears: Guidance on maintaining privacy and dignity was first issued to the service in 1997 and since then the national health service has been working towards a clear target to eliminate mixed sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of NHS trusts by December 2002.

Testicular Cancer

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement as to what measures are being taken to raise awareness of testicular cancer and the importance of self-checking, with specific reference to men aged under 35 years. [46761]

Yvette Cooper: The consensus among health professionals is that promoting testicular awareness is the most effective way to tackle this disease. The Department contributed to the recent production of Cancer Research UK's leaflet "Testicular Cancer—spot the symptoms". Copies are available in the Library and will soon be available on both Cancer Research UK's and the Department's websites.

Complaints Procedures

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to expedite the procedures for investigating complaints against NHS medical staff who have been suspended. [46824]

Ms Blears: We are currently in the process of considering reforms to the NHS complaints procedure, including the need to ensure that complaints are resolved as quickly as possible. We are also reviewing the current guidance on suspensions to ensure that cases where the clinical performance of a doctor or dentist gives concern will be dealt with quickly in a fair and effective manner.

Hysterectomies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women in England were given hysterectomies in an NHS hospital in the latest year for which figures are available. [46698]

Yvette Cooper: The following information is extracted from the Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to, and treated in, NHS hospitals in England.

	Number of hysterectomy operations
1999–2000	53,132
2000–01	[1]47,053

[1] Provisional. The figure for 2000–01 has not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data. The final figure, therefore, may be higher.

NHS Appointments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many appointments to positions and bodies within the NHS *(a)* he and *(b)* the NHS Appointments Commission have made since the inception of the NHS Appointments Commission; [46723]

(2) how many people who have been appointed to a position within the NHS by *(a)* himself and *(b)* the NHS Appointments Commission have declared a political interest, broken down by political parties; and what proportion of the total number of appointees this represents for each political party between (i) 2 May 1997 and 31 March 2001 and (ii) 1 April 2001 and the latest available date. [46724]

Ms Blears: Since its establishment in April 2001, the National Health Service Appointments Commission has made 1,469 executive appointments to the boards of national health service trusts, primary care trusts, health authorities and strategic health authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made 421 appointments to these boards between 1 April and 2 July. This covered the period where the Commission had been formally established, but when the regional commissioners had not been appointed.

Information on the political activity of candidates appointed since 2 May 1997 is given in the tables.

Table 1: Secretary of State for Health appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities from 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2001

Political party	*Appointees*	*Proportion of total appointments (percentage)*
Conservative	286	5.2
Independent	51	0.9
Labour	1,393	25.1
Liberal Democrat	218	3.9
Other	31	0.6
Total declaring political interest	1,979	35.7
Not Politically active	3,564	64.3
Total Appointments for Period	5,543	100.0

Table 2: Secretary of State for Health appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities from 1 April 2001 to 2 July 2001

Political party	*Appointees*	*Proportion of total appointments (percentage)*
Conservative	19	4.5
Independent	3	0.7
Labour	106	25.2
Liberal Democrat	12	2.9
Other	3	0.7
Total declaring political interest	143	33.9
Not politically active	278	66.1
Total appointments for period	421	100.0

Table 3: Appointments Commission appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts, health authorities, strategic health authorities and care trusts from 2 July 2001 to 4 April 2002

Political party	*Appointees*	*Proportion of total appointments (percentage)*
Conservative	66	4.5
Independent	14	1.0
Labour	389	26.5
Liberal Democrat	65	4.4
Other	7	0.5
Total declaring political interest	541	36.8
Not politically active	928	63.2
Total appointments for period	1,469	100.0

Tamoxifen

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost per annum of Tamoxifen for women who do not have breast cancer but are considered to be at high risk. [46722]

Yvette Cooper: Tamoxifen is licensed for the treatment of breast cancer and the treatment of anovulatory infertility.

Tamoxifen is not licensed for the prevention of breast cancer in women who do not have breast cancer. A large international research trial is currently investigating whether tamoxifen can prevent cancer in healthy women who are considered to be at high risk. When the full trial results are published we will consider what action may be appropriate and estimate the cost implications.

Intensive Care Baby Incubators

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care baby incubators are available for use in London NHS hospitals. [46687]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the availability of intensive care incubators are not collected centrally.

The Department does however have data on the number of neonatal intensive care cots available. There are 146 intensive care cots available at London NHS hospitals.

The Department also has data on the number of cots designated for providing lesser dependency care.

There are 82 High Dependency Cots, 333 Special Care Baby cots and 38 Transitional Care Cots.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time is that it took an ambulance to reach an emergency after the initial 999 call is made in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London over the last 12 months. [46752]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally in this format.

Information about ambulance response times is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy of the Bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in each of the last 12 months had their first out-patient appointment after waiting *(a)* less than four, *(b)* less than eight, *(c)* less than 12, *(d)* less than 24 and *(e)* more than 24 weeks; [46712]

(2) how many people were waiting 13 weeks or more for an out-patient appointment in England in each of the most recent three quarters; [46696]

(3) how many patients since 1997 have waited more than 26 weeks for their first out-patient appointment following GP referral; [46714]

(4) how many patients were waiting more than 13 weeks for their first out-patient appointment following GP referral in each of the last 12 months; [46702]

(5) how many patients in each of the last six years had their first out-patient appointment after waiting *(a)* less than four, *(b)* less than eight, *(c)* less than 12, *(d)* less than 24 and *(e)* more than 24 weeks. [46711]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Table 1 shows the number of patients who had first outpatient appointments (following referral by a GP) at NHS trusts in England, broken down by the available waiting time bands. This information is published on a quarterly basis.

Table 2 shows the number of patients referred by general practitioners who were on a waiting list for their first outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, and had been waiting over 13 weeks at that time. This information is also published on a quarterly basis.

Table 1: Number of patients who had a first outpatient appointment in the quarter following GP referral, by time waited: England (NHS trust based)

		Length of wait from GP written referral request to first outpatient appointment (weeks)			
Year	*Quarter*	*0 to <4*	*4 to <13*	*13 to <26*	*26 plus*
1996–97	1	733,000	854,000	234,000	50,000
1996–97	2	742,000	845,000	265,000	42,000
1996–97	3	773,000	823,000	273,000	53,000
1996–97	4	757,000	806,000	262,000	55,000
1997–98	1	743,000	867,000	234,000	61,000
1997–98	2	727,000	842,000	273,000	55,000
1997–98	3	747,000	790,000	284,000	67,000
1997–98	4	758,000	800,000	284,000	78,000
1998–99	1	690,000	809,000	256,000	72,000
1998–99	2	687,000	816,000	304,000	75,000
1998–99	3	696,000	780,000	329,000	89,000
1998–99	4	704,000	787,000	333,000	106,000
1999–2000	1	647,000	792,000	294,000	105,000
1999–2000	2	664,000	788,000	347,000	109,000
1999–2000	3	687,000	763,000	360,000	126,000
1999–2000	4	693,000	807,000	381,000	147,000
2000–01	1	658,000	823,000	293,000	111,000
2000–01	2	660,000	822,000	358,000	110,000
2000–01	3	695,000	818,000	372,000	120,000
2000–01	4	721,000	873,000	382,000	123,000
2001–02	1	675,000	850,000	289,000	81,000
2001–02	2	678,000	850,000	348,000	85,000
2001–02	3	718,000	840,000	385,000	104,000

Source: Department of Health form QM08

Table 2: Number of patients referred by GPs for first outpatient appointments who had been waiting over 13 weeks at end of quarter: England (NHS trust based)

Quarter ending	*Patients waiting over 13 weeks*
March 2001	284,000
June 2001	360,000
September 2001	400,000
December 2001	361,000

Source: Department of Health form QM08

NHS Appointments Commission

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the members of the NHS Appointments Commission and their qualifications; and if he will make a statement on the appointment process for the membership of the Commission; [46718]

(2) how many members of the NHS Appointments Commission have declared themselves to have been politically active in the last five years; and in which political parties they have been active. [46717]

Ms Blears: Details of the chair and members of National Health Service Appointments Commission were given in press releases issued at the time of their appointment. Copies are available in the Library. The chair and all the commissioners declared in their applications that they had not undertaken any political activity in the last five years.

The appointments process was carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The posts were advertised nationally, and candidates interviewed by properly constituted panels, which included independent members.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls were made to the Greater London Ambulance Service between 20 December 2001 and 3 January 2002 for which it was decided an ambulance was not necessary; and what proportion of calls over this period such calls represented. [46756]

Ms Blears: The London Ambulance Service operates a system of priority despatch, under which all calls are categorised according to their clinical priority. Under this system 6,041 calls received between 20 December 2001 and 3 January 2002 were determined to fall into the categories of neither serious nor life-threatening. This represented 20 per cent. of the total workload for that period.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of patients were seen by a doctor or consultant within one hour of their arrival at accident and emergency in *(a)* each of the last six years and *(b)* 2002 to the latest available date. [46728]

Ms Blears: This information requested is not collected centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the latest quarter figures for accident and emergency waiting times. [47546]

Ms Blears: The number of patients admitted through accident and emergency departments for quarter 4 will be released in the "Quarterly Review", which will be pre-announced shortly. The information is collected on the form "Your guide to the NHS". Latest published figures are for quarter 3 and this is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average accident and emergency department waiting times were *(a)* in England, *(b)* in each region and *(c)* in each NHS trust in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [44056]

Ms Blears: The average waiting time in accident and emergency units is not collected centrally.

NHS Re-admissions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS re-admissions there were within *(a)* one, *(b)* three, *(c)* six, *(d)* eight and *(e)* 12 months of previous treatment in the last quarter of (i) 2001 and (ii) 1997. [46704]

Ms Blears: This information requested is not held centrally.

Brain Cancers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is *(a)* underway and *(b)* planned to commence this year to develop new and more effective chemotherapy drugs for the treatment of serious brain cancers. [46751]

Yvette Cooper: A worldwide review of over 3,000 patients, conducted by the Medical Research Council Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) and published in *The Lancet* on 23 March 2002 has found that chemotherapy in addition to surgery and radiotherapy may benefit adult patients with certain types of brain tumour.

Previously individual trials that assessed the efficacy of giving chemotherapy as well as surgery and radiotherapy to adults with high grade glioma, and spanned 30 years, did not include enough patients to give clear results. So leading researchers from around the world formed the Glioma Meta-analysis Trialists' Group and provided their original research from 12 trials to the CTU for re-analysis.

The MRC Clinical Trials Unit is currently conducting a Randomised trial of adjuvant PVC (procarbazine, lomustine, and vincristine) chemotherapy for anaplastic oligodendroglioma, which is looking at whether adjuvant chemotherapy following surgery and radiotherapy can provide longer and better survival than surgery and radiotherapy alone.

We made clear in the NHS Cancer Plan of September 2000 that by 2003 the Government would be investing an additional £20 million each year in the infrastructure for cancer research. Progress in establishing the National Translational Cancer Research Network (NTRAC) and the National Cancer Research Network (NCRN) has been rapid and substantial. NTRAC is focusing on speeding up

the processes for getting scientific breakthroughs from the laboratory bench to the hospital bedside. NCRN is focusing on doubling the number of cancer patients in clinical trials, including trials of new chemotherapy drugs for brain cancer.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of chemotherapy for patients suffering from brain tumours; and the impact of the treatment upon the life expectancy of brain tumour patients. [46747]

Yvette Cooper: First line treatment for brain tumours is usually surgery and/or radiotherapy. For a patient whose tumour recurs or progresses following surgery and radiotherapy, the chemotherapy treatment options are limited because the currently available agents have only a small chance of being effective.

As indicated in the NHS Cancer Plan, the Department of Health and the National Assembly of Wales are currently considering a proposal for referral to National Institute for Clinical Excellence of service guidance for tumours of the brain and central nervous system.

GP Vacancies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress made in GP recruitment in the last 12 months. [46736]

Mr. Hutton: In the past year we have continued to work closely with the profession on measures to boost general practitioner (GP) numbers and make general practice a better place to work. Good progress has been made. During this period we have boosted recruitment by increasing training places; by recruiting from overseas; and by offering cash incentives, additional training and support to new GPs. We have similarly addressed retention through the revised retainer scheme; by developing flexible career options (especially through personal medical services); through further initiatives to reduce bureaucracy; and by improving GPs' working lives with the introduction of a range of family friendly initiatives. The additional resources which we have made available to the NHS are also enabling primary care trusts and others to give better support to GPs by providing better information technology, better buildings and promoting different ways of working.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to wards from accident and emergency departments after arriving in accident and emergency eight or more hours prior to being moved to a ward in the last 12 months. [46703]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Health Care Regulations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps have been taken by his Department to notify medical practitioners who operate exclusively outside the NHS of the requirements of Clause 4(1)(b) of the Private and Voluntary Health Care (England) Regulations 2001, prior to registration packs being sent out to them; [46796]

(2) what consultations his Department had, and with which professional bodies, concerning the requirements of Clause 4(1)(b) of the Private and Voluntary Health Care (England) Regulations 2001; [46795]

(3) what information his Department made available to those covered by Clause 4(1)(b) of the Private and Voluntary Health Care (England) Regulations 2001, *(a)* prior to the Regulations being debated by Parliament and *(b)* prior to their implementation. [46685]

Jacqui Smith: The following organisations were among those consulted by the Department prior to the public consultation on the regulations and national minimum standards for exclusively private medical practitioners:

The Independent Healthcare Association

The British Medical Association

The Independent Doctors Forum

The Network for Private General Practice

Federation of Independent Practitioners

The Royal Colleges

The General Medical Council

The Medicare Group, via the Medicare Centre at Waterloo.

Trade associations for private medical practitioners

The national minimum standards and regulations were developed with the help of an external consultation group comprising users, providers, inspectors, healthcare professionals and specialists. The standards for the different specialties were developed in consultation with appropriate stakeholder organisations, and throughout 2000 and 2001, Dr. Derek Machin, the chair of the BMA group on private practice, assisted in the development of the standards for private medical practitioners.

In early 2001, before the formal consultation period, officials had two meetings with a representative of the Independent Doctors Forum. In July 2001, the regulations and standards were published for a three-month consultation period. The consultation document was also available on the Department's website.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget for the National Care Standards Commission is for 2002–03; and what it is forecast to be over the next three financial years. [47530]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission provisional resource budget is £132.5 million for 2002–03, of which £1.5 million is a capital budget. This includes provision for capital charges and depreciation, and assumes that a proportion of the budget will be derived from fee income.

Decisions on the level of funding for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be made in the light of the work on the 2002 spending review.

Social Care Institute for Excellence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of people who work for the SCIE, *(b)* its budget allocation for 2001–02 and *(c)* the expected budget allocation for the next three years. [48685]

Jacqui Smith: The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) currently have 24 staff in post and the Department made a total resource of £2 million available for 2001–02, of which £1.1 million was a capital budget.

The SCIE budget for 2002–03 is £3.2 million. Decisions on the level of funding for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be made in the light of the work on the 2002 spending review.

Emergency Ambulance Calls

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of the response to 999 ambulance calls received between 10pm and 7am in Barnet was in each of the last three years; how many such calls there were; what estimate he has made of the number of such calls for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [46877]

Ms Blears: Information about the cost of a response for ambulance services is not required to be collected centrally.

In 1999 a total of 6,699 calls were received in Barnet between 10pm and 7am; in 2000 there were 6,663 calls and in 2001, 6,854 calls were received.

The London Ambulance Service would expect to receive approximately 7,000 calls in Barnet between 10pm and 7am in 2002–03.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the link between mental health problems in children and adolescents and suicide/self-harm when they are adults. [47440]

Jacqui Smith: Mental disorder in childhood is a risk factor for mental disorder in adulthood, which itself is a risk factor for suicide and self-harm. The continuities between childhood and adulthood vary according to the nature and severity of the disorder.

Under the leadership of Professor Louis Appleby, National Director for Mental Health, we are developing a coherent national suicide prevention strategy. The strategy will strike a balance between a population approach and a focus on specific high risk/high benefit populations. We recognise that young people are a key "at risk" group and one of the key strategy objectives will be to promote the mental health of children and young people. We plan to publish a draft strategy for wide public consultation later this spring.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers last met Ministers in DfES to discuss co-ordination of children's mental health services with education services. [47441]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers in the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills have many regular meetings and, although Ministers have not met specifically to discuss this topic, child mental health services are raised at many of these meetings. In addition, officials at both Departments' meet frequently to discuss multi-agency mental health services for children.

The Department for Education and Skills will be an important contributor to the development of the mental health module of the Children's National Service Framework. This is a major development and will ensure that co-ordination of child and adolescent mental health services is safeguarded when considering the quality of services.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mental health promotion work is taking place with children and adolescents. [47438]

Jacqui Smith: The promotion of children's mental health and the prevention of mental health problems in childhood are central to many Government programmes.

The Mental Health National Service Framework has set mental health promotion as its first standard. The project group taking this work forward has recently published a "Mental Health Promotion Update" focusing on mental health promotion in schools and for children and young people. Programmes such as sure start are designed to ensure that children get the best possible start in life so that they can thrive and make effective use of opportunities when they start school.

The Department for Education and Skills issued guidance last year specifically addressing mental health promotion in schools, to which this Department contributed. This guidance is designed to increase awareness about children's mental health among teachers and to provide examples of good practice.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost of delivering a world class mental health service for children and adolescents. [47432]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Children, which will include child and adolescent mental health services and the psychological wellbeing of children and young people, will set out service standards to improve the quality of care provided. The framework will take account of studies on the cost of delivering effective services.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the link between mental health problems in children and adolescents and crime. [47439]

Jacqui Smith: The results of a major literature review on antisocial behaviour by young people, commissioned by the Department, was published in 1998 (Rutter, Giller, Hagel—"Antisocial Behaviour by Young People", Cambridge University Press). This looked at international research evidence on antisocial behaviour and covered all the factors relevant to the development of such behaviour in young people, including mental health problems and serious mental disorder. The review clearly illustrated the complex nature of causal relationships in this field and the difficulty of establishing clear links between psychosocial (and other) risk factors and specific behaviours, including criminality.

In addition a report "Psychiatric Morbidity among Young Offenders in England and Wales" was published by the Office for National Statistics in 2000, representing a further analysis of wider survey data on psychiatric morbidity among prisoners originally collected in 1997 on behalf of the Department. The report included a finding that more than nine in 10 of imprisoned young offenders in the survey showed evidence of mental disorder

(assessed in the survey as: personality disorder; psychosis; neurotic disorder; drug dependence; and hazardous drinking).

Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Locum Doctors

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many locum doctors are available, broken down for primary and secondary care, in *(a)* England, *(b)* each NHS region and *(c)* each health authority; [48059]

(2) what arrangements have been made to ensure there are sufficient locum doctors available in each health authority area; and if he will make a statement; [48063]

(3) if he has plans to increase the use of locum doctors from overseas; and if he will make a statement; [48061]

(4) if his Department monitors the availability of sufficient locum doctors to cover each area in England. [48062]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally. It is for NHS trusts locally to determine their need for locums and how they are used. However, the Department will be collecting data on medical and dental locums from September 2002 onwards.

From 1 April 2002 all non-principal general practitioners working in the provision of NHS general medical services are required to be on a health authority/primary care trust supplementary list. From June 2002 we will be collecting information on the number of non-principal general practitioners on health authority/primary care trust supplementary lists as part of the GMS census data.

The NHS Plan set out the Government's intention to increase consultant numbers by 7,500 and GPs by 2,000. We expect increases in the number of permanent staff to help reduce demand for locums.

The Department has advertised in Europe, North America, Australia and the Middle East for consultants and GPs. In general, international recruitment for doctors is generating a good level of interest from good quality overseas candidates. The majority of positions will be for full-time consultants. However, some trusts may wish to employ the consultants in locum positions with a view to employing them in permanent positions. This would provide the consultants with an opportunity to experience working in the UK before settling into a permanent post and also enable trusts to assess the induction processes required for the doctor.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many locum doctors there were *(a)* at the latest available date, *(b)* in 1999, *(c)* in 1997 and *(d)* in 1994. [46740]

Mr. Hutton: The Department stopped collecting data for medical and dental locum numbers in 1996. Data for locum general practitioners are not collected.

Available information is shown in the table.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical and dental locum staff

England at 30 September	*Numbers*
1994	3,040
1996	2,760

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census
Notes:
Figures rounded to the nearest ten.

Locums are either persons working in the temporary absence of a doctor/dentist until their return or someone who fills a temporary post for a period of time or a vacant post until it is filled.

Voluntary Euthanasia

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on voluntary euthanasia. [48021]

Ms Blears: Voluntary euthanasia—the intentional taking of life at the patient's request—is unlawful in the United Kingdom. Anyone alleged to have undertaken it would be open to a charge of murder or manslaughter. Similarly, medical treatment that is either omitted or given to a patient with the specific intention by the health care professional of hastening or inducing death is an illegal act.

The Government have no plans to change the law in this respect.

"Keep Warm, Keep Well"

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the Keep Warm, Keep Well leaflet issued by his Department in the winter of 2001–02. [48014]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of the Keep Warm, Keep Well leaflet issued by the Department in the winter of 2001–02 was £257,353.11.

Diabetes

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients are receiving treatment for diabetes in England and Wales; [47462]

(2) what his Department's projections are for the number of diabetes sufferers in England and Wales in each of the next 10 years; [47463]

(3) what his Department is doing to promote earlier detection of diabetes; [47464]

(4) what his Department's estimate is of the annual cost of care for a diabetic in financial year 2001–02; [47470]

(5) what his Department's budget committed to the treatment of diabetes is in 2001–02; and what it is projected to be for 2002–03. [47469]

Jacqui Smith: There are an estimated 1.3 million people with diagnosed diabetes in England. Incidence is difficult to predict in diabetes, but it has been estimated that this figure will increase by 3 per cent. each year.

Information is not collected on the cost of treating individuals with diabetes. Around 5 per cent. of total NHS resources, and up to 10 per cent. of hospital in-patient resources are used for the care of people with diabetes.

The Diabetes National Service Framework: "Standards", published in December 2001, sets 12 standards in nine areas, including the prevention and detection of diabetes. We have asked the National Screening Committee to assess the benefits and drawbacks of screening for Type 2 diabetes. The Committee has decided that further research, which may require some complex studies, is needed to inform its advice. It will report to the Department of Health in 2005.

Mobile Operating Theatres

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many MASH type mobile operating theatres are *(a)* in use and *(b)* on order; [47459]

(2) what the average cost is of the MASH-type mobile operating theatres being supplied to hospital trusts; [47453]

(3) what guidance has been issued to hospital trusts looking to acquire MASH type mobile operating theatres; [47461]

(4) which hospital trusts are negotiating to acquire MASH type mobile operating theatres. [47460]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect data on how many NHS Trusts are negotiating to acquire mobile operating theatres, or on how many trusts already have them in place. The purchase of mobile operating theatres is a matter for individual NHS trusts to make, in partnership with their commissioners.

Costs for the provision of mobile operating theatres vary according to the type of facility, the costs of securing plumbing and power, and the length of time the facility is likely to be in operation, as well as a range of site-specific conditions. However, the approximate costs are £3,600 a day or £12,000 per week for a "low loader" facility (which can be moved around from day to day) and for Modular kits, which provide a fixed-temporary service, the cost is £1,200 a day or £750,000 as an outright purchase.

Guidance on ventilation in health care premises and operating departments have been issued by NHS Estates. In 1991, NHS Estates issued "Health Building Note 26 on Operating Departments" which covers the planning and design, including space requirements, maintenance, cleaning, energy consumption, engineering and staffing requirements. While the guidance does not refer directly to mobile operating theatres, the standards set out in the guidance applies to all types of operating theatre. Health Technical Memorandum 2025 was issued in 1993 and sets out how the NHS can ensure facilities control and reduce hazards to patients and staff from airborne contaminants, dust and harmful micro-organisms.

Asthma

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to ensure appropriate medication is provided for children suffering from asthma. [47457]

Jacqui Smith: We commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce guidance on inhalers for children under five with chronic asthma. Guidance on that topic was issued in September 2000. Further guidance was commissioned from NICE on the clinical and cost effectiveness of inhalers in older children. This appraisal will be available on the NICE website (www.nice.nhs.uk) from 11 April.

Cancer Patients

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cancer patients have been waiting more than four weeks, broken down by cancer types. [47456]

Yvette Cooper: Standards of a maximum wait of one month from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and one month from urgent GP referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia came into effect at the end of December 2001. Central monitoring of these standards began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published on a quarterly basis. Data collection on waiting times to treatment for other tumour types will be introduced as we roll out the Cancer Plan waiting times targets.

Hospital Re-admission Rates

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the latest quarter figures for hospital re-admission rates for *(a)* all ages and *(b)* those aged over 75. [47543]

Jacqui Smith: Quarterly information on re-admissions is only collected for those aged 75 and over. We currently anticipate that the Quarter 4 (January-March) 2001–02 information will be available late in May.

NHS Leadership Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement of a permanent appointment to the position of Head of the NHS Leadership Centre. [47534]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 850W.

Health Trusts (Security Staff)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if health trusts are given an allocation of their budgets to fund security staff for hospital accident and emergency departments. [47524]

Ms Blears: Security and safety of staff, patients and property in the national health service is of great importance to the Government. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Security is provided in trusts by 'in-house' staff or by private security organisations. The method of provision and level of staffing is a matter for individual trusts dependent on the size of the hospital, the locality, staffing levels and the general configuration of the building.

Guidance on effective management of security in accident and emergency departments was issued by the NHS Executive in 1997 and was an important aspect of the Government strategy when funding the upgrading of A and E departments.

NHS Patients (Overseas Treatment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the policy of his Department is on sending national health service patients for treatment in South Africa; and which health authorities have approached his Department about sending NHS patients for treatment in South Africa. [47455]

Mr. Hutton: Our policy on commissioning health care outside the European Economic Area remains that such commissioning should only take place where exceptional circumstances apply. No health authorities have approached the Department about sending NHS patients for treatment in South Africa.

NHS Beds

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds are available in the NHS. [47734]

Ms Blears: The latest information on the average daily number of available beds for England is on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity

Anti-impotence Drugs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria were used to decide which medical conditions qualify for anti-impotence prescribing; and if he will make a statement. [37637]

Ms Blears: In 1999 we decided to constrain the spend on drug treatments for impotence broadly within the range £12-£14 million a year, the approximate amount that was being spent on these treatments before the first oral treatment became available. The medical conditions conferring eligibility for NHS prescriptions from GPs were those believed to be commonly associated with impotence that we estimated could be met within the spending range (although, in fact, latest figures indicate that annual expenditure on drug treatments for impotence is £25 million). This does not mean that patients suffering from impotence arising from other causes have no access to drug treatment on the NHS. NHS treatment for such patients is available from specialist services where impotence is causing severe distress.

Following a review in 2001, we decided to continue the existing scheme.

Clive Mason

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met Clive Mason of his advisory task force. [40881]

Mr. Hutton: Clive Mason was a member of the NHS task force on Staff Involvement that was announced in January 1998 by the then Secretary of State my right hon. Friend, the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The task force was set up to report on how front-line health service staff worked with local managers to improve services. Following the production of their report in July 1999 the task force was disbanded. According to records Clive Mason has not met with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Boarding Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to respond to the representations made in October 2001 by the Independent Schools Council about the charges proposed for the welfare inspections of boarding schools. [41944]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the Independent Schools Council on 1 March 2002. Department of Health officials have also had discussions with the Independent Schools Council on issues relating to regulation by the National Care Standards Commission.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42578]

Jacqui Smith: The aim of standard 1 of the National Services Framework for Older People is rooting out age discrimination.

The Department is committed to ensure that older people are never unfairly discriminated and has an equal opportunities policy that encompasses this. The Department's valuing diversity policy states that:

> "Everyone who works for the Department of Health or with it should be treated fairly and with respect. This is regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, personal beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, responsibility for dependants, working pattern or position in the organisation"

All staff are provided access to training and promotion without regard to their age—the criteria that apply relate to the individual's capability and business need.

Respiratory Specialists

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the British Thoracic Society concerning the number of respiratory specialists in the NHS. [42707]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives from the British Thoracic Society and the British Lung Foundation on 5 March and discussed a number of issues at the meeting including the number of respiratory specialists in the NHS.

We recognise that treatment of respiratory disease is a high priority specialised area. In 1997 there were 109 Specialist Registrars in Respiratory Medicine. This figure has increased year-on- year and by 2001 had reached 257. This represents a significant increase. As of 30 September 2001 there were 1,020 hospital medical staff within the Respiratory Medicine speciality. This number included 470 consultants.

Timber and Wood Products

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the companies from which his Department have obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43412]

Ms Blears: There is no central record of companies from which the Department obtains timber and wood products.

The Department has a contract for furniture in its offices with Kinnarps (UK) Ltd. for the supply, replacement and renewal of wooden office furniture and the amount spent with that firm over the last five years is:

	£000s (excluding VAT)
1996–97	211
1997–98	337
1998–99	401
1999–2000	637
2000–01	364

Building Land

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors inform the decision to sell his Department's real estate as building land; and if he will make a statement. [43563]

Ms Blears: Once a property has been identified as surplus to national health service (NHS) requirements it will be disposed of. In accordance with Treasury guidance a planning application is likely to be made that will maximise the receipt that will then be re-invested in new NHS capital developments. The local planning authority is responsible for determining the alternative use of the land. Most surplus land disposals over the past few years have been for residential development.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that Persons Responsible should be indemnified by their *(a)* employer and *(b)* defence body under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. [43611]

Yvette Cooper: Within the national health service, employing authorities should make appropriate indemnity arrangements in discussion with the Person Responsible. Outside the NHS, the Person Responsible should make their own arrangements for liability cover in discussion with their employer where appropriate.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial contribution HMG has agreed to make toward the World Health Organisation research into air travel and deep vein thrombosis. [43803]

Yvette Cooper: Representatives from the Department and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions will be visiting the World Health Organisation before the end of March 2002 specifically to discuss funding for research into air travel and deep vein thrombosis.

North and East Devon Health Authority

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the change in the number of care home beds in the North and East Devon health authority since 1997. [43626]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of nursing care beds in the North and East Devon health authority since 1997 at 31 March each year is shown in the table.

Nursing care beds in North and East Devon Health Authority.

Year (as at 31 March)	Nursing care beds[1]
1997[2]	2,620
1998	2,410
1999	2,280
2000	2,080
2001	2,020

[1] Includes beds in private hospitals and clinics.
[2] Relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
Note:
Numbers are rounded
Source:
Department of Health's annual returns.

The Department has allocated an additional £1,082,000 in 2001–02 and £2,270,000 in 2002–03 to Devon county council to assist in stabilising and maintaining capacity in the care home sector.

Further information on the number of residential and nursing care home beds in residential and nursing care homes is available in the statistical bulletin "Community Care Statistics 2001: Residential Personal Social Services for Adults, England" available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0129.htm.

Sellafield

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates, and where, *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have met the Irish Government to discuss the British Nuclear Fuels plant at Sellafield since 5 October 2001; and which Ministers and which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting. [43474]

Yvette Cooper: Officials from the Department have been involved in two meetings since 5 October 2001 with the Irish Government to discuss the British Nuclear Fuels plant at Sellafield. These meetings were on:

11 December 2001—Compliance with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) Provisional Measures Order (Dublin, Ireland) involving officials from the Department, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and other Government Departments, the Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland) and the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland.

15 February 2002—UK Ireland Contact Group on Radioactivity (London) involving officials from the Department, DEFRA, other Government Departments, devolved Administrations, Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland), Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland and the Isle of Man Government.

Heart Disease

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom have been prescribed statins for heart disease in each of the last five years. [43869]

Yvette Cooper: The number of prescription items dispensed in the community for statins in England for the period 1996 to 2000, and the first three quarters of 2001 is listed in the table. The actual number of people being prescribed drugs is not collected. The data include statins prescriptions written in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but dispensed in England. The data do not cover

drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions. Information about prescriptions written and dispensed in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

Thousand

Year	*Prescription items*
1996	2,053.1
1997	3,316.1
1998	4,988.5
1999	6,989.6
2000	9,423.0
January to September 2001	9,070.0

Parkinson's Disease

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions he is taking to raise awareness of Parkinson's Disease. [43967]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions (NSF) will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease, brain and spinal injury, as well as some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition. It will include services for people with epilepsy, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Motor Neurone Disease and other similar conditions.

Lung Cancer

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve the early detection of lung cancer. [43945]

Yvette Cooper: Trials for lung cancer screening conducted in the United States and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s using chest x-rays and/or sputum cytology showed no reduction in cancer mortality. Recent research has shown that low dose spiral computer tomography (CT) scanning can identify lung cancer in asymptomatic individuals at high risk. While this research suggests that CT scanning may be a useful screening test for lung cancer, more research is needed. A proposal for a trial in the United Kingdom is being considered by Medical Research Council.

Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how must has been spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each trust or health authority, in each of the last five years on each type of prescribed domiciliary oxygen therapy. [44301]

Ms Blears: The tables set out payments made for domiciliary oxygen therapy. The payments are made by the Prescription Pricing Authority, on behalf of HAs who are responsible for the provision of these services. The tables cover payments for services, hardware and concentrators between 1997–98 and 2001–02. Also included is the net ingredient cost of oxygen gas and masks in 1999–2000 and 2000–01; the only financial years for which data by health authority are available.

Table 1: Payments made to suppliers in England for oxygen concentrators

£000

Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Avon	269.3	312.3	286.3	299.4	325.8
Barking and Havering	92.3	106.5	128.5	139.4	148.3
Barnet[2]	102.9	102.2	103.5	106.0	—
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey[2]	—	—	—	—	235.2
Barnsley	24.8	41.0	57.8	72.7	89.0
Bedfordshire	84.2	98.2	118.0	129.8	143.9
Berkshire	118.7	122.9	115.0	116.7	134.5
Bexley and Greenwich[3]	87.0	110.5	88.6	91.1	—
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich[3]	—	—	—	—	157.0
Birmingham	258.9	268.5	295.9	323.2	331.5
Bradford	123.9	158.8	187.6	197.2	221.8
Brent and Harrow	75.2	70.4	79.0	99.3	113.2
Bromley[3]	38.9	50.7	40.0	55.3	—
Buckinghamshire	125.8	122.3	119.3	114.9	127.4
Bury and Rochdale	116.8	127.2	142.3	147.5	150.6
Calderdale and Kirklees	134.7	155.4	174.6	194.1	229.3
Cambridge and Huntingdon[4]	61.5	62.5	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire[4]	—	—	113.7	134.5	158.1
Camden and Islington	155.0	156.7	161.2	175.2	182.3
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	264.9	301.2	279.8	296.8	303.9
County Durham	220.4	237.1	261.5	283.1	321.7
Coventry	58.8	68.0	82.2	97.8	116.0
Croydon	46.7	52.5	40.0	43.4	56.9
Doncaster	95.6	103.9	122.0	140.5	165.0
Dorset	164.1	179.3	142.0	177.7	209.9
Dudley	119.4	117.4	110.3	116.7	134.6
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	168.5	155.7	145.4	144.4	178.3
East and North Hertfordshire[5]	93.6	100.1	100.5	117.9	—
East Kent	134.7	124.3	114.4	128.9	154.3
East Lancashire	137.3	156.5	169.6	174.3	196.9
East London and City	221.1	239.8	259.4	283.0	295.7
East Norfolk[4]	130.9	124.4	—	—	—

Table 1: Payments made to suppliers in England for oxygen concentrators

£000

Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
East Riding and Hull	139.6	159.3	192.1	199.0	227.4
East Surrey	23.8	27.6	29.2	36.6	59.7
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	133.7	160.4	143.2	157.7	170.5
Enfield and Haringey[2]	67.8	87.9	96.5	103.1	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside	79.4	81.9	109.1	141.6	179.2
Gloucestershire	142.4	151.7	109.5	123.7	137.7
Herefordshire	23.0	27.9	32.6	38.9	46.4
Hertfordshire[3]	—	—	—	—	328.0
Hillingdon	51.9	52.7	51.8	54.4	65.8
Isle of Wight[4]	11.7	13.0	10.7	13.7	—
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[5]	—	—	—	—	157.5
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	77.7	82.5	82.3	86.3	85.0
Kingston and Richmond	35.5	40.1	32.7	45.0	58.2
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	215.8	233.3	215.0	219.1	230.8
Leeds	176.5	216.5	254.5	261.6	304.1
Leicestershire	222.4	234.3	255.6	283.0	298.5
Lincolnshire	122.7	146.6	157.7	167.8	183.0
Liverpool	143.9	164.6	183.3	213.6	230.5
Manchester	114.5	122.4	133.4	156.1	163.1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	101.4	121.0	121.7	126.8	137.9
Morecambe Bay	27.7	30.6	30.9	36.7	50.6
Newcastle and North Tyneside	188.6	223.7	264.2	296.6	335.7
Norfolk[4]	—	—	156.4	183.0	212.8
North and East Devon	154.9	153.4	122.2	128.0	143.8
North and Mid Hampshire	104.1	110.7	92.0	96.0	113.6
North Cheshire	56.0	64.1	79.4	101.3	112.9
North Cumbria	41.6	45.1	48.3	56.3	72.1
North Derbyshire	74.1	77.7	82.2	99.4	112.5
North Essex	183.3	193.7	207.5	226.3	243.9
North Nottingham	109.9	123.5	125.7	132.1	140.1
North Staffordshire	176.5	184.8	205.3	213.3	227.0
North West Anglia[4]	63.7	72.1	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	137.5	140.1	150.2	162.8	188.9
North Yorkshire	141.9	167.7	185.6	200.8	225.0
Northamptonshire	118.1	131.1	141.8	139.0	169.1
Northumberland	66.6	73.9	79.8	92.9	123.5
Nottingham	151.2	165.7	172.7	209.1	234.5
Oxfordshire	107.8	120.9	99.6	101.0	111.4
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[5]	97.2	118.1	109.5	118.1	—
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	82.0	91.8	98.2	114.4	121.8
Rotherham	61.3	63.8	65.7	75.3	97.4
Salford and Trafford	151.0	147.8	155.3	157.7	166.0
Sandwell	102.6	107.7	115.7	111.7	119.2
Sefton	93.6	92.7	84.2	86.1	98.1
Sheffield	158.3	181.7	210.9	235.4	279.4
Shropshire	111.2	123.6	130.9	127.3	137.0
Solihull	68.3	69.3	73.8	72.2	78.2
Somerset	122.1	133.5	126.3	122.2	161.6
South and West Devon	165.7	180.5	156.3	181.6	201.1
South Cheshire	153.5	163.1	180.2	190.6	210.3
South Essex	118.9	132.7	162.6	185.3	217.6
South Humber	68.1	92.1	110.3	108.4	103.8
South Lancashire	72.5	78.7	88.1	94.9	97.7
South Staffordshire	184.2	211.9	222.7	236.1	269.5
Southampton and South West Hampshire	173.4	190.3	135.3	150.6	171.0
Southern Derbyshire	73.7	86.4	96.9	108.3	117.1
St. Helens and Knowsley	113.4	117.1	134.7	146.0	163.9
Stockport	100.6	115.1	106.8	99.6	103.7
Suffolk	113.1	114.9	125.8	138.5	157.5
Sunderland	138.9	153.5	166.5	182.3	230.9
Tees	109.9	124.3	148.8	180.0	250.2
Wakefield	89.1	102.7	107.6	107.1	122.3
Walsall	59.5	76.4	98.9	116.9	140.2
Warwickshire	87.7	100.0	117.7	131.4	148.1
West Hertfordshire[3]	139.9	159.8	175.7	184.3	—
West Kent	139.3	167.7	148.1	163.1	192.0
West Pennine	140.1	150.9	182.7	191.3	187.3
West Surrey	102.9	119.6	98.8	105.2	117.5
West Sussex	111.4	129.9	106.9	126.1	147.8

Table 1: Payments made to suppliers in England for oxygen concentrators

£000

Health authority	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02[1]
Wigan and Bolton	138.6	134.1	137.2	162.7	175.8
Wiltshire	159.3	169.4	117.8	126.3	138.9
Wirral	127.3	146.7	169.6	190.5	205.1
Wolverhampton	67.8	80.5	92.7	102.8	101.8
Worcestershire	69.4	81.8	95.6	106.3	127.6
England	11,578.7	12,738.4	13,148.0	14,339.9	16,118.8

[1] Provisional
[2] On 1 April 2001 Barnet health authority merged with Enfield and Haringey health authority to create the new Barnet, Enfield and Haringey health authority
[3] On 1 April 2001 Bexley and Greenwich health authority merged with Bromley health authority to create the new Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich health authority
[4] On 1 April 1999 North West Anglia health authority, Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority and East Norfolk health authority were replaced by Cambridgeshire health authority and Norfolk health authority
[5] On 1 April 2001 East and North Hertfordshire merged with West Hertfordshire to create the new Hertfordshire health authority
[6] On 1 April 2001 Isle of Wight health authority merged with Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority to create the new Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority.

Table 2: The net ingredient cost of oxygen gas (cylinders), masks and tubing dispensed in the community in England

£000

Health authority	1999–2000	2000–01
Avon	194.5	249.7
Barking and Havering	89.9	106.8
Barnet[1]	26.6	30.2
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey[1]	—	—
Barnsley	66.1	89.1
Bedfordshire	70.8	74.0
Berkshire	63.2	73.1
Bexley and Greenwich[2]	82.4	90.0
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich[2]	—	—
Birmingham	149.1	136.1
Bradford	133.6	140.3
Brent and Harrow	36.4	42.0
Bromley[2]	36.3	42.0
Buckinghamshire	100.5	96.3
Bury and Rochdale	62.9	62.5
Calderdale and Kirklees	120.9	112.7
Cambridge and Huntingdon[3]	—	—
Cambridgeshire[3]	56.4	56.8
Camden and Islington	44.6	49.9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	175.9	204.2
County Durham	141.1	180.4
Coventry	54.4	70.2
Croydon	27.8	31.5
Doncaster	69.1	77.1
Dorset	83.9	99.9
Dudley	42.4	47.8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	73.8	72.4
East and North Hertfordshire[4]	64.1	74.8
East Kent	108.1	119.3
East Lancashire	64.8	68.9
East London and City	90.2	87.0
East Norfolk[3]	—	—
East Riding and Hull	116.2	143.7
East Surrey	63.1	59.2
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	160.5	155.4
Enfield and Haringey[1]	78.3	76.1
Gateshead and South Tyneside	214.5	203.3
Gloucestershire	57.9	70.6
Herefordshire	25.6	27.9
Hertfordshire[4]	—	—
Hillingdon	36.7	40.2
Isle of Wight[5]	11.3	10.5
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[5]	—	—
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	30.5	33.8
Kingston and Richmond	27.4	28.1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	157.1	138.7
Leeds	157.1	159.6
Leicestershire	132.8	146.1
Lincolnshire	129.6	123.9
Liverpool	166.4	180.3
Manchester	119.4	124.7
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	75.3	77.9
Morecambe Bay	29.1	45.5
Newcastle and North Tyneside	163.3	168.6

Table 2: The net ingredient cost of oxygen gas (cylinders), masks and tubing dispensed in the community in England

£000

Health authority	1999–2000	2000–01
Norfolk[3]	61.1	72.9
North and East Devon	68.8	93.8
North and Mid Hampshire	47.1	50.2
North Cheshire	53.5	62.4
North Cumbria	38.6	51.8
North Derbyshire	44.5	50.8
North Essex	155.4	155.5
North Nottingham	79.8	100.9
North Staffordshire	89.1	88.5
North West Anglia[3]	—	—
North West Lancashire	169.0	196.4
North Yorkshire	117.2	125.0
Northamptonshire	115.8	115.0
Northumberland	124.4	163.3
Nottingham	75.4	87.7
Oxfordshire	100.2	98.5
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[5]	45.5	48.1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	69.1	68.1
Rotherham	67.1	69.7
Salford and Trafford	128.1	138.9
Sandwell	42.7	46.0
Sefton	74.8	96.0
Sheffield	94.7	102.7
Shropshire	91.0	95.7
Solihull	27.4	30.1
Somerset	89.7	79.1
South and West Devon	109.9	111.2
South Cheshire	114.8	122.8
South Essex	123.0	135.4
South Humber	87.0	93.7
South Lancashire	96.6	98.9
South Staffordshire	136.9	146.9
Southampton and South West Hampshire	62.2	77.2
Southern Derbyshire	54.7	59.0
St. Helens and Knowsley	121.3	114.6
Stockport	44.1	46.2
Suffolk	68.5	86.3
Sunderland	86.2	86.7
Tees	271.4	312.4
Wakefield	57.4	56.3
Walsall	58.1	54.6
Warwickshire	64.0	79.7
West Hertfordshire[4]	84.6	88.1
West Kent	157.6	175.0
West Pennine	66.0	76.8
West Surrey	88.1	85.3
West Sussex	129.2	139.6
Wigan and Bolton	80.5	82.6
Wiltshire	117.6	124.5
Wirral	67.1	87.2
Wolverhampton	84.1	95.9
Worcestershire	54.7	60.7
England	8,837.7	9,583.5

[1] On 1 April 2001 Barnet health authority merged with Enfield and Haringey health authority to create the new Barnet, Enfield and Haringey health authority
[2] On 1 April 2001 Bexley and Greenwich health authority merged with Bromley health authority to create the new Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich health authority
[3] On 1 April 1999 North West Anglia health authority, Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority and East Norfolk health authority were replaced by Cambridgeshire health authority and Norfolk health authority
[4] On 1 April 2001 East and North Hertfordshire merged with West Hertfordshire to create the new Hertfordshire health authority
[5] On 1 April 2001 Isle of Wight health authority merged with Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority to create the new Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority.

Notes:
1. The data from the Prescribing Analyses and Cost (PACT) system. The information is for the HA in which the prescription was written
2. Oxygen is described in the British National Formulary (BNF) section 3b. Oxygen masks are defined in the Prescription Pricing Authority pseudo BNF sect.
3. The net ingredient cost is the cost of oxygen before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

Table 3: Payments made to pharmacies in England for oxygen services and hardware

£000

Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Avon	255.6	265.2	271.0	281.6	306.4
Barking and Havering	139.4	182.4	188.8	195.6	204.1
Barnet[2]	66.4	52.1	46.7	45.3	—
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey[2]	—	—	—	—	183.5
Barnsley	108.8	114.1	119.1	113.0	137.2
Bedfordshire	107.2	119.6	121.4	121.5	128.9
Berkshire	152.4	142.4	133.2	143.4	150.4
Bexley and Greenwich[1]	150.6	154.7	153.9	163.5	—
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich[1]	—	—	—	—	197.5
Birmingham	193.1	190.5	196.8	195.9	197.8
Bradford	146.2	143.4	155.7	137.0	175.4
Brent and Harrow	128.6	105.8	88.7	78.8	94.4
Bromley[1]	46.6	48.1	44.0	53.7	—
Buckinghamshire	123.1	147.6	137.2	156.7	168.9
Bury and Rochdale	91.7	76.0	89.5	92.0	82.2
Calderdale and Kirklees	205.7	173.8	186.5	158.1	175.0
Cambridge and Huntingdon[4]	40.4	41.9	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire[3]	—	—	90.0	98.7	109.0
Camden and Islington	71.6	71.7	83.2	70.5	72.1
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	209.8	277.3	286.9	319.7	327.1
County Durham	174.4	179.1	181.9	192.3	198.7
Coventry	62.2	82.3	95.9	90.4	95.8
Croydon	40.5	58.5	57.5	61.8	65.1
Doncaster	113.4	102.6	105.6	102.2	112.9
Dorset	136.3	144.4	153.5	149.9	165.4
Dudley	103.2	104.3	93.6	98.6	93.6
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	163.8	126.4	131.8	124.7	127.1
East and North Hertfordshire[4]	114.7	111.5	112.8	113.2	—
East Kent	164.7	165.6	186.4	203.2	207.7
East Lancashire	120.7	121.3	126.9	130.6	123.8
East London and City	200.6	150.9	106.6	117.8	124.4
East Norfolk[4]	86.6	109.8	—	—	—
East Riding and Hull	131.5	174.2	181.2	208.0	216.9
East Surrey	73.7	98.4	97.1	94.9	112.1
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	201.8	249.8	233.0	230.9	233.2
Enfield and Haringey[2]	117.4	131.8	145.5	139.8	—
Gateshead and South Tyneside	136.6	211.9	201.8	215.8	212.8
Gloucestershire	83.8	131.4	122.1	120.3	118.7
Herefordshire	40.6	52.0	46.4	49.1	56.6
Hertfordshire[4]	—	—	—	—	271.2
Hillingdon	70.5	72.8	61.3	55.1	59.3
Isle of Wight[5]	23.0	22.1	21.1	17.1	—
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[5]	—	—	—	—	117.8
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	59.5	43.2	48.2	54.9	50.3
Kingston and Richmond	62.0	62.8	69.4	63.5	67.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	253.0	357.5	321.4	210.3	224.9
Leeds	146.2	174.5	176.7	156.8	173.0
Leicestershire	169.5	199.3	205.3	213.0	212.5
Lincolnshire	139.2	138.0	167.3	156.1	169.6
Liverpool	295.7	314.2	326.8	339.3	315.6
Manchester	162.9	172.5	194.3	185.2	192.8
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	131.3	141.0	169.7	154.0	148.5
Morecambe Bay	52.8	57.3	49.5	58.6	64.8
Newcastle and North Tyneside	168.1	194.1	233.0	201.2	204.8
Norfolk[4]	—	—	109.7	117.3	123.1
North and East Devon	118.5	126.3	137.3	143.4	158.0
North and Mid Hampshire	74.7	84.2	75.3	72.1	59.8
North Cheshire	93.5	104.8	111.3	116.4	128.2
North Cumbria	47.0	48.9	47.2	58.7	68.4
North Derbyshire	65.9	75.8	75.5	87.4	96.4
North Essex	264.0	275.9	284.4	258.5	279.2
North Nottingham	133.5	141.2	162.2	231.5	237.7

Table 3: Payments made to pharmacies in England for oxygen services and hardware

£000

Health authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
North Staffordshire	124.1	132.6	142.6	145.7	161.4
North West Anglia[4]	72.7	78.0	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	303.1	275.1	280.0	279.1	280.8
North Yorkshire	191.7	220.0	179.9	188.7	200.5
Northamptonshire	161.0	172.8	161.2	156.0	188.9
Northumberland	113.2	126.9	129.4	170.9	183.3
Nottingham	78.4	94.4	114.2	128.1	161.2
Oxfordshire	111.9	114.7	120.1	124.3	130.8
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[6]	113.3	108.5	104.0	97.2	—
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	119.9	120.8	131.0	137.4	144.3
Rotherham	97.3	91.5	102.5	113.5	107.5
Salford and Trafford	224.5	224.8	222.7	251.4	247.5
Sandwell	80.9	77.4	82.1	84.7	83.3
Sefton	149.1	144.7	161.6	153.7	159.8
Sheffield	128.0	138.3	144.7	142.8	120.8
Shropshire	97.6	119.6	120.7	125.3	158.7
Solihull	39.7	38.0	41.4	39.4	52.7
Somerset	104.7	120.3	130.6	129.2	135.7
South and West Devon	170.1	225.9	233.4	228.6	242.3
South Cheshire	192.8	211.2	209.1	222.3	222.3
South Essex	226.4	251.6	306.2	284.8	376.7
South Humber	98.9	120.8	130.3	142.7	156.2
South Lancashire	175.7	162.3	173.8	166.8	173.7
South Staffordshire	181.9	184.8	200.9	202.4	207.1
Southampton and South West Hampshire	102.5	107.9	114.7	113.9	129.1
Southern Derbyshire	74.1	72.7	74.8	74.9	82.6
St. Helens and Knowsley	140.9	169.9	189.1	169.7	168.9
Stockport	72.3	70.4	77.0	77.2	84.8
Suffolk	116.8	99.4	109.4	109.9	141.6
Sunderland	117.4	113.8	137.6	116.4	129.8
Tees	302.1	311.8	354.7	353.3	393.0
Wakefield	85.1	96.1	76.9	69.0	71.8
Walsall	82.6	90.5	83.8	92.0	103.5
Warwickshire	102.6	80.7	109.4	130.2	117.7
West Hertfordshire[5]	140.3	137.0	134.8	111.8	—
West Kent	276.8	282.5	315.6	294.3	290.4
West Pennine	94.6	93.5	100.2	115.0	119.0
West Surrey	118.0	152.3	124.6	160.5	154.8
West Sussex	156.9	147.3	151.5	153.6	169.2
Wigan and Bolton	163.4	174.9	175.5	175.0	177.2
Wiltshire	146.9	163.3	172.0	174.1	201.2
Wirral	114.4	136.7	132.0	136.8	154.2
Wolverhampton	131.9	122.5	118.7	120.2	121.2
Worcestershire	83.1	78.4	89.2	82.6	87.3
England	13,014.5	13,875.4	14,282.9	14,364.6	15,191.1

[1] Provisional

[2] On 1 April 2001 Barnet health authority merged with Enfield and Haringey health authority to create the new Barnet, Enfield and Haringey health authority

[3] On 1 April 2001 Bexley and Greenwich health authority merged with Bromley health authority to create the new Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich health authority

[4] On 1 April 1999 North West Anglia health authority, Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority and East Norfolk health authority were replaced by Cambridgeshire health authority and Norfolk health authority

[5] On 1 April 2001 East and North Hertfordshire merged with West Hertfordshire to create the new Hertfordshire health authority

[6] On 1 April 2001 Isle of Wight health authority merged with Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority to create the new Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority

Breast Cancer

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of women aged 50 to 64 years were screened for breast cancer in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority in 2000–01. [44274]

Yvette Cooper: In 2000–01 70 per cent. of women aged 50–64 were screened for breast cancer. Information about the percentage of women screened in each health authority is provided in the statistical bulletin "Breast Screening Programme, England: 2000–01". Copies are available in the Library.

Premature Babies

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the clinical needs of premature babies will be addressed within the maternity services section of the planned National Service Framework on Children. [45097]

Yvette Cooper: We have established a number of External Working Groups to provide advice on standards for the Children's National Service Framework. The needs of premature babies will be considered as part of the work of any relevant External Working Groups including maternity services.

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Western Sussex Primary Care Trust

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capital allocations have been and will be made in respect of GP premises in the Western Sussex Primary Care Trust for 2001–02. [45337]

Ms Blears: The Western Sussex Primary Care Trust is an amalgamation of Regis and Chichester and Rural Primary Care Groups (PCGs). These PCGs received a share of the additional moneys for investment in primary care premises that were allocated towards the end of 2001. These were £25,000 for 2001–02 and £50,000 for 2002–03.

In addition, the PCGs have accessed the West Sussex General Medical Services discretionary fund, which included over £500,000 for cost rent and improvement grant projects. The Western Sussex share of that was £140,000 or 28 per cent. of the funding. With the agreement of all PCGs and Primary Care Trusts in West Sussex, this money has been held and managed as a shared resource for 2001–02.

Fibromyalgia

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear, *(d)* the north east and *(e)* the UK; what information and support is available to people diagnosed with fibromyalgia; how many multidisciplinary clinics for fibromyalgia there are in the UK; and if he plans to fund a multidisciplinary clinic for fibromyalgia in the north east. [45217]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested on the incidence of fibromyalgia is not available in the form requested, as we do not collect data on the incidence of individual conditions. We do, however, have some information on finished consultant episodes as shown in the table.

Finished consultant episodes (FCES) for fibromyalgia[1] by area of residence NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

Area of residence	*Number*
QDG Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	33
Northern and Yorkshire RO	227
England	1,360

The diagnosis (ICD-10) code used was M79.0—Other soft tissue disorders, not elsewhere classified; rheumatism, unspecified. This includes fibromyalgia and fibrositis.

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

People with fibromyalgia can access the normal range of NHS services according to their needs. There is also information available from NHS Direct on fibromyalgia either by telephone or on their website.

We do not hold information centrally on how NHS services are configured locally. It is for NHS authorities in the north east to decide whether or not they want to fund a multidisciplinary clinic for fibromyalgia as they are responsible for commissioning local services.

Suicides

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made towards his target for the reduction of suicides; and if he will make a statement. [43718]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 147W.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from PCGs and PCTs on their state of preparation for new PCT responsibilities. [46737]

Mr. Hutton: I have received no representations from primary care groups (PCGs) or primary care trusts (PCTs) on their state of preparation for their new PCT responsibilities. All PCTs have been established after full and open consultation locally, giving every opportunity for views and concerns to be expressed and addressed at that stage.

Ring-fenced Funding

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent ring-fenced money allocated to specific services in Barnet *(a)* was used in 2001–02 and *(b)* is proposed to be used in 2002–03 for reducing deficits and for other purposes outside the ring-fence; what the original ring-fencing was proposed for in each case; and if he will make a statement. [46878]

Mr. Hutton: The main unified allocation for 2001–02 made to health authorities did not include ring-fenced allocations for specific services.

In 2001–02, some funds were hypothecated at a national level only.

In 2002–03, there is limited earmarking of funds within allocations. This is to allow HAs to be able to manage flexibly the resources available to them. The following sums are included in allocations with the intention that they are spent on the purpose for which they were allocated.

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey health authority

	£000
Mental health	1,342
CHD	1,074
Cancer	1,360
Information management and technology	993
Primary care	1,494
Capacity	7,604
	13,866

Barnet Primary Care Trust is still in the process of agreeing its financial plan for 2002–03.

York Formula Calculations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the findings of the review into the York formula calculations. [47526]

Mr. Hutton: The intention is that, following the review, the new formula will be ready for 2003–04 allocations. We plan to announce these in the autumn.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers have been recruited by local authorities since the Government launched its publicised recruitment drive last year. [47553]

Jacqui Smith: There was a rise of 780 whole-time equivalent social work staff working for councils between 30 September 1999 and 30 September 2000. More recent figures are not yet available. However, the main aim of the social care recruitment campaign is to raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5,000 by 2004. As the current social work training takes two years, and the earliest that someone reacting to the campaign could join a course is autumn 2002, we would not expect to see the effects of the campaign on an increase in social workers being recruited by local authorities until summer 2004 at the earliest.

Radiographers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the vacancy rates for radiographers, broken down by health authority. [47547]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Hypothermia (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners in Portsmouth have died from hypothermia in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [46443]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mike Hancock, dated 10 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many pensioners in Portsmouth have died from hypothermia in the last 12 months. (46443)

The most recent annual figures are for the calendar year 2000. In that year, of those resident in Portsmouth Unitary Authority at death, there were four deaths among men aged 65 and over and women aged 60 and over where hypothermia (International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision code 991.6) was mentioned on the death certificate.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44820]

Mr. Hutton: Information about progress on public service agreement targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44875]

Mr. Hutton: A delay of three months was experienced in assessing the "Retention of Employment" model at the three pilot sites. However, as announced on 18 March 2002, we are now satisfied that the model does provide value for money and that we will be proceeding on this basis for future national health service private finance initiative (PFI) projects.

No other PFI schemes are at a stage where the model has caused any delays.

Medical Negligence Claims

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount paid by the NHS for medical negligence claims in 2001–02. [45171]

Ms Blears: Figures for clinical negligence expenditure by the NHS can be found in the National Audit Summarised Accounts for Health Authorities, NHS Trusts and the NHS Litigation Authority.

The Figure for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Anaesthesia Services

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community hospitals no longer carry out operations under general anaesthetic because of a shortage of consultant anaesthetists. [45108]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect figures on the numbers of community hospitals which carry out operations under general anaesthetic.

At September 2001, there were 3,550 (headcount) consultant anaesthetists (whole-time equivalent 3,320) for all trusts in England. Our current projections show that by 2004, there will be an increase of around 1,070 trained specialists in anaesthetics.

Road Accidents

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time was which it took the medical services to complete all their official duties at an accident site on *(a)* an A-road and *(b)* a motorway in each of the last three years. [42787]

Ms Blears: The information is not available in the form requested. Information about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of a reported incident within our target response times for NHS ambulance trusts in England, are contained in the Department's Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members his Department employs in its regulatory impact unit; and if he will make a statement. [42937]

Ms Blears: Two officials are employed under the leadership of a branch head within my Department's regulatory impact unit. The unit works with the Department's policy officials and the Cabinet Office regulatory impact unit to prepare regulatory impact assessments and identify suitable regulatory reform measures.

Fluoride

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support he gives to organisations which promote the use of fluoride. [43076]

Ms Blears: We have given financial support to the British Fluoridation Society since 1975. The Society has both a promotional role and an information gathering function, and produces objective, evidence based information when responding to inquiries.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage strategic health authorities to establish their headquarters as close to the balance of population in the area as possible. [42095]

Mr. Hutton: The location of headquarters for new strategic health authorities is a matter for the Chief Executive (designate) and the Chair (designate) in the light of options appraisals conducted at the same time as the boundary consultation exercise. The Department does not consider it necessary to offer specific advice to the leaders of the new StHAs on the location of their headquarters.

Adolescent Mental Health Unit, Tolworth

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of opening a new adolescent mental health unit at Tolworth. [47499]

Jacqui Smith: The estimated cost of opening a new adolescent mental health unit at Tolworth was given as £1.7 million in the outline business case.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the initial estimates of the cost of delivering a world-class mental health service referred to on page 115 of "Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View". [47431]

Jacqui Smith: The initial estimate of the cost of delivering a world-class mental health service has already been given on page 115 of "Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View". This estimate was £3.2 billion per year.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are *(a)* rough sleepers and *(b)* suffer from mental illness. [47435]

Jacqui Smith: The Prime Minister announced on 3 December 2001 that his target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds had been met and that 532 people were sleeping rough in England, compared to around 1,850 in June 1998. This represents a reduction of 71 per cent.

The support needs profile identified in the Social Exclusion Unit's 1998 report into rough sleeping highlighted that 30–50 per cent. had mental health problems. The Homelessness Directorate is currently looking into the support needs of those people that remain sleeping rough to ascertain whether people are refusing offers of help to come inside as a lifestyle choice or due to other factors such as mental health or substance misuse issues.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on the promotion of mental health services *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in target specific groups in the last three years; and if he will list the campaigns. [42392]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. However, Standard One of the National Service Framework for Mental Health requires health and social services in England to promote mental health for all, working with individuals and communities, and to combat discrimination against individuals and groups with mental health problems, and promote their social inclusion. Local services have been asked to develop and agree evidence-based mental health promotion strategies based on local needs assessment by March 2002.

In addition, the Department has developed its "mind out for mental health" campaign to tackle the stigma and discrimination faced by peopie with mental health problems. This campaign is targeting three particular groups: employers, young people and the media as well as the public at large. In the financial year 2000–01 the Department spent £573,000 on the mind out for mental health campaign. £900,000 has been allocated to the campaign in the year 2001–2002.

NHS Concordat

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been carried out under the NHS Concordat since November 2000. [47522]

Mr. Hutton: Since November 2000 the Independent Healthcare Association (IHA) has collected monthly data from independent healthcare providers about the number of NHS patients treated by them. According to data made available to the Department by the IHA, between November 2000 and January 2002 (the latest month for which figures are available) at least 88,000 procedures were carried out in the independent sector in England, paid for by the NHS. This includes out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment.

NHS Patients (Overseas Treatment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is for national health service patients having received treatment in French and German facilities having follow-on treatment there if equivalent treatment can be provided locally. [47452]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service commissioners involved in the pilot programme for sending NHS patients overseas have aimed to purchase complete packages of care for patients, so as to reduce as far as possible the burden on the NHS of follow-up treatment. Any subsequent care and treatment that is required is organised by the NHS locally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement on the cost of NHS patients being treated in continental hospitals. [47521]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the per capita spending on the NHS in 2001–02 in England; and the equivalent figures for planned expenditure in 2002–03. [R] [48253]

Mr. Hutton: Planned NHS expenditure per capita is set out in the table.

£

	Spend per capita
2001–02	970
2002–03	1,060

NHS Staff

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the cost to the NHS of investigations of NHS staff who have been suspended from work in the last two years. [46825]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of investigating suspended national health service staff is a matter for national health service employers. The Department collects quarterly information in regard to the suspension of hospital medical and dental staff and overall costs incurred. At 31 December 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 29 doctors and community dentists currently suspended for more than six months.

Procurement Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of procurement savings he expects NHS trusts to achieve in 2001–02. [47291]

Mr. Hutton: The Audit Commission and the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency have been collating information on the level of procurement savings achieved by acute NHS trusts in England in 2001–02. This information will be available from May 2002.

NHS Complaints Procedure

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow patients to be given the right to have a complaint heard within the NHS complaints procedure when a hospital has treated the matter as disciplinary; and if he will make a statement. [44937]

Ms Blears: A complaint can already be either investigated or recommenced under the NHS complaints procedure if it has firstly, or at some point during the complaints procedure, been referred to a NHS trust's disciplinary process. This would only happen where there were outstanding matters in the complaint that had been considered, but not resolved, by the disciplinary process. Any issues in the complaint not referred to the disciplinary process should continue to be investigated under the complaints procedure.

Appointments

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of appointees by the NHS Appointments Commission to NHS trusts, health authorities and PCTs in Somerset and Dorset since 1 April 2001 have declared political activity with the *(a)* Labour party, *(b)* Conservative party and *(c)* Liberal Democrats. [43852]

Ms Blears: The political activity declared by candidates appointed to national health service boards in Somerset and Dorset by the NHS Appointments Commission since the commission's establishment on 1 April 2001 has been as follows:

	Number
None declared	15
Conservative	1
Labour	3
Liberal Democrat	5
Total	24

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43682]

Ms Blears: The Department does not centrally hold information on individual contract values. It is not possible to provide a full answer to this question without disproportionate cost.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Greater London had been waiting up to *(a)* six, *(b)* 12, *(c)* 15 and *(d)* 18 months for hospital treatment in each month since October 2001. [46726]

Mr. Hutton: The number of patients in Greater London waiting up to *(a)* six, *(b)* 12, *(c)* 15 and *(d)* 18 months for hospital treatment in each month from October 2001 until the end of February 2002 are shown in the table.

In-patient waiting times at London trusts—October 2001 to February 2002

	0–5 months	6–11 months	12–14 months	15–17 months	18 months plus
Numbers waiting					
March 1997	140,113	46,169	6,576	1,731	57
October 2001	114,018	34,257	6,565	1,852	28
November 2001	116,321	32,445	5,818	804	14
December 2001	116,084	36,659	5,601	761	1
January 2002	117,150	37,688	5,234	502	3
February 2002	120,005	36,065	5,040	228	0
Percentage waiting					
March 1997	72	24	3	1	0
October 2001	73	22	4	1	0
November 2001	75	21	4	1	0
December 2001	73	23	4	0	0
January 2002	73	23	3	0	0
February 2002	74	22	3	0	0
Change since March 1997					
March 1997	—	—	—	—	—
October 2001	−26,095	−11,912	−11	121	−29
November 2001	−23,792	−13,724	−758	−927	−43
December 2001	−24,029	−9,510	−975	−970	−56
January 2002	−22,963	−8,481	−1,342	−1,229	−54
February 2002	−20,108	−10,104	−1536	−1,503	−57
Percentage change since March 1997					
March 1997	—	—	—	—	—
October 2001	−19	−26	0	7	−51
November 2001	−17	−30	−12	−54	−75
December 2001	−17	−21	−15	−56	−98
January 2002	−16	−18	−20	−71	−95
February 2002	−14	−22	−23	−87	−100

Source:
Published waiting list returns

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Greater London had been waiting more than 13 weeks to see a consultant at the latest available date. [46725]

Mr. Hutton: The number of patients in Greater London waiting for more than 13 weeks to see a consultant at the end of February 2002 is shown in the table.

Patients waiting 13 weeks or more for a first out-patient appointment at London trusts—February 2002

	March 1998	February 2001	February 2002
13 weeks and over	65,899	59,991	59,231
Change since March 1998			
Number	—	−5,908	−6,668
Percentage	—	−9	−10
Change since February 2001			
Number	—	—	−760
Percentage	—	—	−1
26 weeks and over	25,954	[1]	10,372
Change since March 1998			
Number	—	—	−15,582
Percentage	—	—	−60

[1] Not collected

Source:
Published waiting list returns

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people were waiting in England for in-patient treatment at the latest date for which figures are available; [46695]

(2) how many people in England were waiting *(a)* up to 12, *(b)* up to 15, *(c)* up to 18 and *(d)* over 18 months for in-patient treatment in each of the last six months. [46697]

Mr. Hutton: There were 1,050,400 patients waiting for an elective admission to a NHS trust in England at 28 February 2002.

The table shows the number of patients waiting for elective admission by length of time waited in each of the last six months.

Patients waiting for elective admission (position at the end of the month), England

	Patients waiting in months			
Month ending	*Up to 12*	*13 to 15*	*16 to 18*	*Over 18*
September 2001	978,306	33,860	10,063	209
October 2001	980,692	31,613	7,946	129
November 2001	985,751	28,739	4,219	23
December 2001	1,006,165	27,181	4,166	9
January 2002	1,014,841	26,400	3,156	28
February 2002	1,010,704	23,873	1,942	3

Note:
Figures are for the English responsible population. Some patients may be waiting for treatment at non-English NHS trusts
Source:
Department of Health form QF01

Operations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the variation in the cost of operations in NHS hospitals and health authorities. [46732]

Mr. Hutton: The latest information on the variation in the cost of operations in NHS hospitals is provided in 'Reference Costs 2001'. (Copies of this are held in the

Library. It also available at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm.) There is no information on the cost of operations by health authorities.

An analysis of the published information on reference costs shows there is still a significant variation in the cost of some operations. Publishing comparative information of this sort is part of a wider strategy to improve performance in the NHS, which also includes:

Investment—including 7,500 more consultants and 20,000 more nurses by 2004;

National standards—such as those set out in the National Service Frameworks;

Stronger regulation and inspection—where the Commission for Health Improvement will play a key role; and

Spreading best practice—for example, by the Modernisation Agency.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the variation in the cost of a hip replacement operation in an NHS hospital. [46733]

Mr. Hutton: The reference costs provide the best source of information on the variation in the cost of hip replacement operations. (Copies of this are held in the Library and it also available at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/refcosts.htm.) The information for 2000–01 includes the following for elective primary hip replacements:

	£
Average cost for England	4,179
Inter-quartile range	3,650 to 4,702
Lowest recorded cost	566
Highest recorded cost	12,907

The extent of care delivered within this definition can vary, because of local factors such as service delivery and data recording. The best indicator of cost variation is the inter-quartile range as this contains a significantly high percentage of total activity.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional costs involved in providing temporary staff with enhanced contractual terms through NHS Professionals. [41721]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals charges a management fee to recoup operating costs currently set at a maximum of 7.5 per cent. This compares favourably with that of commercial agencies as highlighted in the Audit Commission report "Brief Encounters—Getting the Best from Temporary Nursing Staff". This report indicated wide variations in the commission rates charged by agencies with an averaging charge of 20.5 per cent.

NHS Properties

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the *(a)* estimated and *(b)* actual value of NHS property sales in each of the last five years; [41705]

(2) how many NHS properties are *(a)* for sale and *(b)* scheduled to be sold; and what their estimated sale value is on the open market; [41704]

(3) how many NHS properties are empty. [41702]

Ms Blears: The planned and actual receipts from sale of property from when the spending review process started is as follows.

£ million

Year	*Planned*	*Actual*
1997–98	289	471
1998–99	272	500
1999–2000	337	549
2000–01	363	647

Note:

Figures shown for Hospital and Community Health Services capital receipts.

The main reason for the disparity between planned and actual sales is due to transfers between NHS trusts or to NHS trusts from the Secretary of State for Health's ownership being recorded as a sale.

Details of how many properties are for sale or scheduled for sale is not held centrally. The planned receipts from sales of property is:

	Planned (£ million)
2001–02	351
2002–03	470
2003–04	270

Note:

Figures shown for Hospital and Community Health Services planned capital receipts.

The Department does not hold information about the numbers of properties that are vacant at any one time. There are a variety of reasons why property might be vacant, including awaiting refurbishment/development for health care purposes, or awaiting sale. The NHS seeks to make the optimum use of the estate, and to keep the number of empty properties to a minimum.

Medical Treatment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many UK patients were treated in each overseas country *(a)* in and *(b)* outside the EEA in 2000–01; and how many patients from each country (i) in and (ii) outside the EEA were treated in the UK in each year. [40877]

Mr. Hutton: The available information has been placed in the Library.

UK residents are treated abroad in a variety of circumstances. No information is held centrally on treatment obtained abroad privately and which are the patients' own responsibility. Patients are likewise personally responsible for arranging and paying for treatments given in countries with which the UK has no reciprocal health agreements, with the exception of a few instances where special approval has been given for the NHS to pay for highly specialised treatment for serious conditions.

There are reciprocal health agreements with some non-EEA countries which provide emergency care for UK residents on temporary visits. But because these are on a

cost waiver basis there is generally little information available to the UK on numbers of patients treated in the partner country.

Regulation (EEC) 1408/71 is the EC legislation which co-ordinates the health care systems of the EEA. It allows for health care to be provided abroad in a variety of circumstances. Member states pay each other for these treatments but information available is generally on treatment costs rather than patient numbers.

For patients coming to the UK, no information is held by the Department on treatments in the private sector. Neither is information held centrally on the number of patients not normally resident in the UK who have been treated by the NHS.

The bilateral health agreements with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, some Caribbean and Atlantic Overseas Territories, Gibraltar and Malta permit limited numbers of referrals to the UK specifically for treatment. Some information is available centrally in respect of emergency treatments provided in the UK under bilateral reciprocal health agreements and in respect of treatments provided under Regulation 1408/71.

Cataracts

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost to the NHS of *(a)* a cataract extraction and *(b)* a cataract extraction with a lens implant was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [43499]

Ms Blears: The national average cost for a cataract extraction with lens implant varies according to how the procedure is undertaken. For 2000–01 the national unit costs are:

	Unit cost £
Phakoemulsification cataract extraction with lens implant	
Elective in-patient	861
Non-elective in-patient	1,073
Day case	583
Other cataract extraction with lens implant	
Elective in-patient	799
Non-elective in-patient	1,283
Day case	572

These costs exclude the cost of out-patient attendances. In 2000–01, 594,320 such attendances were reported for cataract and lenses. The unit cost is £60 per attendance.

No separate costings are available for a cataract extraction without implant.

Hearing Aids

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 833W, on hearing aids, when he expects to announce the latest wave of trusts sites to receive funding for the provision of digital hearing aids. [47539]

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has determined the additional hospital trusts which will be able to offer digital hearing aids; and when an announcement will be made. [48547]

Jacqui Smith: I am happy to announce that the sites listed will form the second wave of the Modernising Hearing Aid Services pilot project:

Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust

Bolton Hospital NHS Trust

Bournemouth Primary Care Trust

Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust

Countess of Chester NHS Trust

Croydon and Surrey Downs and Mayday University Hospitals NHS Trust

Gloucestershire Royal Infirmary NHS Trust

Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Trust

Mid Cheshire Healthcare NHS Trust

North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust

George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust

The Royal Free Hospital

Rochdale NHS Trust

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospitals NHS Trust

Salford Primary Care Trust

Sherwood Forest NHS Trust

West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust

Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust

University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

Wolverhampton Healthcare NHS Trust

Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust

Wirral Hospitals NHS Trust

Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospital NHS Trust

Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust

East Cheshire NHS Trust

Hastings and Rother NHS Trust

Royal Liverpool Hospitals

Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust

North Devon Primary Care Trust.

In addition, Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust and the Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital, which provided digital hearing aids to adults only as part of the first wave, will now be providing hearing aids to children as well. University Hospitals Birmingham will now be fitting children's hearing aids at the Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Adoption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many representations he has received from hon. Members regarding amending the Adoption and Children Bill to extend rights of adoption to unmarried couples; [47372]

(2) how many representations he has received from outside bodies and individuals regarding amending the Adoption and Children Bill to extend rights of adoption to unmarried couples; [47371]

(3) what consultation is taking place by his Department on amending the Adoption and Children Bill to extend rights of adoption to unmarried couples; [47370]

(4) when his Department will announce his policy on amending the Adoption and Children Bill to extend rights of adoption to unmarried couples; [47369]

(5) what his assessment is of the number of unmarried couples who would apply to adopt children if the Adoption and Children Bill were amended to allow them to do so. [47451]

Jacqui Smith: We are looking thoroughly at the many and complex issues of partnership registration, rights and responsibilities. Adoption will, alongside all other relevant issues, be considered as part of that work.

Under the existing Adoption Act 1976 single people may adopt (regardless of sexual orientation), but only married couples may adopt jointly. It is open for one unmarried partner to adopt a child and for the other to obtain parental responsibility by applying for a residence order in respect of the child. The Adoption and Children Bill makes no change in this area. However the Government recognises that it is an issue for debate. We have taken a consultative approach throughout the progress of this Bill, listening to the views of a wide range of interested parties through the Special Standing Committee. A number of amendments, supported by Members from all sides of the House have been tabled for Report stage. We are giving these amendments careful consideration and they will be debated at Report.

Since the introduction of the Adoption and Children Bill on 19 October 2001, the Department has received ten letters regarding adoption by unmarried couples from hon. Members and over 350 from outside bodies and private individuals. In addition there have been five previous Parliamentary Questions answered and two meetings between Ministers and hon. Members on this topic.

A MORI poll commissioned by BAAF in September 2001, "Attitudes to Adoption", found that 41 per cent. of cohabiting couples say they have considered or would consider adopting a child in the future, compared to 25 per cent. of married couples. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Health and Race Co-ordinators

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions his Department has had with the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority about the role of health and race coordinators; [47478]

(2) how many health and race coordinators are employed by his Department; [47473]

(3) what proposals he has to assess the disciplinary procedure for *(a)* social workers and *(b)* health and race coordinators employed by the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority; [47467]

(4) what the role is of health and race coordinators employed by health authorities; [47472]

(5) what rights of appeal are available to employees of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority suspended on disciplinary matters; [47468]

(6) what is the policy of his Department on referring health and race coordinators in the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority to an assessment centre; [47474]

(7) how many health and race coordinators are employed by health authorities in England, broken down by health authority. [47471]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not employ health and race coordinators and does not require organisations within the NHS to do so. However, many NHS organisations have sought to establish dedicated posts to work on issues of health, race and ethnicity, in response to the diverse needs of their local communities. Information on such posts is not collected centrally.

Similarly, although there are assessment centres for NHS staff in accessing places on a variety of courses, which are mainly linked to management schemes, there is no specific departmental policy on referring health and race coordinators to these centres. This would be a matter for the local NHS as the employer to address.

Neither has the Department had discussions with Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority about health and race coordinators.

The Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA do not employ any social workers. They are employed for those areas by the local councils, who are responsible for all disciplinary procedures. All NHS staff have a right of appeal against a disciplinary penalty available to them. This, however, does not include suspension, which does not fall within the definition of a disciplinary penalty.

The Department of Health is committed to equality and diversity. "The NHS Plan: a plan for investment, a plan for reform", published in July 2000, recognises the need for a modern NHS to respond to the needs of our diverse, multi-cultural society.

The Department has also launched an Equalities Framework for the NHS, "The Vital Connection", in April 2000 which includes clear requirements for the NHS to promote race equality and introduces a package of standards, indicators and monitoring arrangements.

Both these documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Lung Consultants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lung consultants there were in the NHS in each year since 1997 broken down by health authority. [47551]

Mr. Hutton: The information is shown in the table.

Cardio-thoracic consultants and respiratory consultants deal with lungs as part of their wider responsibilities.

Hospital medical consultants within the cardio-thoracic surgery and respiratory medicine specialties by health authority—England, at 30 September

Number

	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
HA name	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*
Avon	10	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	20
Barking and Havering	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Barnsley	—	0	—	0	—	0		0	—	0
Bedfordshire	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Berkshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	—	0	—	10	—	0	—	0	—	0
Birmingham	10	10	10	10	10	20	10	20	10	20
Bradford	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	—	10	—	10	—	10	—	10	—	0
Buckinghamshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Bury and Rochdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Calderdale and Kirklees	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Cambridge	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	20	10	10
Camden and Islington	10	0	10	10	10	10	20	10	20	10
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
County Durham	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Coventry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Croydon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	0
Doncaster	—	0	—	0	—	—	—	0	—	0
Dorset	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	10
Dudley	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10
East Kent	—	0	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	10
East Lancashire	0	0	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	10
East London and The City	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	10
East Riding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Surrey	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
East Sussex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10
Gateshead and South Tyneside	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Gloucestershire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	10	—	0
Herefordshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Hertfordshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Hillingdon	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	0	0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	10	—	0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	10	20	10	20	10	10	10	10	10	20
Kingston and Richmond	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	10	10	20	10	20	10	20	20	20	20
Leeds	10	0	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Leicestershire	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	10
Lincolnshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Liverpool	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10
Manchester	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	20	10
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	0	0	10
Morecambe Bay	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Newcastle and North Tyneside	10	10	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	0	10
North and East Devon	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
North and Mid Hampshire	—	—	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
North Cheshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
North Cumbria	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
North Derbyshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
North Essex	—	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	—	0
North Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	0	0	0
North West Lancashire	0	0	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	0
North Yorkshire	—	0	—	0	—	10	—	10	—	10
Northamptonshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Northumberland	—	—	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Nottingham	0	10	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	10
Oxfordshire	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	0	10
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	—	0	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Rotherham	—	0	—	—	—	0	—	0	—	0
Salford and Trafford	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	—	0
Sandwell	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Sefton	—	10	—	10	—	10	—	10	—	10
Sheffield	0	0	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	10
Shropshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	0
South and West Devon	—	0	0	0	10	0	10	0	10	0
South Cheshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	—	0
South Derbyshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
South Essex	—	0	—	0	0	0	0	0	—	0
South Humber	—	—	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	—
South Lancashire	—	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Staffordshire	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10
St. Helens and Knowsley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Hospital medical consultants within the cardio-thoracic surgery and respiratory medicine specialties by health authority—England, at 30 September

Number

	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
HA name	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*	*Cardio-thoracic surgery*	*Respiratory medicine*
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunderland	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Tees	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	0
Wakefield	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Walsall	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Warwickshire	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
West Kent	—	0	—	10	0	10	0	10	0	10
West Pennine	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
West Surrey	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
West Sussex	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Wigan and Bolton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0
Wiltshire	—	—	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Wirral	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Wolverhampton	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Worcester	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0

Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. '—' denotes zero.
3. '0' denotes five or less.

Consultants

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of how many additional consultants are needed if consultants work the European legal limit of hours each week. [46693]

Mr. Hutton: We expect that the growth in consultant numbers to deliver the NHS Plan (7,500 more by 2004) and strong continuing growth thereafter will provide sufficient numbers for all consultants to adhere to the European working time directive.

Through new ways of working, supported by pay modernisation, we expect to see increased numbers of staff working more flexibly with increased productivity and some roles currently carried out by consultants being transferred to other members of the health care team.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants practising in the NHS are aged over 55 years; and how many consultants aged over 55 years were practising in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1996, *(d)* 1994 and *(e)* 1992. [46690]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical and dental consultants, England at 30 September each year

	1992	*1994*	*1996*	*1998*	*2000*	*2001*
Consultants over 55	3,250	3,200	3,270	3,490	3,720	3,890
Percentage of all consultants	19.0	17.7	16.1	15.7	15.3	15.1

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

The number of consultants practising in the NHS has increased by 50 per cent. since 1992 and the age profile of the consultant workforce has become younger.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant vacancies there are. [46691]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Consultant vacancies in NHS trusts, England—3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

	Whole-time equivalents
3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	3.0
3 month vacancies (number)	670
Staff in post	21,630

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental workforce census (whole-time equivalent).
3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.
4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
5. Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census 2000

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours consultant physicians are contracted to work per week; how many hours were worked by consultant physicians over the contracted time, on average, in the last 12 months; and how many additional consultants would be needed to maintain levels of service if consultants worked only their contracted hours. [46694]

Mr. Hutton: Consultants hold a professional contract that does not specify particular hours of work. Whole-time and maximum part-time contract holders have a contractual commitment to devote substantially the whole of their professional time, up to 11 sessions, to their NHS duties.

The table shows the number of hospital medical consultants by contract in England as at 30 September 2001. The table gives a breakdown of contract holders on national terms and conditions of service by *(a)* whole time, *(b)* maximum part time and *(c)* part time. The number of honorary contract holders is also provided.

Hospital medical consultants by nature of contract—England at 30 September 2001

	Consultant
All contracts	24,400
Whole time	
Number	13,810
Percentage	56.6
Mag. part-time	
Number	5,520
Percentage	22.6
Part-time	
Number	3,530
Percentage	14.5
Honorary	
Number	1,550
Percentage	6.3

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding figures may not equal the sum of component parts.
3. Percentages were calculated using unrounded figures.

Source:
Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census.

A 1999 survey by management consultants KPMG for the 28th report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration showed that the average number of hours worked per week for whole time consultants, excluding emergency recalls, was 51.3 hours and for maximum part-timers 48.7 hours.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in consultant recruitment in the last 12 months. [46735]

Mr. Hutton: As at 30 September 2001, the date of the Department's annual work force censuses, 1,380 more consultants were working in the national health Service than there were at 30 September 2000. Overall since 1997 the number of consultants employed in the national health service has increased by 4,320 (20 per cent.).

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant physicians there are; and how many there were in each year since 1992. [46692]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

The number of consultant physicians has increased by 47 per cent. since 1992.

Hospital medical consultant physicians'—all specialties

	Number
1992	4,040
1993	4,090
1994	4,110
1995	4,510
1996	4,720
1997	4,940
1998	5,050
1999	5,290
2000	5,540
2001	5,930

[1] Physicians as recognised by the Royal College of Physicians includes staff in the listed specialties:
Allergy, Audiological medicine, Cardiology, Clinical genetics, Clinical Neurophysiology, Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics, Dermatology, Endocrinology and diabetes mellitus, Gastroenterology, General Medicine, Genito-urinary medicine, Geriatric medicine, Haematology, Immunology, Infectious diseases, Medical oncology, Neurology, Nuclear medicine, Palliative medicine, Rehabilitation medicine, Renal medicine, Respiratory medicine, Rheumatology.

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

NHS Staff Suspensions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff within the NHS have been suspended from work as a result of allegations and complaints by whistleblowers in the last two full available years; [46826]

(2) how many whistleblowers have been suspended from work within the NHS as a result of allegations and complaints in the last two full years that figures are available. [46827]

Mr. Hutton: We expect a climate of openness and dialogue in the national health service and a culture and an environment that encourages staff to feel able to raise concerns about health care matters sensibly and responsibly without fear of victimisation.

NHS trusts routinely report suspensions lasting six months or longer to the Department. As at 31 December 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, 29 hospitals and community medical and dental staff had been suspended for more than six months. These suspensions are not as a result of individuals whistleblowing.

Information on the suspension of individuals in other staff groups is not collected within the Department.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what trend data are available to measure progress against the PSA target for a reduction in the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury. [47299]

Jacqui Smith: Data to monitor the PSA target to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury (less inquest-adjourned cases) are obtained from mortality data published by the Office for National Statistics. Data are for England.

This PSA target is the target published in 2000 in the NHS Plan and previously in 1999 in the White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" for a 20 per cent. reduction against a baseline of the average age standardised mortality rate for the three years 1995–97.

The trend data are as follows:

Three-year average age standardised

Period	*Mortality rate per 100,000 population*
1995–96–97	9.07
1996–97–98	9.18
1997–98–99	9.33
1998–99–2000	9.44

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the PSA target for efficiency and other value for money gains in personal social services expenditure in 2001–02 will be met. [47285]

Jacqui Smith: No more figures are available since the answer I gave the hon. Member on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 938W. The in-year estimates I quoted then are what are used to monitor efficiency gains and no further information will be available.

Information provided by councils during in-year monitoring suggests that for social services in England the estimated efficiency gain was 2.1 per cent. for 1999–2000, 2.3 per cent. for 2000–01 and 2.5 per cent. for 2001–02. This means the efficiency gains achieved in 2001–02 fell short of the 3 per cent. target, although the targets of 2 per cent. for each of the previous two years were exceeded. Over the three years the total estimated efficiency gain was 7.1 per cent, all but meeting the total of the efficiency targets over three years of 7.2 per cent.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the PSA target for all NHS trusts to achieve three per cent. procurement savings in 2000–01 was met. [47292]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 987W.

Diseases (Ships)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* gastrointestinal disease and *(b)* Legionnaire's disease in passengers or crew members of ships have been notified to the UK in each of the last 10 years. [45366]

Yvette Cooper: The Public Health laboratory Service (PHLS) does not collect data on the number of cases of gastroenteritis in passengers and crew on ships.

Legionnaire's disease is not statutorily notifiable. Laboratory reports of Legionnaire's disease associated with ships, England and Wales from 1992 to 2001 are as follows:

Year	*Cases of Legionnaire's disease*
1992	0
1993	0
1994	2
1995	2
1996	3
1997	6
1998	3
1999	2
2000	0
2001*	0
Total	18

* provisional data

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take in respect of the World Health Organisation guide to ship sanitation. [45365]

Yvette Cooper: The UK Government are participating in the revision of the World Health Organisation Guide to Ship Sanitation, which is due to be published in 2003.

Pneumococcal Disease

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the impact of the introduction of the conjugate pneumococcal vaccine in *(a)* the USA and *(b)* other European countries on the incidence of pneumococcal disease in those aged under two. [45455]

Yvette Cooper: Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine has been introduced into the routine programme in the US and since the vaccine was licensed there has been little information on its national impact, other than in the population that took part in the clinical trials. Nevertheless, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has been made aware of these results. Similarly, reviews of the epidemiology of pneumococcal disease in England and Wales have been presented to the JCVI, along with progress reports on UK studies to evaluate the suitability of this vaccine for this country. There are only limited data available on pneumococcal disease in those under two years from other European countries.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine will be made available to all children aged under two. [45454]

Yvette Cooper: Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine has only recently been licensed for use in European Union countries. The Chief Medical Officer has already sent advice to doctors on the use of this vaccine in children less than two years, with risk factors for pneumococcal disease. Its use in all children will be dependent on the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, the results of trials on the vaccine's suitability for inclusion in the national immunisation programme and considerations of costs and benefits.

Eye Tests

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many old age pensioners in the Harwich constituency have benefited from the introduction of free eye tests. [45118]

Ms Blears: Figures for the number of sight tests by constituency are not collected centrally.

The table shows the number of national health service (NHS) sight tests in North Essex Health Authority for the years 1998–99 to 2000–01. Eligibility to NHS sight tests was extended to those aged 60 and over from 1 April 1999. Some of those benefiting from this extension may also have qualified for free sight tests on other grounds.

General Ophthalmic Services: Number of sight tests paid for in North Essex HA for the years 1998–99 to 2000/01.

General ophthalmic services: number of sight tests paid for in north Essex HA for the years 1998–99 to 2000–01

	Total number of sight tests	Sight tests for 60 and over age group
1998–99	128,200	[1]n/a
1999–2000	176,200	73,000
2000–01	181,800	90,606

[1] Not applicable

Dentistry

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of those aged under 18 were registered with a general dental service dentist in *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* England in each year since 1997. [44273]

Ms Blears: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to NHS services by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The percentage of children registered with a General Dental Service (GDS) dentist per head of population for each health authority and England is shown in the table at 30 September 1997 to 2001.

From September 1996, the registration period was changed to 15 months; previously child registrations expired at the end of the following calendar year. As a result, data held on registration numbers after 1997 are not comparable to earlier years.

General Dental Service: Children registered by health authority at 30 September 1997 to 2001

Health authority	Percentage of children registered[1,2] 1997[3]	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	65	60	60	61	60
Avon	75	70	70	71	71
Barking and Havering	56	49	50	51	52
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	59	52	52	53	53
Barnsley	67	61	62	62	62
Bedfordshire	49	46	46	47	47
Berkshire	63	57	59	58	56
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	63	58	58	58	58
Birmingham	58	52	52	51	50
Bradford	55	50	49	50	50
Brent and Harrow	60	52	54	54	55
Buckinghamshire	66	61	60	60	59
Bury and Rochdale	69	63	61	62	62
Calderdale and Kirklees	66	61	61	63	62
Cambridge and Huntingdon[4]	61	56	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire[4]	—	—	58	59	59
Camden and Islington	45	40	40	41	40
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	71	65	65	64	65
County Durham	64	60	59	60	59
Coventry	61	56	57	56	57
Croydon	65	57	55	56	54
Doncaster	73	68	65	67	67
Dorset	77	72	73	73	72
Dudley	55	52	52	51	51
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	56	50	48	49	51
East Kent	66	61	59	61	60
East Lancashire	65	60	59	58	56
East London and The City	38	32	33	33	33
East Norfolk[4]	72	68	—	—	—
East Riding	65	60	61	62	63
East Surrey	67	62	57	61	60
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	67	62	62	62	61
Gateshead and South Tyneside	69	64	66	65	65
Gloucestershire	68	65	65	65	63
Herefordshire	74	65	68	67	64
Hertfordshire	73	68	68	69	69
Hillingdon	62	56	56	57	57
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	62	59	60	61	60
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	38	34	32	32	31
Kingston and Richmond	66	59	59	59	55
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	49	43	40	40	41
Leeds	68	64	65	64	63
Leicestershire	66	62	62	61	63
Lincolnshire	65	61	62	63	63
Liverpool	66	60	60	60	59
Manchester	61	52	54	53	51
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	56	50	50	52	52
Morecambe Bay	64	61	61	61	61
Newcastle and North Tyneside	65	59	61	61	61
Norfolk[4]	—	—	64	64	63
North and East Devon	70	65	68	71	69
North and Mid Hampshire	64	60	59	60	61
North Cheshire	68	61	61	61	61
North Cumbria	66	64	67	68	69
North Derbyshire	67	62	62	61	61
North Essex	66	62	62	63	61
North Nottinghamshire	72	67	68	70	69
North Staffordshire	64	58	59	59	59
North West Anglia[4]	61	56	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	72	67	69	67	66
North Yorkshire	72	67	68	68	68
Northamptonshire	64	54	59	59	58
Northumberland	68	64	64	65	65
Nottingham	67	62	64	64	63
Oxfordshire	61	57	57	60	60
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	63	56	55	57	57
Rotherham	66	60	61	62	62
Salford and Trafford	77	68	67	66	63
Sandwell	50	48	50	51	51
Sefton	74	69	69	65	63
Sheffield	73	66	67	67	66
Shropshire	73	68	68	68	66
Solihull	62	55	58	58	59
Somerset	74	69	67	70	66
South and West Devon	70	65	66	67	67
South Cheshire	74	62	64	64	65
Southern Derbyshire	64	60	60	61	59
South Essex	60	57	62	64	62
South Humber	69	64	65	65	66
South Lancashire	65	60	60	60	60
South Staffordshire	71	66	66	65	64
Southampton and South West Hampshire	71	67	67	65	65
St. Helens and Knowsley	68	61	61	56	56
Stockport	75	70	71	71	70
Suffolk	68	63	63	64	63
Sunderland	68	63	64	64	64
Tees	75	68	68	68	68
Wakefield	71	65	65	65	65
Walsall	56	50	51	51	49
Warwickshire	67	62	63	62	65
West Kent	64	61	62	62	63
West Pennine	72	65	66	65	64
West Surrey	69	63	63	63	63
West Sussex	75	70	71	70	70
Wigan and Bolton	70	67	66	65	65
Wiltshire	67	63	66	67	66
Wirral	72	69	69	66	65
Wolverhampton	54	54	55	55	54
Worcestershire	69	64	64	62	62

[1] Based on the number of registrations at 30 September each year.

[2] ONS 1997 to 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census are used to calculate the percentage of children registered.

[3] Registration rate is not comparable to later figures because of the change in the registration period to 15 months.

[4] Three HAs: Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia were replaced by two HAs: Cambridge and Norfolk in April 1999.

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Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of those aged 18 years and over were registered with a general dental service dentist in *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* England in each year from 1990 to 1999, inclusive. [44272]

Mr. Blears: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to NHS services by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The percentage of adults registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist per head of population for each Family Health Service Authority and for England is shown in table 1 at 30 September 1992 to 1995.

The percentage of adults registered with a GDS dentist per head of population for each health authority and for England is shown in table 2 at 30 September for each year since 1996.

Comparable data for 1990 and 1991 are not available as registrations were only introduced in October 1990 and registration numbers had not yet had time to reach consistent levels.

From September 1996, the registration period for adults was shortened from 24 to 15 months. This affected registration numbers. As a result, registration numbers after 1997 are not comparable to the numbers for earlier years. The data is also affected by gradual improvements in the methods used for the removal of duplicate registration records, which were first employed by the Dental Practice Board in 1993.

Table 1: General Dental Service: Adults registered by Family Health Service Authority at 30 September 1992 to 1995

Family Health Service Authority	Percentage of adults registered [1,2,3] 1992	1993	1994	1995
England	58	57	56	53
Avon	64	63	61	56
Barking and Havering	50	52	51	47
Barnet	39	39	40	37
Barnsley	51	56	56	54
Bedfordshire	50	52	52	49
Berkshire	53	51	48	41
Birmingham	61	60	60	58
Bolton	56	58	61	58
Bradford	61	62	61	59
Brent and Harrow	56	57	58	56
Bromley	37	34	33	31
Buckinghamshire	55	50	46	41
Bury	57	57	55	53
Calderdale	66	68	65	63
Cambridgeshire	58	56	55	52
Camden and Islington	62	62	64	59
Cheshire	63	63	62	60
City and East London	51	53	51	47
Cleveland	62	66	64	63
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	63	58	56	53
Coventry	65	61	63	59
Croydon	60	58	55	51
Cumbria	59	56	53	50
Derbyshire	54	53	52	50
Devon	64	61	58	54
Doncaster	60	64	63	62
Dorset	65	63	61	58
Dudley	55	56	57	54
Durham	56	56	54	53
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	55	56	56	52
East Sussex	62	60	58	56
Enfield and Haringey	50	52	52	49
Essex	53	53	53	50
Gateshead	53	58	58	57
Gloucestershire	65	53	47	40
Greenwich and Bexley	54	53	52	47
Hampshire	62	61	58	55
Hereford and Worcester	59	60	59	58
Hertfordshire	60	61	60	57
Hillingdon	58	60	58	56
Humberside	55	55	51	48
Isle of Wight	62	56	51	47
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	47	47	47	44
Kent	54	48	45	41
Kingston and Richmond	40	42	41	41
Kirklees	60	63	63	60
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	60	61	60	56
Lancashire	58	56	55	52
Leeds	62	61	58	56
Leicestershire	59	58	57	55
Lincolnshire	60	60	58	55
Liverpool	58	60	61	58
Manchester	67	69	69	65
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	52	51	50	49
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	55	57	56	57
Norfolk	60	59	57	52
North Tyneside	60	60	60	60
North Yorkshire	62	61	59	56
Northamptonshire	55	56	56	56
Northumberland	51	54	56	52
Nottinghamshire	59	60	60	57
Oldham	56	58	60	57
Oxfordshire	52	48	40	34
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	53	55	56	52
Rochdale	59	58	58	58
Rotherham	51	55	52	52
Salford	59	60	60	55
Sandwell	58	58	59	58
Sefton	62	64	64	63
Sheffield	59	61	61	59
Shropshire	64	63	60	50
Solihull	51	50	49	48
Somerset	66	69	66	60
South Tyneside	55	56	57	57
St. Helens and Knowsley	59	61	61	59
Staffordshire	54	53	51	48
Stockport	67	66	66	65
Suffolk	65	66	65	62
Sunderland	55	57	57	57
Surrey	56	54	52	48
Tameside	55	55	53	53
Trafford	71	68	67	68
Wakefield	58	71	67	63
Walsall	49	51	53	51
Warwickshire	57	57	55	52
West Sussex	62	59	56	54
Wigan	59	59	62	59
Wiltshire	55	55	54	51
Wirral	64	65	65	63
Wolverhampton	57	58	60	58

[1] Based on the number of registrations at 30 September each year
[2] ONS 1992 to 1995 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census are used to calculate the percentage of adults registered
[3] Registration rates are based on a 24 month registration period

Table 2: General Dental Service: Adults registered by health authority at 30 September 1996 to 1999

Health Authority	Percentage of adults registered [1,2] 1996 [3]	1997 [3]	1998	1999
England	52	51	44	43
Avon	55	54	47	45
Barking and Havering	48	48	39	38
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	44	43	35	34
Barnsley	55	55	50	49
Bedfordshire	47	44	36	38

Table 2: General Dental Service: Adults registered by health authority at 30 September 1996 to 1999

Health Authority	Percentage of adults registered[1,2] 1996[3]	1997[3]	1998	1999
Berkshire	39	39	32	33
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	39	40	33	33
Birmingham	57	57	49	48
Bradford	57	56	49	48
Brent and Harrow	56	56	43	43
Buckinghamshire	39	36	31	30
Bury and Rochdale	54	54	46	45
Calderdale and Kirklees	60	60	54	52
Cambridge and Huntingdon[4]	48	46	39	—
Cambridgeshire[4]	—	—	—	40
Camden and Islington	59	61	48	46
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	50	48	39	37
County Durham	53	53	47	47
Coventry	56	57	47	47
Croydon	50	50	40	39
Doncaster	62	62	56	54
Dorset	55	55	49	49
Dudley	52	51	45	46
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	51	52	41	38
East Kent	43	43	38	37
East Lancashire	53	54	47	47
East London and The City	46	46	34	33
East Norfolk[4]	54	53	48	—
East Riding	46	46	41	42
East Surrey	44	44	38	34
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	55	53	45	43
Gateshead and South Tyneside	58	57	50	51
Gloucestershire	38	37	31	31
Herefordshire	63	61	50	51
Hertfordshire	55	54	46	46
Hillingdon	54	55	46	44
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	50	48	42	41
Kensington and Chelsea Westminster	42	41	31	30
Kingston and Richmond	39	37	30	29
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	55	55	44	40
Leeds	55	54	49	48
Leicestershire	54	53	46	46
Lincolnshire	55	54	49	49
Liverpool	58	58	48	47
Manchester	63	63	51	51
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	48	48	38	37
Morecambe Bay	53	52	46	46
Newcastle and North Tyneside	57	57	49	50
Norfolk[4]	—	—	—	45
North and East Devon	52	50	43	45
North and Mid Hampshire	49	49	41	38
North Cheshire	56	57	48	48
North Cumbria	48	48	43	45
North Derbyshire	47	45	40	40
North Essex	52	51	44	46
North Nottinghamshire	54	57	53	54
North Staffordshire	42	42	36	37
North West Anglia[4]	43	42	38	—
North West Lancashire	53	56	50	51
North Yorkshire	55	54	49	48
Northamptonshire	55	56	47	50
Northumberland	53	53	47	47
Nottingham	59	60	54	52
Oxfordshire	33	32	28	27
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	51	52	43	41
Rotherham	52	52	46	46
Salford and Trafford	60	59	50	49
Sandwell	56	55	49	50
Sefton	63	63	57	56
Sheffield	59	59	54	53
Shropshire	51	45	38	36
Solihull	42	41	31	34
Somerset	56	56	48	46
South and West Devon	52	51	43	41
South Cheshire	57	56	44	45
South Derbyshire	49	48	44	44
South Essex	45	44	39	40
South Humber	52	52	47	48
South Lancashire	43	43	38	39
South Staffordshire	50	49	42	41
Southampton and South West Hampshire	56	55	48	47
St. Helens and Knowsley	58	58	49	49
Stockport	64	63	56	57
Suffolk	59	58	51	52
Sunderland	57	55	46	47
Tees	63	64	56	56
Wakefield	62	61	53	52
Walsall	49	47	42	42
Warwickshire	50	49	41	37
West Kent	40	39	35	35
West Pennine	55	56	48	49
West Surrey	47	44	38	37
West Sussex	51	49	42	42
Wigan and Bolton	58	58	53	52
Wiltshire	48	42	34	37
Wirral	62	62	56	57
Wolverhampton	57	55	47	47
Worcestershire	55	52	45	45

[1] Based on the number of registrations at 30 September each year
[2] ONS 1996 to 1999 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census are used to calculate the percentage of adults registered
[3] Registration rate is not comparable to later figures because of the change in the registration period to 15 months
[4] Three HAs: Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia were replaced by two HAs: Cambridge and Norfolk in April 1999

Autism

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements exist for monitoring numbers of children with autism; [43607]

(2) what figures exist for the number of children diagnosed with autism since 1990. [43608]

Yvette Cooper: All local statutory authorities are responsible for ensuring that they have sufficient knowledge of local needs and priorities to inform the pattern of services in their area.

Details of the number of children diagnosed with autism since 1990 are not available. In December 2001 the Medical Research Council (MRC) published a comprehensive review of autism research, which provides an authoritative overview of the current state of knowledge on the prevalence, incidence and causes of autism. The report was commissioned by the Department and produced with the help of a wide range of experts and a "lay" group including parents and representatives of autism charities. It is available on the MRC website at "www.mrc.ac.uk".

St. James' Hospital, Portsmouth

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what correspondence he has had concerning his Department's decision to challenge the declaration of a town green in the grounds of St. James' Hospital in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement; [43824]

(2) if he will make a statement to the House on his proposal to take action against Portsmouth City Council in respect of St. James' Hospital; [43821]

(3) what discussions he has had with the DTLR concerning city council policy on open spaces; and if he will make a statement; [43559]

(4) what consultation he has had with the DTLR concerning Portsmouth City Council's policy on open spaces and St. James' Hospital site; and if he will make a statement; [43825]

(5) what assessment has been made of the compatibility between the proposed action by his Department against Portsmouth Council in regard to St. James' Hospital and the open space in cities policy; and if he will make a statement; [43820]

(6) what action he has taken in respect of Portsmouth City Council's decision to declare a town green in the grounds of St. James' Hospital; and for what reasons. [43822]

Ms Blears: Apart from correspondence with our professional and legal advisers, the Department has received letters from Portsmouth City Council legal department and the hon. Member.

Portsmouth City Council as the registration authority received an application to register part of St. James Hospital, Portsmouth as a Town or Village Green, and appointed an inspector to conduct a non-statutory inquiry which the Department opposed. The Council subsequently determined to approve the application. Based on legal advice the Department has filed an application for a review of the Council's decision. It seems unlikely that the drafters of the Commons Registration Act 1965 intended it to apply to National Health Service (NHS) land.

Discussions have been held with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), who are the successor to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, making representation for guidance to make it clear that NHS land within hospitals should not be subject of future applications for registration as a Town or Village Green.

The Department has not discussed with Portsmouth City Council its policy on open spaces either generally or specifically in connection with St. James Hospital. That is a matter for local discussions in the context of a planning application for development on the land remaining in the ownership of the NHS.

The area of land in the proposed Town or Village Green is largely within an area declared surplus to NHS requirements. The site has been marketed with the benefit of outline planning permission for residential development granted by Portsmouth City Council, and with open space provided in accordance with that outline consent.

Milk

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation will be conducted with parents about the introduction of fluoridated milk in schools. [42977]

Ms Blears: When a scheme is under consideration, health service staff visit the school and explain the objectives of the scheme both to parents and staff. Leaflets and letters are then issued to parents, which indicate that children who are taking fluoride tablets or drops do not need fluoridated milk and that milk without the addition of fluoride will remain available. A consent form is attached to the letter which parents have to sign before their child can receive fluoridated milk.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether children drinking fluoridated milk in schools will be monitored for fluoride excess. [42979]

Ms Blears: The design of the milk fluoridation scheme is such that it is unlikely that children will consume excess fluoride and children are not being monitored on an individual basis. However, there is general monitoring in place to evaluate the scheme. The amount of fluoride excreted in a 24 hour period gives a good indication of the amount consumed. Recently published data show that a number of children in the scheme have had their fluoride excretion levels measured and no evidence was found of any problems. In addition, fluorosis levels will be monitored in four health authorities in the scheme.

Eastbourne District General Hospital

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patient admissions there were to Eastbourne District General Hospital in each of the last 10 years. [44713]

Ms Blears: The information requested is collected centrally at trust level, not by individual hospital. The figures for Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust are as follows:

Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust: inpatient admissions 1991–92 to 2000–01

Year	*Number*
1991–92	30,259
1992–93	32,057
1993–94	34,322
1994–95	34,669
1995–96	36,752
1996–97	37,738
1997–98	38,018
1998–99	40,671
1999–00	41,878
2000–01	42,689

Note:
1. The Trust was established in its current form in 1992.
Source:
"Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)"

Hospital Beds

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been provided for hospital bed places since 1997 for hospitals in *(a)* England and *(b)* Coventry. [43525]

Mr. Hutton: Funding for hospital beds is not identified separately within health authority allocations.

Since 1997, total health authority allocations have risen from £20.9 billion to £41.8 billion in 2002–03. Ringfencing within allocations is kept to a minimum to allow health authorities to manage flexibly all the resources available to them. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care organisations and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities, modernising services and meeting NHS Plan targets.

Hospital Design

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the design and construction of *(a)* new hospitals, *(b)* hospital extensions and *(c)* hospital refurbishment. [43690]

Mr. Hutton: 'Achieving Excellence in Healthcare Design' is the Department's programme to deliver design excellence in national health service buildings. We are raising the profile of design, partnering with key architectural professional bodies and supporting the NHS by providing advice and guidance at key stages of the procurement process.

Each hospital embarking on a new development, however large or small, will nominate a local design champion from the Trust board to ensure that the new building provides a high quality patient-focused environment with good working conditions for staff and buildings that make a positive contribution to the local neighbourhood.

To ensure that good design is embedded within the NHS hospital building programme design proposals will be reviewed by a panel, led by NHS Estates with the Prince's Foundation, CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and others. Designs will be reviewed at the earliest stages of the procurement process before a preferred bidder is chosen.

Future new projects will need to provide evidence of the involvement of staff, patients and the public in planning their design.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in drawing up the legal and financial framework within which foundation hospitals will operate. [48023]

Mr. Hutton: The full implications and details surrounding the establishment of foundation hospitals are still being explored. We are working with a broad range of interested parties including 3 star trusts to take this work forward.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he plans to give to rural hospitals in the new status health authorities. [43398]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out our vision for a health service designed around the patient, offering a comprehensive range of services for everyone, using the guiding principle of providing as much care as possible as close to home as possible.

It will be for local primary care organisations, working in partnership with the new health authorities, to develop services that meet the needs of the community they serve, taking account of clinical standards and safety and the views of local people. Rural hospitals clearly have an important role to play in meeting patients' desire for care closer to home.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the number of people receiving intermediate care preventing unnecessary hospital admission for *(a)* Q1 1999–2000, *(b)* Q2 1999–2000, *(c)* Q3 1999–2000, *(d)* Q4 1999–2000, *(e)* Q1 2000–01, *(f)* Q2 2000–01, *(g)* Q3 2000–01, *(h)* Q4 2000–01, *(i)* Q1 2001–02, *(j)* Q2 2001–02 and *(k)* Q3 2001–02. [43461]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Figures are collected on:

number of people referred to/receiving intermediate care in a residential setting ('rapid response'/'supported discharge') to prevent hospital admission;

number of people referred to non-residential intermediate care teams to prevent hospital admission.

Data are only available on a quarterly basis for Q1, Q2 & Q3 2001–02, and have been placed in the Library.

Care Worker Training

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 432W, on care worker training, what funding he has made available to meet the costs of training care workers to NVQ level II *(a)* in respect of the draft domiciliary care standards and *(b)* in respect of the care home standards. [42915]

Jacqui Smith: With regard to domiciliary care workers I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 117W. Provision has been made in the personal social services standard spending assessment (PSS SSA) in 2002–03 and 2003–04 for the training of care workers to NVQ level 2 standard as set out in the care standards. The PSS SSA is unhypothecated, and it is for individual councils to consider how much to spend on this training in the light of local circumstances.

In April 2001 we set up a fund to help towards the implementation of the national training strategy for the social care work force. This fund is being disbursed by TOPSS (the national training organisation for social care) through their regional training forums. There was £2 million in this fund for 2001–02 and it has been used to embed induction training and it has been available to train staff working in the voluntary, private and statutory sectors.

The fund has increased to £15 million for 2002–03. This money will be used to support 26,500 staff to undertake training. Some 11,500 of these staff will be undertaking assessor, verifier or mentor training in order to strengthen NVQ frameworks, enabling staff to complete their NVQs in future years.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish for consultation the assessment tool commissioned from the Social Care Association to meet the care home regulations in respect of the staffing mix in care homes. [44771]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* We are currently considering the details of the guidance.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the protocols that are being developed regarding funding of nursing care. [45661]

Jacqui Smith: These will be published as soon as they have been agreed. Copies will be placed on the Department's website.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of nursing homes charging extra administration costs for payment of the free nursing care contribution; and if he will make a statement. [47533]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave to him today.

Nurses (Overseas Recruitment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new NHS nurses since 1999 have been recruited from overseas; and what percentage of the total new recruitment intake they represent. [47525]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's workforce censuses do not record the nationality of the nurses working in the national health service. It is not therefore possible to calculate the number of nurses recruited from overseas or the percentage of the new recruitment intake that they represent.

The new nurses working in the national health service are made up of newly qualified staff, overseas recruits and nurses returning to work in the national health service.

In order to practise as a nurse, overseas applicants must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), formerly the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting. Overseas nurses registered with the NMC do not necessarily work in the national health service The number of entrants to the register in the last three years are shown in the table.

Overseas trained nurses and midwives registering with the UKCC

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Overseas nurses registered with the UKCC	3,621	5,945	8,403

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures have been taken and what safeguards exist to ensure the competence of locum doctors. [46741]

Mr. Hutton: We introduced a new Code of Practice for the employment of locum doctors in 1997. This remains the current guidance and requires NHS employers who use locums to conduct vigorous checks and to ensure that they are properly supervised. The Code also requires locum agencies to ensure that the doctors they supply are of the appropriate quality and have the necessary credentials and qualifications.

We are determined, however, to improve on these arrangements. We are now developing proposals to extend the existing appraisal arrangements for NHS consultants and principal GPs to locum doctors. This will ensure that these doctors have their professional development needs identified by NHS appraisers and get the same support as substantive doctors to keep their practice up-to-date. We are also working with the General Medical Council on proposals to revalidate doctors regularly. These arrangements will apply to locums who will be required to produce the same standards of evidence about their practice as all other doctors. We will then introduce a new Code of Practice through which we see NHS Professionals adopting a central role in supporting and quality assuring locums.

In primary care, non-principal Gps are now required to register on a Primary Care Trust/Health Authority supplementary list before they can work as a deputy or as an assistant in general medical services.

In order to be registered, non-principals need to satisfy certain criteria that include checks on their qualifications and criminal record. The criteria mirror that required for principal GPs applying to join a medical list and will be used by health authorities to determine the suitability of a practitioner applying to work in their area.

Trainee Doctors (Care Standards)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to introduce to ensure safe standards of care when increasing numbers of trainee doctors move to shifts. [46829]

Mr. Hutton: Shifts are an established mode of working for doctors in training and recommended rest requirements already exceed those of the European Working Time Directive. Weekly hours of work and maximum shift lengths are currently subject to limits agreed with the British Medical Association, and these too will be subject to the further limitations of the Working Time Directive from August 2004.

Recent figures show that trainee doctors working full shifts are more likely to meet the rest requirements than those undertaking other patterns of work.

GP Vacancies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP vacancies there were at the latest available date. [46727]

Mr. Hutton: The 98 (out of 100) health authorities in England and Wales who responded to the Department's 2001 GP vacancy survey reported 2,464 vacancies as current at some time during the 12-month period from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. These vacancies will reflect both staff turnover and the creation of new posts.

77 per cent. of the GP vacancies filled between April 2000 and March 2001 were filled in six months or less, and there were an average of 6.9 applications per vacancy.

Further details are available in the Department of Health publication "General Practitioner Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey 2001 England and Wales". It is available as www.doh.gov.uk/stats/gprrvsurvey2001.htm or in the Library.

Doctors

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent *(a)* hospital doctors and *(b)* GPs there were in the NHS in each year since 1979. [44055]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in tables which have been placed in the Library.

Whole-time equivalent data for general practitioners (GPs) was not available prior to 1990. There was no provision for GPs to work anything less than full-time, therefore whole-time equivalent data was not available.

The headcount number of hospital medical staff increased by 92 per cent. between 1979 and 2001. In the same period, the number of practitioners and unrestricted principals and equivalents increased by 33 per cent. and 31 per cent. respectively.

Midwives

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies were unfilled in the NHS for qualified midwives in each of the last five years. [43867]

Mr. Hutton: The number of midwives working in the NHS increased from 22,570 to 23,080 between September 2000 and September 2001.

The Department has only collected vacancy information as at 31 March for the last three years. The information requested is in the table.

3-month vacancies for all qualified midwives

	3-month vacancy rates (%)	*3-month vacancies*	*Staff in post*
March 1999	2.1	400	18,170
March 2000	2.8	510	17,880
March 2001	2.6	470	17,660

Notes:
1. Three-month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March each year which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).
2. Three-month vacancy rates are three-month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three-month vacancies plus staff in post from the previous September non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent).
3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.
4. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.

Source:
Department of Health vacancies survey each year and non-medical workforce census

Nurses

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are employed in accident and emergency departments in England. [43552]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible to separately identify nurses employed in accident and emergency (A&E) departments.

On 30 September 2001, there were 241,910 nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff within the acute, elderly and general area of work.

The Reforming Emergency Care Strategy was announced in October 2001. It provides £40 million new investment between now and March 2003 to recruit 600 additional A&E nurses. This will provide sufficient staff to allow separation of services for patients with minor injury or illness from those patients with more serious conditions in all A&E departments.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* health visitors, *(b)* school nurses, *(c)* district nurses and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses were in training in each region in September of each year since 1997 broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [41700]

Mr. Hutton: Information collected by the Department does not record the gender or ethnicity of health visitors, school nurses, district nurses and community psychiatric nurses in training. Information was not collected in 1997–98. The whole-time equivalent numbers in training between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 in each region are shown in the tables.

Health visitors in training 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Trent	55	53	59
South East	89	81	92
South West	42	34	38
Northern and Yorkshire	129	142	190
North West	76	84	84
London	101	99	105
Eastern	38	53	68
West Midlands	52	52	60
Total	580	598	695

School nurses in training 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Trent	7	9	14
South East	19	20	21
South West	1	6	20
Northern and Yorkshire	31	27	18
North West	14	23	23
London	24	24	28
Eastern	5	10	18
West Midlands	19	18	20
Total	119	137	162

District nurses in training 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Trent	50	44	49
South East	96	90	95
South West	36	28	42
Northern and Yorkshire	103	127	80
North West	64	71	71
London	93	101	103
Eastern	38	46	53
West Midlands	62	67	67
Total	541	574	560

Community psychiatric nurses in training 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Trent	3	4	0
South East	64	51	34
South West	13	16	7
Northern and Yorkshire	13	38	6
North West	37	30	30
London	55	43	67
Eastern	19	38	29
West Midlands	40	34	34
Total	244	253	207

Source:
1998–99 data—November 1999 Financial and Workforce Information Return
1999–2000 data—November 2000 Financial and Workforce Information Return
2000–01 data—November 2001 Financial and Workforce Information Return

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of whole time equivalent nurses who will be performing non-clinical duties with *(a)* the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, *(b)* the Commission for Health Improvement and *(c)* the NHS Modernisation Agency. [24598]

Mr. Hutton *[pursuant to his reply, 10 January 2002, c. 999W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the NHS Modernisation Agency are responsible for improvements in quality across the NHS. Nurses are employed within these agencies to provide the frontline perspective and to influence development.

Numbers are subject to change but in December there were two nurses employed in the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 35 nurses employed in the Commission for Health Improvement and 51 in the Modernisation Agency.

Haemophilia Drugs

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many UK-resident patients over the age of 16 are being treated with rcFVIII. [22325]

Yvette Cooper *[pursuant to her reply, 11 January 2002, c.1029W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

The United Kingdom Haemophilia Doctors Organisation (UKHDCO) carried out a survey in 2001 which revealed that all haemophilia A patients in England under the age of 20 (43 per cent. of the total) and 6.5 per cent. of those over age 20 are receiving, or are entitled to receive, Recombinant Factor VIII. The UKHCDO estimates that the situation is likely to be similar in Northern Ireland, although no data are currently available. In Scotland and Wales, all patients are eligible to receive Recombinant Factor VIII.

Tobacco

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what steps are being taken to further reduce tobacco use among children and adults. [42946]

Yvette Cooper: In 1988, the Government introduced a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use among children and adults, 'Smoking Kills'. Key features are:

a comprehensive mass media campaign highlighting the dangers of smoking and publicising the free NHS smoking helpline (0800 169 0 169) with additional helplines for pregnant women and ethnic minorities;

specific programmes targeting manual groups, pregnant women and ethnic minorities;

projects designed to provide focused support in communities such as in prisons and hospitals;

smoking cessation services across the country;

nicotine replacement therapy and Zyban on prescription;

an enforcement protocol strengthening action against illegal sales to under 16s;

a public places charter encouraging the provision of smoke-free areas;

banning tobacco advertising and promotion. The Government have taken on Lord Clement-Jones' Private Member's Bill which completed its Third Reading in the House of Lords on 15 March; as well as

concerted action to tackle smuggling.

Specifically aimed at reducing tobacco use among young people, the Department has commissioned 'Smokescreen', a film-making initiative developed by young people for young people. The films have been shown on cable TV and a teaching pack is being produced for schools. The Government's Healthy Schools Programme also addresses the health risks posed by smoking and substance misuse.

In England, the prevalence rate in the 11 to 15 year-old age group has fallen from 13 per cent. in 1996 to 10 per cent. in 2001. In adults (aged 16+) prevalence rates fell from 28 per cent. in 1998 to 27 per cent. in 2000. The prevalence in adult manual groups in England fell from 33 per cent. in 1998 to 31 per cent. in 2000.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 April 2002

NORTHERN IRELAND

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to dispose of L5A7 plastic baton rounds; and how many have been retained for future use. [17763]

Jane Kennedy: All stocks of L5A7 baton rounds held by the police in Northern Ireland have been disposed of to the Ministry of Defence and none have been retained for future use.

Public Bodies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those public bodies that are not designated for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. [38295]

Mr. Browne: Under section 75(3)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has the authority to designate "any department, corporation or body listed in Schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 . . ."

The most recent list of bodies under Schedule 2 to the 1967 Act totals 237. Of these, 26 have been designated and a further 39 remain under consideration. These are:

Alcohol Education and Research Council
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Broadcasting Standards Commission
Boundary Commission
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges
Civil Aviation Authority
Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship
Committee on Standards in Public Life
Commonwealth Institute
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom
Community Development Foundation
Consumer Council for Postal Services
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils
Economic and Social Research Council
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Food Standards Agency
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority
General Social Care Council
HM Treasury
Home Office
Information Commissioner
Lord Chancellor's Department
Medical Research Council
Ministry of Defence
National Biological Standards Board (UK)
National Care Standards Commission
National Radiological Protection Board
National Savings (part of the Treasury)
National Environment Research Council
Office of the Director General of Fair Trading
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council
Pensions Compensation Board
Post Office Users' Council for Northern Ireland
Postal Services Commission
Treasury Solicitor's Department
UK Passport Agency (part of the Home Office)
United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board
War Pensions Agency (part of the Department for Work and Pensions)
War Pensions Committees.

Of the remainder, 130 have no remit in Northern Ireland. It is not appropriate to designate a further 42 as they have no scope to affect equality in Northern Ireland (for example because their role is purely advisory). These are listed below:

Bodies with no remit in Northern Ireland

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees
Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales
Agricultural Wages Committees
Apple and Pear Research Council
Arts Council of England
Benefits Agency
Britain-Russia Centre and the British East-West Centre
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe
British Museum
British Potato Council
British Tourist Authority
Cabinet Office
Central Office of Information
Certification Office for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations
Charity Commission
Child Support Agency
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
Civil Justice Council
Coal Authority
Commission for Health Improvement
Commission for Racial Equality
Commission for the New Towns (English Partnerships)
Committee of Investigation for Great Britain
Competition Commission
Construction Industry Training Board

Consumers' Committee for Great Britain under the Agricultural Marketing Act 1958
Countryside Agency
Court Service
Crafts Council
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Crown Estate Office
Department for Education and Skills
Department for International Development
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Department for Work and Pensions
Department of Health
Development Corporations for new towns
Disability Rights Commission
Docklands Light Railway
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Driving Standards Agency
Education Transfer Council
Employment Service
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
English Heritage (Historical Buildings and Monuments Commission for England)
English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
English Nature
English Partnerships (Urban Regeneration Agency and Commission for the New Towns)
English Sports Council
English Tourist Board
Environment Agency
Equal Opportunities Commission
Fleet Air Arm Museum
Football Licensing Authority
Forestry Commission
Gaming Board for Great Britain
Gas and Electricity Consumer Council
Geffrye Museum
Health and Safety Commission
Health and Safety Executive
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Highways Agency
Historic Royal Palaces
HM Prison Service
Horniman Museum and Gardens
Horserace Betting Levy Board
Horticultural Development Council
Housing Corporation
Imperial War Museum
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Land Registry
Legal Services Commission
Local Government Commission for England
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission
Meat and Livestock Commission
Milk Development Council
Museum of London
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester
Museums and Galleries Commission
National Army Museum
National Consumer Council
National Employers' Liaison Committee
National Film and Television School
National Forest Company
National Gallery
National Maritime Museum
National Museum of Science and Industry
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
National Portrait Gallery
Natural History Museum
Office for National Statistics
Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England (OFSTED)
Office of the Rail Regulator
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Office of the Director General of Water Services (OFWAT)
Oil and Pipelines Agency
Ordnance Survey
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
Parole Board
Police Information Technology Organisation
Public Record Office
Rail Passengers' Committees
Rail Passengers Council
Regional Development Agencies (other than the London Development Agency)
Remploy Ltd
Residuary Bodies
Royal Air Force Museum
Royal Armouries Museum
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (now merged with English Heritage)
Royal Marines Museum
Royal Naval Museum
Royal Navy Submarine Museum
Sir John Soane's Museum
Strategic Rail Authority
Tate Gallery
Teacher Training Agency
The Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses
The Corporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond
UK Sports Council
Urban Development Corporations established for urban development areas wholly in England
Urban Regeneration Agency (English Partnerships)
Victoria and Albert Museum
Wallace Collection
Westminster Foundation for Democracy
Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

Bodies with no scope to affect equality

Advisory Board on Family Law
Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes
Advisory Council on Public Records

Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
British Film Institute
British Hallmarking Council
Building Societies Commission
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
Consumer Panel
Design Council
Electoral Commission
Food Advisory Committee
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
Immigration Services Commissioner
Investors in People UK
Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct
Lord President of the Council's Office
Medical Practices Committee
Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee
Millennium Commission
National Debt Office
National Lottery Commission
New Millennium Experience Company Ltd
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA)
Registry of Friendly Societies/Friendly Societies Commission
Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
Royal Mint
Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Simpler Trade Procedures Board
Standing Dental Advisory Committee
Standing Medical Advisory Committee
Standing Nurse and Midwifery Advisory Committee
Standing Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee
The Great Britain-China Centre
Treasure Valuation Committee
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Women's National Commission.

Under section 75(3)(d) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Secretary of State can designate "any other person". This is not a finite list and it is not, therefore, possible to list those bodies not designated under 75(3)(d).

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41109]

Dr John Reid: The Northern Ireland Office did not defend any industrial tribunal cases in the years concerned.

The information in respect of court cases is not held in the format requested. However, between 1997 and 2002, 12 cases were defended, four of which were concluded in the Department's favour.

The return for Agencies is as follows:

Year	*Cases Defended*	*Concluded in favour of Agency*
Industrial Tribunals		
1997	1	1
1998	3	3
1999	1	1
2000	–	–
2001	1	1
2002	–	–
Courts		
1997	13	9
1998	22	20
1999	19	15
2000	30	19
2001	20	10
2002	–	–

Police Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 485W, in what manner the PSNI activity data collection will break down activities of the police; what the objectives and terms of reference for this exercise are; and in what way the results of such analysis will be made public. [29809]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI activity analysis collection will break down activities in accordance with the ACPO National Police Activity Based Costing Model. This model is focused on the District/Basic Command Unit and encompasses the total cost of policing a given geographical area. It includes all of those policing services which are delivered by DCU staff, and includes contributions from Headquarters operational or organisational support units. The six core areas of policing activity to be analysed are crime, road traffic, public order, public reassurance, call management and prisoner handling. Each of these core areas are broken down into Incidents (and by association incident related activities) and Non-incident Related Activities. For example, Crime is broken down into Violence (sexual offences, robbery, violence against the person), Burglary (dwelling, other), Theft of or from a Motor Vehicle, Theft other (shoplifting), Criminal Damage, Drugs (Class A), Other Crime and Crime Desk/Telephone Investigation Bureau.

The objectives of the Activity Analysis/Activity Based Costing Project are as follows:

To provide complete, accurate and timely activity information through user friendly, on-line access to relevant systems;

To make transparent the full cost of providing policing services, including by way of activity based costing;

To assist in the delegation of operational and financial decision-making to the lowest level consistent with strategic direction and control;

To link Activity management with Corporate Planning, Performance, Best Value and Inspection and Review.

The main outputs from the Project will be as follows:

Standard classification of policing activities linked to organisational objectives;

Develop and conduct activity analysis programmes;

Carry out research into other GB Forces' activity based costing and activity sampling systems and make appropriate recommendations;

Identification of overheads;

Development of overhead apportionment rules;

Develop interfaces with other PSNI systems as required;

Activity based costing extracted from existing computer systems;

Activity sampling;

Internal and external benchmarking;

Trading accounts for Administration Departments;

Costed Service Level agreements for Administration Departments.

The analysis will be made public to enable informed decisions to be made about the allocation of scarce resources. Activity analysis will also help inform future funding debates and make explicit how resources are allocated across core police functions.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will break down the number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman by *(a)* perceived community origin, *(b)* gender and *(c)* other recorded categories of complainant. [43890]

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many recipients there are of pensions paid *(a)* for their service and *(b)* by virtue of their husband's service in the Royal Irish constabulary including Auxiliaries. [44658]

Jane Kennedy: There are *(a)* no recipients of pensions paid to former officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary including Auxiliaries and *(b)* four recipients of pensions paid to widows by virtue of their husband's service.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions are under way against members of the Police Service in respect of activity carried out by them in the course of their duties in the period up to May 1998. [43434]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised that there is no record of any prosecutions underway against members of the Police Service in respect of activity carried out by them in the course of their duties from 1996 to May 1998. Records prior to 1996 are held in a form which is not readily retrieved.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* reserve members of the Police Service there were in each police division in Northern Ireland in each year since 1996. [43433]

Jane Kennedy: The numbers of regular and full-time reserve members of the Police Service in each police division in Northern Ireland in each year from 1996 to 2001, are as follows:

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Reg	*Ftr*	*Reg*	*Ftr*	*Reg*	*Ftr*	*Reg*	*Ftr*	*Reg*	*Ftr*	*Reg*	*Ftr*
A	557	256	536	237	536	227	522	235	514	219	480	198
B	447	374	455	344	445	378	427	350	413	342	412	327
D	721	356	713	327	727	326	720	317	712	306	721	286
E	404	374	401	364	414	372	412	355	406	335	377	310
G	290	165	295	156	300	154	307	153	313	149	296	139
H	368	230	373	203	352	210	343	205	324	188	322	172
J	266	146	267	131	277	133	284	129	299	135	285	123
K	241	141	263	139	239	140	227	140	228	125	231	114
L	434	238	428	211	413	217	406	204	412	192	396	174
N	369	215	387	197	380	203	358	192	351	176	352	169
O	295	167	307	158	292	163	301	163	291	155	287	137
P	266	109	270	106	278	109	291	101	290	96	275	85
Total	465 8	277 1	469 5	257 3	465 3	263 2	459 8	254 4	455 3	241 8	443 4	223 4

Jane Kennedy: The numbers of regular and full-time reserve members of the Police Service in Northern Ireland in 2002, following the replacement of Divisions with District Commond Units (DCUs), are as follows:

	2002 (as at 15 March 2002)	
	Ftr	*Reg*
N BMEN DCU	108	23
N BMON DCU	60	14
N COLE DCU	109	43
N FERM DCU	188	82
N FOYL DCU	223	83
N LARN DCU	68	22
N LIMA DCU	63	28
N MFEL DCU	88	54
N MOYL DCU	24	11
N OMAG DCU	118	41
N STRB DCU	100	56
S ARDS DCU	121	51
S ARMA DCU	124	62
S BANB DCU	80	29
S COOK DCU	84	37
S CRAI DCU	165	71
S DAST DCU	166	72
S DOWN DCU	153	85
S NEWM DCU	174	87
U ANTR DCU	99	54
U BELE DCU	196	126

	2002 (as at 15 March 2002)	
	Ftr	Reg
U BELN DCU	334	109
U BELS DCU	276	142
U BELW DCU	254	205
U CFER DCU	70	52
U CREA DCU	104	72
U LISB DCU	197	112
U NABB DCU	129	26
U NDOW DCU	139	88
Total	4,014	1,925

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people identified as *(a)* Protestant and *(b)* Roman Catholic who have applied to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (i) were found to be suitably qualified and (ii) were not offered a position within the Police Service. [45756]

Jane Kennedy: In the first Police Service of Northern Ireland recruitment competition, 419 candidates identified as non-Catholic and 173 candidates identified as Catholic were found to be suitably qualified.

To date 245 candidates from the non-Catholic group have been informed that the Chief Constable cannot offer them an appointment, in accordance with Section 46 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. No candidate in the Catholic group has to date been refused an appointment.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what expenditure has been made on the refurbishment of the police Land Rover fleet in Northern Ireland in each year since 1995; what tendering processes were held for the award of the contracts; and what the benefit to the public purse will be of using low cost substitute Land Rover components in the refurbishment work. [46032]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that expenditure made on the refurbishment of the Police Landrover fleet since 1995 is as follows:

Business Year	Expenditure & Number	Cost (New)	Saving
1995–96–97–98	0	0	0
1998–99	£1250k (50 x vehicles)	£2,250k	£1,000k
1,999–00	£1,300k (50 x vehicles)	£2,350k	£1,050k
2,000–01	£980k (35 x vehicles)	£1,645k	£665k
2001–02[1]	£510k (15 x vehicles)	£900k	£390k
Totals	£4,040k (150 x vehicles)	£7145k	£3105k

[1] Phase 3 TD5 Land Rover approved power-train conversion.

The refurbishment engineering programme was originally tendered through the Government Puchasing Agency and ratified via the Support Services Committee of the Police Authority.

Later programmes have been tendered through the Government Purchasing Unit and ratified via Police Transport Policy Committee.

The refurbishment programme includes the utilisation of discounted and approved Land Rover parts, which include a warranty period of 12 months. It is not possible to quantify separately the savings arising from the use of these component parts.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he expects the 2002 target for ethnic minority representation in the Home Civil Service Senior Civil Service Group will be met on time. [45988]

Dr. John Reid: In its 2001 Departmental Report, the Northern Ireland Office declared its continued commitment to progressing Home Civil Service (HCS) targets for increased ethnic minority representation in the Senior Civil Service. The aim is to have 5 per cent. ethnic minority representation by the end of 2002.

Currently, 4.3 per cent. of the Home Civil Service Senior Civil Service Group are from an ethnic minority background.

Crime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the strategy and quantified targets for tackling crime were published by March 2001. [45999]

Jane Kennedy: Quantified targets for tackling crime were set out in the Annual Policing Plan 2001–02 published by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in April 2001. The RUC Crime Strategy published in April 2000 remained valid for the year commencing April 2001.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many press officers there were in his Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46889]

Dr. John Reid: Information is not held in the format requested.

Statistics relating to the number of Information Officers in the Northern Ireland Office is as follows:

(a) at 1 April 1997 there were 11 Information Officers; and

(b) at 27 March 2002 there were 13 Information Officers.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his Department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and end dates of their secondment. [35831]

Dr. John Reid: No staff have been seconded to this Department from the private sector since May 1997.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27299]

Dr. John Reid: The cost of fraud to the Northern Ireland Office budget since 1 May 1997 is £51,728.65, however the Department has recovered £11,187.09 of this amount.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42997]

Dr. Whitehead:

(a) Only those services in part (b) have been market tested in the last five years

(b)

Internal Press Cuttings Distributions	(i) 23.5k	(ii) 100 per cent.
DTLR Mailing Database	(i) 10.0k	(ii) 75 per cent.
Design Drawing and Print Services	(i) 443.8k	(ii) 47 per cent.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44558]

Dr. Whitehead: The DTLR does not keep a centralised record of those members of staff who are justices of the peace.

My department supports members of staff who wish to become justices of the peace and provides special leave with pay in order to assist staff in their role.

Equal Opportunities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997 to the Latest date for which information is available. [46494]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer Tuesday 26 March 2002]:* In DTLR, two statistical series incorporating the specified variables have been commissioned in the time period in question. These are two household surveys, the survey of English Housing and the National Travel Survey. All four variables have been collected on the Survey of English Housing since before 1997 and ethnicity was included in the National Travel Survey in 2001.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47156]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 10 April 2002 [Ref 47193].

Railtrack

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions pursuant to his statement of 25 March, *Official Report*, column 586, if he will give the reasons underlying his statement that a company limited by guarantee would be a good successor body to Railtrack plc in administration; [48166]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23*October 2001*, *Official Report*, columns 195W–197W.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the Railtrack Plc administrator to make available a prospectus to prospective bidders. [47989]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* This is a matter for the Administrator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the likely outcome of an interim review for Railtrack. [47387]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave him on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 370W.

Sony Display Screens (Swanwick)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the Health and Safety report of 15 March into the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 of the equipment at NERC Swanwick, what he is doing to ensure that all the defects mentioned in the report are rectified and in what time scale; for what reason the Health and Safety Executive relied on information

supplied by NATS in relation to the size of the characters on the Sony display screens; and if they will take their own measurements. [47654]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has asked NATS to set out in writing the action it proposes to take on each of the items raised in the report together with a proposed timetable. HSE will consider what if any further action needs to be taken once it has received those proposals and will continue to monitor the situation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, how many safety reports have been made by planning and tactical air controllers as a result of confusion of reading alpha numeric data on the Sony screen at NERC Swanwick. [47653]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for NATS.

Public Service Obligations (Airports)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received concerning the imposition of public service obligations on regional airports with London; and what its response to these representations has been. [47955]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* The Scottish Executive has requested that a Public Service Obligation should be imposed on Inverness-Gatwick air services. The government expects to announce its decision shortly.

Special Purpose Vehicles

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to raise private sector investment in the railways through special purpose vehicles. [47396]

Mr. Jamieson: Special purpose vehicles are expected to be an option for securing private sector investment in infrastructure projects. But private sector investment in the railways may also be secured by other means, and special purpose vehicles will not be suitable for all infrastructure projects.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposed transfer of special purpose vehicles to Railtrack's successor after construction. [47394]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 728W.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the state aid rules as they apply to Network Rail; [48188]

(2) if state aid rules will apply to the standby loans to Network Rail. [48189]

Mr. Jamieson: If Network Rail's offer for Railtrack plc's shares is successful any financial support provided to the company by Government would be notified to the European Commission as a potential state aid.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Network Rail will be able to replace commercial debt with standby loans from the SRA at a later date. [48187]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department is statutorily obliged to meet additional costs resulting from an interim review of Railtrack's finances. [47398]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 783W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who holds responsibility for deciding whether Network Rail takes over the network. [48184]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for Railtrack Group to consider, with its shareholders, the proposal from Network Rail for the purchase of its shares in Railtrack plc. If the proposal is accepted, the Secretary of State would in due course need to consider the exercise of his powers under the change of control provisions in the existing network licence held by Railtrack plc. In addition, the Court would need to order, on an application by my right hon. Friend, that the Railways Administration Order should be discharged. It is for the Administrators to decide how to continue with their process in the light of their responsibilities and the proposal that has been made.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the funding of Network Rail or another successor to Railtrack for Control Period 3. [48183]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 956W.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the directors and putative directors of Network Rail and their previous experience *(a)* in the railway industry and *(b)* in business. [47121]

Mr. Jamieson: The details of its proposals are a matter for Network Rail.

Channel Tunnel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last spoke to his French counterpart about rail freight carriage through the Channel Tunnel. [47512]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers maintain regular contacts with their Friends counterparts on this issue.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the EU Transport Commissioner and *(b)* the French Transport Minister on the indefinite suspension of the Channel Tunnel rail

freight facilities; what assessment he has made of the impact on his rail freight target of the indefinite suspension of the Channel Tunnel rail freight facilities; and if he will make a statement. [47915]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department, and others, are in regular contact with both the European Commission and the French Government on this matter.

We will be producing a review of the 10 Year Plan in July this year.

South West Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the upgrades to the South West Trains routes will be transferred from a special purpose vehicle into operation when they are completed in 2004. [47397]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns 728W and 729W, as well as my right hon. Friend's answer to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 18 March, *Official Report*, column 21W.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the public sector comparator with the London Underground PPP includes the management costs associated with the administration of the private sector contracts. [47511]

Mr. Jamieson: The Public Sector Comparator does not include any London Underground management costs associated with managing the private sector PPP contracts. It is London Underground's view that any public sector alternative would incur similar contract management costs in aggregate. As a result, such costs have been excluded from the value for money analysis, because they would not differentiate between the options.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the draft comfort letters that he is intending to issue in respect of the London Underground PPP. [48293]

Mr. Byers: I have decided to extend the consultation period for the comfort letters laid before this House on 20 March. This will provide the customary notification period.

Brownfield Developments

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans there are to *(a)* cut taxes on brownfield developments and *(b)* introduce incentives to encourage builders away from green fields. [48589]

Ms Keeble: Budget 2001 introduced a tax relief for cleaning up contaminated land, 100 per cent. capital allowances for developing flats over shops and a number of VAT reliefs to encourage conversions and the renovation of empty property. From 30 November 2001, land and property transactions worth up to £150,000 in the UK's most deprived communities have also been exempt from stamp duty. The aim of this fiscal package is to encourage and create incentives for the re-development of brownfield land and re-use of empty property, helping to protect greenfield sites.

Any further changes to taxation policy are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Housing (VAT)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans there are to *(a)* abolish VAT on the renovation and conversion of existing houses and *(b)* to introduce VAT on building new houses. [48590]

Ms Keeble: Budget 2001 reduced the rate of VAT to 5 per cent. on the renovation of dwellings empty for three years or longer and on residential conversions that result in a change in the number of dwellings. Budget 2001 also introduced an adjustment to the zero rate of VAT to provide relief for [illegible] sale of renovated houses that have been empty for 10 years or more.

Any further changes to VAT policy are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what conclusion he has drawn from the research by TRL on the effect of mobile phones on driver concentration; and if he will make a statement. [48194]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* The report confirms advice given in the Highway Code that drivers should never use hand-held phones while driving and that using a hand-free phone is also likely to distract a driver's attention from the road.

Airport Security

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what extra security measures his Department has taken at *(a)* London City Airport and *(b)* Gatwick Airport since 11 September 2001. [47375]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* Following the attacks on 11 September, heightened aviation security measures were introduced at all UK airports, including London City and Gatwick, and for all airlines operating from the UK. Security remains at an enhanced level, with the measures applying equally at all UK airports. We do not discuss the details of our aviation security requirements.

Inquiry Costs

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of the *(a)* inquiry into the Clapham Rail Crash on 12 December 1998, *(b)* Sheen Inquiry into the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster on 6 March 1997, *(c)* Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry after the collision of 5 October 1999, *(d)* Marchioness Inquiry, *(e)* Piper Alpha Inquiry and *(f)* Southall Rail crash Inquiry. [48031]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of the public inquiries are as follows:

(a) Clapham Inquiry—figures could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost

(b) Herald of Free Enterprise Inquiry—figures could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost

(c) Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry—£7.0 million

(d) Marchioness Inquiry—£5.1 million

(e) Piper Alpha Inquiry—a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

(f) Southall Rail Inquiry—£2.25 million.

Malicious Fires

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many malicious fires and incidents of abandoned vehicles there were in *(a)* London Borough of Havering and *(b)* Romford in (i) 1997, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and what steps he is taking to effectively tackle these problems. [47314]

Dr. Whitehead: Data on malicious fires are only available at Fire Brigade level. In 1997 the London Fire Brigade reported 6,388 malicious fires, of which 2,971 (47 per cent.) occurred in road vehicles. Provisional figures for 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, show there were 9,419 malicious fires of which 6,098 (65 per cent.) occurred in road vehicles.

Information obtained form the London Borough of Havering shows that in 2000 the Borough reported 2,995 abandoned vehicles; the number for 2001 was 4,505. No information is available for 1997.

No information on abandoned vehicles is available for Romford.

The problem of abandoned cars is one part of a more general problem—the existence of a hard core of more than a million cars in the United Kingdom that are unlicensed and for which it is difficult to trace an owner. Not only are these vehicles at the heart of the problem of abandoned vehicles: they are untaxed, uninsured, have no MOT certificate, and in many cases it is not possible to trace their current owners when they are involved in accidents, parking and motoring offences and wider crime.

Regulations made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to reduce the notice periods after which local authorities can remove abandoned cars to 24 hours in many cases came into effect on 9 April. Furthermore, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a package of related measures on 10 April which will enable local authorities, the police and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to tackle the problem of abandoned cars more effectively.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48399]

Mr. Raynsford: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in future Departmental Annual Reports.

School Transport (Safety)

Chris McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to help local partnerships finance safe transport to school. [44492]

Ms Keeble: The Government is providing increased levels of funding through local transport plans to enable authorities, in partnership with transport operators, schools and local people to improve children's safety on the journey to and from school.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the per capita aggregate external funding is for the Sedgefield District and Durham county councils for the most recent year for which information is available. [48384]

Dr. Whitehead: Sedgefield Borough Council and Durham County Council have reported the following figures.

Aggregate External Finance (AEF per capita for Sedgefield Borough Council and Durham County Council (2000–01 Outturn)

Figures in £000s unless stated

	Durham County Council	*Sedgefield Borough Council*
Revenue Support Grant	163,866	3,447
Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates	126,543	3,400
Ring-fenced Grants inside AEF	30,375	303
Total AEF	320,784	7,150
Population figures (thousands)	506	89
AEF per capita (£'s)	634	80

Source:
Revenue Summary return.
Notes:
AEF is central government support towards total standard spending. It comprises of Revenue Support Grant, Redistributed Non-domestic rates, and certain Ring-fenced grants.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the per capita aggregate borrowing permission is to Sedgefield district and Durham county councils in the most recent year for which information is available. [48386]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2000–01, per capita aggregate borrowing permission to Sedgefield District Council and Durham County Council respectively was £32.27 and £35.40.

Source. Capital Outturn Return (COR4) for 2000–01. Mid-year population estimate for 2000 (ONS).

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what per capita aggregate capital grant is paid to the

Sedgefield district and Durham county councils in the most recent year for which information is available. [48385]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2000–01 the per capita aggregate capital grant from central Government sources, paid to Sedgefield District Council and Durham County Council respectively was £5.34 and £16.15.

Source: Capital Outturn Return (COR4) for 2000–01. Mid-year population estimate for 2000 (ONS).

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what Band D council tax is payable by householders in Sedgefield district to their district and county councils. [48387]

Dr. Whitehead: The average total Band D council tax payable in the area of Sedgefield Borough Council is £1,194. This is made up of:

£145 for parish and town councils;

£157 for Sedgefield Borough Council;

£828 for Durham County Council; and

£64 for Durham Police Authority.

The figure of £1,194 per Band D property in Sedgefield is equivalent to £784 per dwelling. The difference is due largely to the fact that almost 90 per cent. of dwellings in the area that are liable to pay council tax are in Bands A, B or C.

Local and Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to publish a report on progress on adoption of area wide local plans and unitary development plans. [48707]

Ms Keeble: A report on the progress made by local authorities in England in preparing and reviewing their Local Plans and Unitary development plans will be published in May.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to tackle low housing demand and abandonment. [48708]

Mr. Byers: Nine areas, where streets of boarded up and abandoned homes have led to a spiral of decline and misery for thousands of local residents, will get the opportunity to work with Government to establish pathfinder projects. Their aim will be to provide lasting solutions for communities blighted by derelict homes through investment and innovation. The lessons learnt can then be applied to other areas.

Pathfinders will be formed in Greater Manchester, Merseyside, East Lancashire, Oldham and Rochdale, South Yorkshire, Humberside (Hull), Tyneside, North Staffordshire (Stoke), and Birmingham and Sandwell. The size of the pathfinders will be significant ranging from 40,000 to 120,000 properties.

I am clear that the pathfinder projects will have to make some radical decisions in order to regenerate these areas. It is not sufficient to tackle the housing problem alone. Local authorities must work closely together with their partners—the police, the health authority, the Regional Development Agency, Housing Corporation and private sector—to rejuvenate our towns and cities.

Low demand and abandoned housing is a major problem. But it also provides a unique opportunity to restructure and rebuild our cities for the twenty first century. We must now seize that opportunity. The Government will work with local people to deliver the change necessary and bring hope to those communities.

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority; and if he will make a statement. [49013]

Mr. Byers: I have today published directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House and are available on my department's website at: www.railways.dtlr.gov.uk.

The directions and guidance set the SRA two main objectives: to work with the rail industry to achieve substantial lasting improvements in performance; and to work within its statutory framework to deliver the key targets for rail in our Ten Year Plan. The SRA also has other objectives, especially in relation to: leadership for the rail industry; driving up standards of punctuality, safety and comfort across all franchised services; and a much clearer and focussed approach to franchising.

A response to the consultation on the draft directions and guidance has been published today and is available on my department's website.

Cullen Report

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what date he estimates the recommendations of Lord Cullen's report will be fully implemented. [47517]

Mr. Jamieson: Lord Cullen recommended that all his recommendations be fully implemented within three years of the publication of his final report, ie by September 2004.

The Health and Safety Commission will publish regular reviews of progress, including implementation dates.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42453]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 19 March (*Official Report*, column 295W).

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many cases have been brought

against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost to public funds to date in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45093]

Dr. Howells: Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. The department is involved in comparatively little litigation. However, it has been involved to date in three cases where proceedings have been brought which raise issues under the Human Rights Act 1998. It is often difficult to attribute costs specifically to the human rights aspects of cases, so it is not possible to give an aggregate figure for legal costs defending human rights points. The department has not to date made any compensation payment associated with a Human Rights Act case.

Independent Television Commission

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what costs the ITC has incurred in advising her Department on the creation of OFCOM. [46594]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the ITC.

Ofcom

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations her Department has received from the ITC on the issue of preparation for OFCOM; and what form they have taken. [46591]

Dr. Howells: The ITC has welcomed the proposals to establish OFCOM and has been closely involved, along with the other regulators who will go to make up OFCOM, in the early preparations for creating the new body.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47804]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget Report on 17 April.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47108]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Appointments

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all the boards, committees and trustees that *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department are wholly or partly responsible for appointing members to, listing for each one (i) the total membership of each board, committee or trustees, (ii) the procedure for making each appointment, (iii) the remuneration made and (iv) the term of office. [48376]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* The bodies for which I am wholly or partly responsible for the appointment of members are set out in the following table. This includes appointments made by other Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on my behalf and appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, or through him, by Her Majesty The Queen, on which I advise. The table also includes bodies where appointments are the responsibility of others, but where I have an approving role. There are also bodies where I am responsible for making some appointments but where I have no role in others. Appointments which fall under the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments follow procedures which meet the requirements of her Code of Practice. For other appointments, the spirit of the Commissioner's Code is encouraged. Appointments to DCMS sponsored bodies are usually for terms of between three and five years.

DCMS Public Appointments

Sponsored body	*No. of members*	*Remuneration range—board (per annum unless stated)*	*Remuneration chair (per annum unless stated)*	*Within remit of Commissioner for Public Appointments*
Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection	3		31,800	Yes
Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites	13			Yes
Advisory Council on Libraries	1	7,730	32,010	Yes
Alcohol Education and Research Council	15			Yes
Architectural Heritage Fund	10			No
Arts Council of England	12			Yes
British Broadcasting Corporation	12	14,930–26,250	77,590	Yes
Chair of British Film Institute	1			No
British Library Board	14			Yes
British Museum	25			Yes
British Tourist Authority	6	7,883–8,120	41,930	Yes
Broadcasting Standards Commission	12	16,310–38,530	50,990	Yes
Churches Conservation Trust	7			No
Channel 4 Television Corporation	8	8,330–18,260	59,310	No
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment	14	5,000–8,000	30,000	Yes
The Community Fund	17		25,000	Yes

DCMS Public Appointments

Sponsored body	*No. of members*	*Remuneration range—board (per annum unless stated)*	*Remuneration chair (per annum unless stated)*	*Within remit of Commissioner for Public Appointments*
Crafts Council	1			No
English Heritage	17	2,235–5,000	54,000	Yes
English Tourism Council	7	7,880	37,440	Yes
Film Council	15	2,100		Yes
Football Licensing Authority	8	5,000		Yes
Gaming Board for Great Britain	5	16,447		Yes
Geffrye Museum	12			Yes
Historic Royal Palaces	9			Yes
Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust	11			Yes
Horserace Betting Levy Appeals Tribunal for England and Wales	3	187–265 per day	48,250	No
Horserace Betting Levy Board	3	14,900–19,800	83,552	Yes
Horserace Totalisator	9	9,613	33,026	Yes
Imperial War Museum	22			Yes
Independent Football Commission	1			Yes
Independent Television Commission	11	19,900–26,250	77,590	Yes
Millennium Commission	9			Yes
Museum of London	17			Yes
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	12			Yes
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts	14	1,800–2,700	22,660	Yes
National Gallery	14			Yes
National Heritage Memorial Fund	15	4,440–17,590	32,132	Yes
National Lottery Commission	5	6,378		Yes
National Maritime Museum	16			Yes
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	18			Yes
National Portrait Gallery	16			Yes
Natural History Museum	12			Yes
New Millennium Experience Co.	11	11,110		Yes
New Opportunities Fund	13	8,309–12,500	24,133	Yes
Public Lending Right Advisory Committee	8			Yes
Public Lending Right Registrar	1		48,706	Yes
Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team	6		41,020	Yes
Radio Authority	9	14,930–19,690	58,180	Yes
Chair of Culture South West	1			Yes
Chair of East Midlands Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of East of England Regional Culture Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of North East Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of North West Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of South East Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of West Midlands Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Chair of Yorkshire and Humber Regional Cultural Consortium	1			Yes
Resource	17			Yes
Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Arts	8			Yes
Royal Armouries	11			Yes
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts	18			Yes
Royal Opera House	15			No
Royal Parks Advisory Board	9			No
S4C	8	8,300	44,480	Yes
Science Museum	17			Yes
St. John Soane's Museum	9			Yes
South Bank Centre Board Ltd.	16			No
Spoliation Advisory Panel	11		5,631	Yes
Sport England	19	2,220–15,195	25,205	Yes
Tate Gallery	12			Yes
Theatres Trust	15			No
Treasure Valuation Committee	6			Yes
UK Sport	16	1,220	36,705	Yes
Victoria and Albert Museum	19			Yes
Wallace Collection	8			Yes

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all the individuals that *(a)* she and her predecessors and *(b)* Ministers in her Department and their predecessors have appointed to boards, committees and trustees since 2 May 1997. [48378]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* The information you requested is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The list shows people who have been appointed or reappointed since 2 May 1997 by myself or by predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Chris Smith). This includes appointments which have been made by Ministers in my Department on my behalf. It does not include appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister or, through him, by Her Majesty The Queen, on which I advise.

Digital TV

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the methods employed by her Department to calculate the take up of *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable in the United Kingdom. [48374]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* My Department mainly uses information on subscriber figures from platform operators to give an indication of the take up figures of digital pay television for different platforms.

The Office for National Statistics' omnibus survey has recently included a question which asks how households in Great Britain access digital television, which will enable us to assess take-up across individual platforms. We expect that this will give a more accurate figure in the light of increasing numbers of non-subscription digital viewers.

BBC Accountability

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the means by which the British Broadcasting Corporation is accountable to Parliament. [48371]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* The BBC's accountability to Parliament is reflected primarily through the Royal Charter and Agreement. The Royal Charter is debated by Parliament before it comes into force and the Agreement is subject to formal approval by this House. In addition, the BBC's Annual Report and Accounts are laid in Parliament and Members have the opportunity to ask the BBC Chairman and Governors questions at an open event on the day of publication. The BBC is also subject to inquiry by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, which in recent years has held hearings on the BBC's Annual Report, and the Secretary of State is often required to answer questions in this House concerning the BBC. Under the 1991 transfer of responsibilities agreement between the BBC and the Home Office, when the Corporation assumed responsibility for administering the television licensing system, the BBC is accountable to the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee for the value for money of the collection and enforcement arrangements.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will list the dates on which *(a)* she, *(b)* Ministers, and *(c)* officials of her Department have met (i) the Director General and (ii) other members of the Executive Committee of the British Broadcasting Corporation in the last 12 months; [48383]

(2) if she will list the dates on which *(a)* she, *(b)* Ministers and *(c)* officials in her Department have met (i) the Chairman, (ii) the Vice Chairman and (iii) other members of the Board of Governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation. [48331]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* I, Ministers and officials have met members of the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee regularly in the course of business both at formal meetings or at other functions.

PRIME MINISTER

Energy Policy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the conclusions of his Performance and Innovation Unit on the existing structure of institutions involved in United Kingdom energy policy-making and delivery. [48687]

The Prime Minister: The PIU's conclusions on the existing structure of institutions involved in United Kingdom energy policy-making and delivery are set out in Chapter 8 of the Energy Review. For the status of these conclusions and future government action, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Mann) on Thursday 14 February, *Official Report*, column 613W.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Prime Minister when the Performance and Innovation Unit will publish its report on privacy and data-sharing. [49043]

The Prime Minister: The Performance and Innovation Unit's report "*Privacy and Data-Sharing: The Way Forward for Public Services*" is being published today. The report is important in the continuing development of customer-focused public services and sets out a strategy for improving the use of personal data in the public sector, while still safeguarding individual's privacy, including:

(i) Making better use of technology to deliver more secure, more joined-up services—using technology to ensure data is secure at all times and to enable more joined-up, more personalised service delivery;

(ii) Improving data quality—ensuring that the data held for public service delivery is good quality and up-to-date;

(iii) Building public trust—ensuring that clear prinicples govern the way that personal information is used across the public sector and that there is greater oppenness in the interactions between public services and their consumers; and

(iv) Addressing legal problems—ensuring that public services are clear about how the law regulates data-sharing, together with consultation on possible options for legislative changes.

There are a number of recommendations in the report where we need a proper debate before final decisions are made. On those recommendations—set out in the report—the Government is seeking views from all interested parties. For the other recommendations, the Government wants to see early progress in taking them forward as part of the strategy in delivering the overall objectives.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

South Middlesbrough Academy

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on a funding agreement between her Department and the proposed South Middlesbrough Academy. [48638]

Mr. Timms: My Department has been supporting the development of plans for a City Academy in South Middlesbrough. I welcome the commitment of the sponsors and Middlesbrough Council to establish an Academy which will raise standards in the area and meet the needs of local pupils and the wider community. I expect soon to be in a position to consider whether to enter into a funding agreement with the Academy.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48361]

Robin Cook: My Department does not subscribe to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite or *(c)* digital cable television. However, my Department does own a number of Sky Digiboxes to receive free-to-air digital channels.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47139]

Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Country*	*No. of special advisers*	*Overall cost of trip* £
October 2000	Mexico	1	16,012.17
September 2000	Switzerland and Germany	1	6,697.21
January 2001	America[1]	1	48,387.01

[1] The office of the Leader of the House was then responsible for the Business Co-ordination Unit which has since been transferred to the Cabinet Office.

The cost of these visits attributed to Special Advisers is not available.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47114]

Robin Cook: None.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask President of the Council if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47724]

Robin Cook: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01 on Ministerial Accountability and parliamentary questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

My Department will continue to improve on its performance. Arrangements are being made for additional training to be given to officials in my Department who provide draft replies.

WALES

Foot and Mouth

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly on expenditure levels in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England on measures to alleviate FMD problems in 2001. [34911]

Mr. Murphy *[holding answer given on 11 February 2002]:* I have met the First Minister and the Rural Affairs Minister of the National Assembly for Wales regularly throughout 2001 and subsequently. A wide range of issues connected to FMD were discussed, including measures to alleviate FMD problems through compensation to farming businesses and measures to assist businesses (including tourism) affected by FMD.

Additionally, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was a member of the Rural Task Force set up to examine and alleviate the effects of FMD on rural areas and rural businesses. The National Assembly for Wales was also a member of this group.

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36692]

Mr. Murphy: The Assembly operates this scheme for the Wales Office and maintains a log of applications, which is not broken down by operational unit. Hence, an aggregate figure for Wales Office is not readily available. To date about 420 Assembly staff have received a free eye test, some of these would have been Wales Office staff.

The scheme is widely advertised through an induction questionnaire, induction course, on-line computer training package and Health and Safety bulletin board. Soon the scheme will be advertised through an intranet Health and Safety page, which is currently under development.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37503]

Mr. Murphy: My staff undertake official rail journeys in line with the guidance and principles set out in section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code and departmental staff handbook.

The information on *(a)* is not held centrally and collating it would involve disproportionate costs.

In case of *(b)* the commonest rail journey is that between Cardiff and London for which the average first class return fare is around £140.

Information on *(c)* is not available in the form requested. However, spending on UK travel by the Wales Office during 1999–2000 (since 1 July 1999) was £117,000, in 2000–01 £62,000 and in 2001–02 (to end of January 2002) £55,000.

Television Sets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets his Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if he will make a statement. [38174]

Mr. Murphy: My Department has bought three analogue television sets in the last 24 months.

As with all procurement decisions, officials are expected to find the most cost-effective solution to meet the expressed need.

Capita Contracts

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth; [38372]

(2) if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39341]

Mr. Murphy: None.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39121]

Mr. Murphy: My Department has not had responsibility for the implementation of any European Union directives and regulations since its creation in July 1999.

Cynon Valley

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on recent discussions with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the plans of the National Assembly for Wales for the NHS in the Cynon Valley. [40533]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have not recently discussed with the First Minister or Health Minister of the National Assembly for Wales Assembly plans for the NHS specific to the Cynon Valley. However, I understand that the Assembly have reaffirmed their commitment to addressing areas of health deprivation in all parts of Wales by endorsing the Townsend report with a view to starting the implementation process in April 2003.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap amongst staff in his Department. [40991]

Mr. Murphy: The permanent civil servants in my Department are all secondees from elsewhere and so their home departments determine their salaries. However, the Assembly who supply most of the secondees work closely wit the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and has assisted in the development of an equal pay model to allow employers to carry out pay audits. It has conducted pay audits for the past two years and will be doing so again this year.

In carrying out the equal pay audit and reforming their pay system, the Assembly have taken particular note of the EOC Task Force report "Just Pay". They have developed several initiatives to close the gender pay gap including no penalty for mothers who take career breaks to raise families, that is they return to the pay scale point they would have been on had they continued working.

Working Conditions and Practices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41010]

Mr. Murphy: Job sharing is only one of a number of alternative and flexible working patterns that staff at the Wales Office are welcome to take up. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in consultation with management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work.

At the present time the Wales Office has eight staff out of 40 who work a flexible pattern, none of these job-share.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42416]

Mr. Murphy: At the present time the Wales Office does not have any job share or term working staff. However, out of the 40 staff at the Wales Office eight enjoy alternative and flexible working patterns.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of staff were employed by the Wales Office on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45221]

Mr. Murphy: One staff member was seconded to the Wales Office from a non-Governmental organisation in the year 2001. There were none in 1999 or 2000.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of work-related stress have been reported in his Department; how much compensation has been paid to employees; how many work days have been lost due to work-related stress, and at what cost; what procedures have been put in place to reduce work-related stress, and at what cost, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35936]

Mr. Murphy: Work related stress has only been separately identified as a cause of absence for the last six months. During this period there is no record of any member of Wales Office staff having been absent for work related stress.

Wales Office staff have available to them the resources of the Assembly in tackling stress. These include a new draft policy on stress and will shortly include a Health, Safety and Welfare intranet site providing guidance on stress at work, including details of stress awareness training.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46807]

Mr. Murphy *[holding answer given on 10 April 2002]:* My Department's press office consists of three full-time people; its running costs are not separately identified.

The Wales Office was created in July 1999; figures for 1996–97 would therefore relate to the much larger predecessor department and would not be comparable.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the journeys made to Wales by *(a)* him and *(b)* the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in his official capacity over the last 12 months; what the purpose of each visit was; and what mode of transport was employed. [48609]

Mr. Murphy: Both myself and my hon. Friend live in Wales and so any travel from home on official business originates in Wales. Furthermore, a substantial amount of our time is spent on official duties in Wales. Due to the very large number and routine nature of the journeys made to, from and within Wales no separate record is kept of either their frequency or mode, though all journeys are made within the terms of the ministerial code.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including g*(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48396]

Mr. Murphy: No Wales Office projects have been sponsored since the Department's creation in July 1999.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Future of Europe Convention

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will place in the Library a verbatim report of the proceedings of the European Convention on the Future of Europe. [46256]

Peter Hain: The Convention does not provide verbatim reports of each plenary session. It is, nevertheless, committed to making its proceedings transparent. Plenary sessions are open to the public and broadcast live on the Convention's website (http://european-convention.eu.int). It also contains summary records of these sessions, details of its future work programme, and all documents submitted in the course of its work.

Burma

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column 435W, on Burma, what assessment he has made of measures taken in partnership with the EU designed to promote human rights, national reconciliation and democracy in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [46379]

Mr. Bradshaw: I very much welcome the EU's united position and involvement in Burma. In recent weeks there has been an EU Troika delegation visit to Burma, joint action over forced labour in Burma at the International Labour Organisation, an EU demarche to press for the reinstatement of a planned visit to Burma by the UN Secretary General's Special Representative to Burma, and we are currently preparing a resolution on Burma for adoption at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

I remain gravely concerned about the overall situation in Burma. Although there has been some very modest political progress there in the past 16 months, we now need to see evidence of substantive change if confidence in the political process in Burma is to be maintained.

Community Agricultural Policy

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost will be to the EU in 2002 of the CAP *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the overall EU budget; how much each EU member state will receive from the CAP; and if he will make a statement. [46136]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The cost to the EU budget of the CAP in 2002 is forecast to be 44,480 million euro, which is 46.5 per cent. of the budget. The following table gives CAP receipts for each member state in 2001, since there are no forecasts available for these receipts in 2002.

Member State	*Euro (million)*
Austria	1,052
Belgium	934
Denmark	1,112
Finland	815
France	9,221
Germany	5,858
Greece	2,612
Ireland	1,584
Italy	5,324
Luxembourg	29
Netherlands	1,104
Portugal	874
Spain	6,176
Sweden	780
United Kingdom	3,997

Gibraltar

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Spain was invited to attend the recent talks under the terms of the Brussels Process before an invitation was extended to the Government of Gibraltar. [47406]

Peter Hain: The Brussels Process, involving the UK and Spanish governments, was established in 1984 with the aim of overcoming both government's differences over Gibraltar and promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis.

We informed the Chief Minster of Gibraltar in June 2001 of our intention to re-launch the Brussels Process. We and the Spanish Government made clear from the outset that Gibraltarian engagement would be an important element in carrying the process successfully forward.

The Chief Minister of Gibraltar has been invited to attend al the Brussels Process meetings since then. The offer remains open for him to participate in future meetings, having his own and distinct voice on the British side of the table: as the formula "three voices two flags".

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what basis European Union funds are not made available for the economic development of Gibraltar. [48307]

Peter Hain: Gibraltar has access to European Union Structural Funding. For the period 2000–06 Gibraltar has been allocated €8 million of Objective 2 funding (assisting regions affected by the decline of traditional industries), and €7 million of Objective 3 funding (combating long-term unemployment and promoting the integration of young people into the labour market). In addition, Gibraltar is involved in three INTERREG III programmes, with an allocation of €425,000 for each.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the British Government will formally seek the views of the Government of Gibraltar on proposals being discussed with the Spanish Government before agreeing any such proposals with a view to these the being placed before the people of Gibraltar for referendum. [48308]

Peter Hain: The aim of the current Brussels Process talks between the UK and Spanish Governments is to produce a set of proposals offering a framework for a secure, stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar. We want Gibraltar to have a voice in the talks. That is why we and the Spanish Government have invited the Chief Minister to participate with his own voice on the British side of the table, a formula known as: "three voices two flags". The offer stands and we continue to hope the Chief Minister will take it up.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the date for the next round of talks between Britain and Spain on the future status of Gibraltar. [47317]

Peter Hain: A further Ministerial meeting under the Brussels Process will be held in the coming months. The date has not yet been fixed. Our aim remains to conclude a comprehensive agreement by the summer.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether Gibraltar's social tax status would be a barrier to integration into the UK. [47315]

Mr. Hain: None. The Government does not regard integration with the UK as an option for any of the British Overseas Territories.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to encourage the United States Administration to ratify the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty; and what information he has in respect of the shortfall in payments made to the CTBT organisation in Vienna. [48079]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. John McDonnell) on 10 December 2001, *(Official Report,* column 711W.)

In previous years, payments to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organisation have averaged over 95 per cent. of the annual approved budget.

By 3 April this year, the organisation had already received over 50 per cent. of its current budget contributions. This compares favourably with this time last year, when the figure stood at 45 per cent. The US have contributed US$16.6 million for 2002, which represents more than 95 per cent. of their assessed contribution.

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proceeds from the sale of the former Cambodian Embassy in London. [48825]

Mr. Bradshaw: The proceeds from the sale of the former Cambodian Embassy premises and subsequent interest thereon, amount in total to £2.6 million, were transferred to the Foreign Ministry of Cambodia on 21 March. We hope the Cambodian Government will use these funds to establish a permanent diplomatic presence in the UK.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods subject to strategic controls have recently been approved for export to Iraq. [48826]

Mr. MacShane: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export laboratory equipment for use by secondary schools in Northern Iraq. The export included 6.25kg of sodium sulphide which is subject to the Dual-Use Items (Export Control) Regulations 2000 as amended. The UN Iraq Sanctions Committee approved this export to Iraq under the Oil for Food programme (OFF). Under OFF Iraq is allowed to export unlimited quantities of oil to fund the

purchase of humanitarian goods. The export is consistent with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for April and *(b)* major European Union events for the period between 30 April and September. [48827]

Peter Hain:

April 2002

5–6—Brussels—Luxembourg—Migrations Council (ASEM Informal)

8—Luxembourg—Fisheries Council

13–14—Luxembourg—ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)

15–16—Luxembourg—General Affairs Council

22–23—Valencia—Euromed Conference

22–23—Luxembourg—Agriculture Council

25–26—Luxembourg—Justice and Home Affairs Council

27–30—Luxembourg—Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)

The following are the principle events in the EU between 1 May and September 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

May

2—Washington—EU/US Summit

3–4—Brussels—Tourism Council (Ministerial Informal)

6—Brussels—Eurogroup (Evening)

7—Brussels—ECOFIN

8—Madrid—EU/Canada Summit

9—Europe Day

13—Brussels—General Affairs Council and Defence Ministers Meeting

17–18—Madrid—EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit

21—Brussels—Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council

23—Brussels—Culture and Audio-visual Council

24–26—Brussels—Environment Council (Ministerial Informal)

27–28—Brussels—Agriculture Council

30—Brussels—Development Council

30—Brussels—Education and Youth Council

31–1 June—Brussels—Transport Council (Ministerial Informal)

June

3—Brussels—Employment and Social Affairs Council

3—Brussels—Eurogroup (Evening)

4—Luxembourg—ECOFIN

6–8—Brussels—Foreign Affairs Council (ASEM Ministers)

6–7—Brussels—Industry and Energy Council

10–11—Brussels—General Affairs Council

10–11—Brussels—Agriculture Council

11—Brussels—Fisheries Council

13–14—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council

17–18—Brussels—Transport and Telecoms Council

17–18—Brussels—General Affairs Council

21–22—Seville—European Council

24—Brussels—General Affairs Council (Evening)

24–25—Brussels—Environment Council

25—Luxembourg—ECOFIN

26—Brussels—Health Council

July

6—Copenhagen—ASEM Ministers for Finance

12—Brussels—ECOFIN

12–13—Kolding—Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers (Informal)

15–16—Brussels—Agriculture Council

19—Brussels—Budget Meeting

19–21—Arhus—Environment Ministers Meeting (Informal)

22–23—Brussels—General Affairs Council

August

31–1—Elisnore—Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)

September

6—Brussels—ASEM Economic Ministers Meeting

6–8—Copenhagen—ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)

8–10—Nyborg—Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)

12–13—Copenhagen—Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)

22–23—Copenhagen—ASEM Meeting

23–24—Brussels—Agriculture Council

26—Brussels—Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council

27—Tent—ACP-EU Ministers Meeting

30—Brussels—General Affairs Council

30—Brussels—Research Council

International Criminal Court

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the International Criminal Court. [48828]

Mr. Straw: This is an historic day or international justice and for the human rights of every citizen of the world. Today, at the United Nations in New York, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Ireland, Mongolia, Romania and Slovakia deposited their instruments of ratification to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). These ratifications

bring to 63 the number of states to have committed themselves to this landmark Convention and therefore activates the Statute, which will enter into force on 1 July 2002.

The ICC will try those individuals accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, irrespective of their rank or position. In future, tyrants will know that their actions are not beyond the reach of international justice. The victims of their crimes will, for the first time, be able to look forward to the prospect of real justice. The culture of impunity, which has shrouded human rights violations for too long, will be over.

This government has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the Court. It is our belief that the global rule of law is stronger than the local rule of tyrants. We played a major part in drafting the Statute, and worked hard to secure the passage of the International Criminal Court Act through this Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, to enable us to be amongst the first 60 states to ratify. I pay tribute to my predecessor, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and to all those who have worked to see establishment of the ICC.

The ICC will be a permanent court acting as a permanent deterrent for all potential tyrants. In time, this will be the law which transcends borders and embodies global values. As ever with all institutions of the law, its practice will be as important as its founding principles. We are committed to ensuring that it does its job fairly and impartially. We hope shortly to nominate a British candidate to be one of the judges of the Court.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48404]

Mr. MacShane: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report form the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44832]

The Solicitor-General *[holding reply 25 March 2002]*: In relation to my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, so far as I am aware, there have been no instances of criminal damage to the Department's building in each of the last four years.

In relation to those Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain a database in respect of incidents or costs arising from criminal damage to its buildings. The Crown Prosecution Service could not obtain such information without incurring disproportionate cost.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

None of the Treasury Solicitor's Department's premises have suffered criminal damage over the last four years.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not suffered any criminal damage over the last four years.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor General how many people employed by her Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45091]

The Solicitor-General: My Own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, is a small one and the staff are all seconded from other Government Departments. It has not, therefore employed any staff under the New Deal schemes during the last four years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has not employed anyone specifically under the New Deal for Young People scheme over the last four years.

However, two people within the Young People scheme age group were employed by the Department under a general New Deal recruitment scheme. Both employees were placed on one year fixed term contracts (unsubsidised). One person was released after a couple of months, as the outcome of the pre-employment enquiries proved unsatisfactory. It is not known whether this person returned to claim jobseekers' allowance or any other benefits. The second person resigned after a year to commence a college course.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has never specifically allocated vacancies to be filled by New Deal applicants, although where the Department has recruited at Administrative Officer level and below, it has always circulated these vacancies on the New Deal Network, through the local Job Centre.

Two Support Grade Band 2s were recruited in May 2000, who were New Deal registered. These employees were offered permanent posts from the outset and therefore no subsidies were claimed.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not employed any staff under the New Deal Schemes during the last four years.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor General, what recent assessment she had made of whether the PSA target to increase by March from 93 per cent. to 100 per cent. the proportion of prosecution witness expenses sent no later than 10 working days from receipt of a correctly completed claim form will be met. [47813]

The Solicitor General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Law Officers' 2002 Departmental Report.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–00, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in ea. h case. [33847]

Ms Hewitt: Information from the Department's systems indicate that contracts let by core DTI to PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers are as follows:

PricewaterhouseCoopers

	No. contracts	*Total value £*
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	9	354,657
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	16	636,623
1 April 2001 to 4 January 2002	13	870,199

Contracts let by core DTI to Ernst & Young are as follows:

Ernst & Young

	No. contracts	*Total value £*
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	3	407,165
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	58	829,043
1 April 2001 to 4 January 2002	10	879,679

Contracts let by core DTI to Deloitte & Touche are as follows:

Deloitte & Touche

	No. contracts	*Total value £*
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	6	1,265,252
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	6	1,839,428
1 April 2001 to 4 January 2002	4	4,489,189

Contracts let by core DTI to KPMG are as follows:

KPMG

	No. contracts	*Total value £*
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	1	11,642
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	4	30,009
1 April 2001 to 4 January 2002	3	92,131

Information is not held centrally for the earlier years and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

For contracts let to Andersen I would refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr on 11 February 2002, Official Report, column 62W where exceptionally information was given for earlier years.

The Department's Executive Agencies will be responding separately.

Letter from Dr. J. W. Llewellyn to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) to your question about the number and value of consutlancy services commissioned by NWML in recent years in respect of PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Yong, Deloitte Touche, KPMG and Andersen.

NWML has not engaged any of these organisations during the period specified.

Letter from David Irwin to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

I set out below details of contracts issued by the Small Business Service since its inception on 3 April 2000, together with its predecessor directorates, to two of the companies listed in your question to Mrs. Hewitt.

Company	*Financial Year*	*Number of contracts*	*Value (£)*
KPMG	1997–98	1	19,387
	1998–99	1	254,232
	2001–02	Secondee	35,000
Ernst & Young	1997–98	2	75,719

No contracts were issued to PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte & Touche, or Andersen.

Letter from Chris de Grouchy to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Parliamentary Question about contracts let to various companies.

In 1999–2000 the Agency let one contract to KPMG. Remuneration for the work amounted to £1,522,460 ex-VAT.

Letter from Dr. Roger Heathcote to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question on 4 February 2002 to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, concerning how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration made in each case.

The Employment Tribunals Service awarded one contract to Deloitte & Touche for (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. The remuneration made was as follows:

Financial year 2000–01 payment of £21,319.20 was made on 22 February 2001;

Financial year 2001–02 payment of £10,184.90 was made on 12 April 2001; and

Financial year 2001–02 payment of £21,576.53 was made on 19 July 2001.

The Employment Tribunals Service awarded this contract to Deloitte & Touche as a result of a competitive tender. The contract was funded from the Civil Service Reform Fund and both the work and payment spanned the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

I refer to your written Parliamentary Question 2001/2674. I have been asked to respond for Companies House.

A contract was let to PricewaterhouseCoopers in June 1998, via a mini-competition using SCAT suppliers, for consultancy advice related to procurement of a Millennium-compliant accounting system, at a cost of £127K.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question as to how many contracts were let by The Insolvency Service to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–00, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration made in each case.

The Insolvency Service has had no consultancy contracts with these firms during the specified years.

Letter from Alison Brimelow to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 April 2002:

I am replying on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question 2674 to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry relating to contracts let to PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young, Deloitte & Touche, KPMG and Andersen for consultancy services for each of the financial years from 1997 to 2001.

No contracts have been let by the Patent Office to any of the above for consultancy services in any of the financial years from 1997 to 2001.

ECGD Assistance

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list by name and location, the fossil fuel power projects that have been built with the involvement of UK companies in receipt of ECGD assistance since *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1997; and which of those are coal-powered. [44620]

Ms Hewitt: The tables below list the project name, country and fuel type for which ECGD has provided guarantees since 1992 and 1997.

In addition, ECGD has provided Overseas Investment Insurance and other insurances for 11 fossil fuel power projects. These projects are not disclosed, since such cases are treated as commercial in confidence.

For most of the projects listed, the UK exporter is one of several contractors and ECGD is guaranteeing only part of the total project financing.

Table 1: Power Projects Supported by ECGD 1992–1997

Project Name	*Country*	*Fuel Type*
Balagarh	India	Coal
Budge Budge	India	Coal
Fuzhou	China	Coal
Nantong	China	Coal
Dalate	China	Coal
Fushan City	China	Coal
Gao Bei Dian	China	Coal
Omblin	Indonesia	Coal
Dalian	China	Coal
Dandong	China	Coal
Majuba	South Africa	Coal
Shaijao	Hong Kong	Coal
Hare and Munyati	Zimbabwe	Coal
Shandong	China	Coal
Sual	Philippines	Coal
Doha East	Kuwait	Oil
Pulau Seraya Stage III	Singapore	Oil
Outer Island	Indonesia	Oil
Manah Power Station	Oman	Gas
Blackpoint	Hong Kong	Gas
Tetouan	Morocco	Gas
Samarinda	Indonesia	Gas
Manjung	Malaysia	Gas
Kakinda	India	Gas

Table 2: Power Projects Supported by ECGD since 1997

Project Name	*Country*	*Fuel Type*
Shandong	China	Coal
Bulawayo	Zimbabwe	Coal
Munjung	Malaysia	Coal
Naptha Jhakri	India	Coal
Afsin—Elbistan	Turkey	Coal
AK Enerji	Turkey	Gas
Bilkent	Turkey	Gas
Manzanillo	Mexico	Gas/Oil
St Kitts Power	St Kitts and Nevis	Oil
Elege Alimentos	Brazil	Oil
Anguilla Electricity	Anguilla	Oil
Ghubrah	Oman	Oil
San Pedro	Dominican Republic	Oil
Magnesita	Brazil	Oil
Outer Islands Power	Indonesia	Oil

Economic Reform

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she intends to pursue the Lisbon agenda of economic reform after the Barcelona Summit. [47975]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government view the Barcelona Summit as a significant success. The conclusions registered solid progress on economic reform and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister

stressed in his post-Summit Press Conference, it "symbolised an important change of gear for Europe's economy and its economic policy".

The Lisbon agenda is a 10 year programme and there is still much to be done. We wait to ensure that individual Councils make a practical reality of the Barcelona conclusions on the liberalisation of energy markets, the availability of Broadband, final agreement on a Community Patent and the adoption of an EU R&D Framework. Member states will also need to work closely with the European Commission in its work on an Entrepreneurship Green Paper, reform of state aids policy and exploiting biotechnology.

In taking this work forward, both Ministers and officials will continue to be constructively engaged with the Commission, our opposite numbers in other member states and the European Parliament, as well as ensuring that the voice of UK and European business is listened to by all key EU players.

Pay (Heywood and Middleton)

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to commission data on the gender pay gap in Heywood and Middleton constituency. [48634]

Alan Johnson: The Office for National Statistics publishes data on the gender pay gap in the New Earnings Survey. However, in the case of the Heywood and Middleton Constituency, the data is not sufficiently reliable for publication.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies published last year by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website (http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/research-and-publications.htm).

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website (http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/gender-briefing/home.htm).

There are no plans to commission further research into the gender pay gap in Heywood and Middleton.

Oil and Gas Industry

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on the Department's review of the oil and gas industry's code of practice dealing with the negotiations for access to oil and gas infrastructure. [48852]

Mr. Wilson: I have today placed in the Libraries of the House recommendations to industry to consider limited but worthwhile changes to its Infrastructure Code of Practice. The proposed changes are intended to improve the transparency and conduct of negotiations for third party access to UKCS pipelines and processing facilities. This is the final element of the Departmental response to its consultation on Oil and Gas Infrastructure: Access Provisions and Voluntary Arrangements, which included a review of the effectiveness of the voluntary Code. The recommendations build on views expressed and suggestions made in response to that consultation.

Mineworkers

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for giving mineworkers a greater share of the surplus from their pension fund; and if she will make a statement. [44495]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the Member for Barnsley Central on 17 January, *Official Report*, column 403W.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the wards in the South and South East of England which have EU objective 2 status, in the grouping which enabled them to qualify for objective 2 status, listing for each grouping its *(a)* position relative to the lowest decile of deprivation indices, *(b)* population, *(c)* unemployment according to the last census, *(d)* average income per head according to the most recent information available, *(e)* population of working age and *(f)* county. [48389]

Alan Johnson: Groups of wards were submitted to the European Commission for consideration for Objective 2 status according to the Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999. The table shows the groups for wards in the South West and South East of England, and shows which NUTS 3 and 4 areas the wards were in. The table shows *(a)* whether the ward was ranked in the tenth lowest wards according to the 1998 index of deprivation, *(b)* the population as estimated for 1996, *(c)* unemployment according to the 1991 census, *(d)* the population of working age according to the 1991 census.

No information is available on average income per head for wards.

UA or LA	*Ward*	*Criterion for inclusion*	*Index of multiple deprivation on 1998 lowest decile?*	*Population 1996*[1]	*Un-employed census 1991*	*Working age census 1991*
Hastings	Maze Hill	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,300	219	2,105
	Mount Pleasant	Urban article 4(7)	No	5,800	249	3,220
	Old Hastings	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,100	192	2,314
	Ore	Urban article 4(7)	No	5,100	221	3,000
	West St. Leonards	Urban article 4(7)	No	6,500	236	3,615
	Castle	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	3,600	315	2,257
	Central St. Leonards	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	4,500	381	2,555
Dover	Sandwich	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,900	123	2,601
Thanet	Cecil	Urban article 4(7)	No	2,300	148	1,338
	Central Eastcliff	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	6,400	525	3,623
	Ethelbert	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	2,100	222	1,328

UA or LA	Ward	Criterion for inclusion	Index of multiple deprivation on 1998 lowest decile?	Population 1996[1]	Un-employed census 1991	Working age census 1991
	Minster Parish	Urban article 4(7)	No	3,300	94	1,901
	Newington	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	5,000*	359	2,843
	Northdown Park	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	6,300	401	3,357
	Pier	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	2,500	266	1,439
	St. Lawrence	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,500	141	2,365
	St. Peters	Urban article 4(7)	No	6,000	180	3,146
	Salmestone	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,800	198	2,615
	Southwood	Urban article 4(7)	No	4,700	182	2,576
	Thanet Parishes	Urban article 4(7)	No	1,800	48	1,057
Bristol	Ashley	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	12,800	1,315	7,943
	Easton	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	11,500	711	6,721
	Filwood	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	11,000	900	6,091
	Lawrence Hill	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	12,900	1,275	7,129
	Windmill Hill	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	14,400	885	8,680
North Devon	Bishop's Nympton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	57	1,025
	Bishop's Tawton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	38	983
	Bratton Fleming	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	48	1,112
	Braunton East	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,800	111	2,218
	Braunton West	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,800	101	1,980
	Chittlehampton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,900	56	1,138
	Chulmleigh	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	57	1,121
	Combe Martin	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,200	133	1,777
	Fremington	Rural article 4(9b)	No	7,500	216	4,100
	Georgeham	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	42	826
	Heanton Punchardon	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,700	67	1,691
	Ilfracombe Central	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,900	275	2,113
	Ilfracombe East	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,100	175	1,888
	Ilfracombe West	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,100	176	2,317
	Instow	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	45	949
	Landkey	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,600	79	1,543
	Longbridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	75	927
	Lynton and Lynmouth	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,900	54	1,120
	Marwood	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	55	1,110
	Mortehoe	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,300	84	1,369
	Newport	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,900	148	2,236
	North Molton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	29	825
	Pilton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,000	92	2,441
	St Mary's	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,300	160	1,953
	South Molton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,300	117	2,386
	Swimbridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,100	60	1,286
	Tawstock	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,200	51	1,230
	Trinity	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,900	265	2,869
	Witheridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	48	1,044
	Yeo	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,500	200	2,077
South Hams	Avon and Harbourne	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	64	1,239
	Avonleigh	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	40	889
	Bickleigh and Shaugh	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,500	133	3,082
	Brixton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	34	759
	Charterlands	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	62	1,121
	Cornwood and Harford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,200	31	722
	Dartington	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	68	958
	Dartmouth Clifton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,900	87	1,498
	Dartmouth Hardness	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,000	96	1,620
	Dart Valley	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,900	60	1,108
	Eastmoor	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,200	35	750
	Erme Valley	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	29	828
	Garabrook	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	40	1,022
	Ivybridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	9,800	252	6,030
	Kingsbridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	5,200	145	2,747
	Kingswear	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,300	44	736
	Malborough	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	27	749
	Marldon	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	59	1,166
	Modbury	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	32	776
	Newton and Noss	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	46	989
	Salcombe	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,200	48	1,135
	Saltstone	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	40	835
	Skerries	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	27	721
	South Brent	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,900	74	1,573
	Sparkwell	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,100	40	692
	Stoke Gabriel	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,300	27	714
	Stokenham	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	45	943
	Thurlestone	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	39	892
	Totnes	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,700	220	2,614
	Totnes Bridgetown	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,500	103	1,291
	Ugborough	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	62	930
	Wembury	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,000	60	1,811
	West Dart	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	45	927
	Yealmpton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,100	79	1,242

UA or LA	Ward	Criterion for inclusion	Index of multiple deprivation on 1998 lowest decile?	Population 1996[1]	Un-employed census 1991	Working age census 1991
Torridge	Appledore East	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,200	67	613
	Appledore West	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,100	27	594
	Bideford East	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,000	150	2,214
	Bideford North	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,600	207	2,532
	Bideford South	Rural article 4(9b)	No	5,100	187	2,861
	Broadheath	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	27	848
	Clovelly Bay	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	43	868
	Coham Bridge	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	34	875
	Forest	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	34	880
	Great Wood	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,300	51	722
	Hartland Point	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	57	958
	Heanton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,900	58	1,110
	Holsworthy	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,800	57	1,467
	Kenwith	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	47	955
	Melbury	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	65	1,044
	Morice	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	36	939
	Northam Central	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	44	781
	Northam North	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	89	936
	Northam West	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	65	670
	Orchard Hill	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,300	33	674
	Rolle	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	40	954
	Stafford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,300	35	725
	Tamarside	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	51	813
	Torrington	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,700	157	2,629
	Waldon	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	51	866
	Westward Ho	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	95	809
	Winkleigh	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	41	892
West Devon	Bere Ferrers	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,000	104	1,676
	Bridestowe	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	41	884
	Buckland Monachorum	Rural article 4(9b)	No	3,600	74	2,000
	Burrator	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	58	917
	Chagford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	38	753
	Courtenay	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	38	951
	Drewsteignton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	29	730
	Exbourne	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,000	30	599
	Hatherleigh	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	70	956
	Lew Valley	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	42	830
	Lydford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,800	82	1,119
	Mary Tavy	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,700	50	982
	Milton Ford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	44	852
	North Tawton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,600	43	893
	Okehampton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,700	126	2,645
	South Tawton	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,200	36	671
	Tamarside	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	50	894
	Tavistock North	Rural article 4(9b)	No	4,600	160	2,698
	Tavistock South	Rural article 4(9b)	No	5,800	172	3,150
	Thrushel	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,500	56	883
	Walkham	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,900	103	1,744
Plymouth	Budshead	Industrial article 4(5)	Yes	12,900	783	7,144
	Compton	Industrial article 4(5)	No	11,000	463	6,461
	Drake	Industrial article 4(5)	No	12,400	770	7,369
	Efford	Industrial article 4(5)	No	12,700	649	7,359
	Estover	Industrial article 4(5)	No	16,400	512	9,496
	Ham	Industrial article 4(5)	Yes	12,000	816	6,781
	Honicknowle	Industrial article 4(5)	No	13,000	642	6,882
	Keyham	Industrial article 4(5)	Yes	14,100	933	9,067
	Mount Gould	Industrial article 4(5)	No	10,600	687	6,507
	St Budeaux	Industrial article 4(5)	No	12,500	625	6,893
	St Peter	Industrial article 4(5)	Yes	11,900	1,209	7,031
	Southway	Industrial article 4(5)	No	14,200	602	8,828
	Stoke	Industrial article 4(5)	No	12,700	827	7,475
	Sutton	Industrial article 4(5)	No	10,600	853	6,212
	Trelawny	Industrial article 4(5)	No	10,300	402	5,556
Torbay	Blatchcombe	Urban article 4(7)	No	10,300	316	5,496
	Cockington-with-Chelston	Urban article 4(7)	No	10,300	363	5,718
	Furzeham-with-Churston	Urban article 4(7)	No	9,100	317	4,530
	St Peter's-with-St Mary's	Urban article 4(7)	No	10,000	442	5,395
	Tormohun	Urban article 4(7)	Yes	10,400	718	6,099
	Torwood	Urban article 4(7)	No	9,500	611	5,202
West Somerset	Aville Vale	Rural article 4(9b)	No	700	22	341
	Dulverton and Brushford	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,900	34	970
	Exmoor	Rural article 4(9b)	No	800	20	492
	Haddon	Rural article 4(9b)	No	900	40	547
	Holnicote	Rural article 4(9b)	No	700	18	405
	Old Cleeve	Rural article 4(9b)	No	2,000	57	989
	Porlock and Oare	Rural article 4(9b)	No	1,400	39	690
	Quarme	Rural article 4(9b)	No	900	26	504

[1] Population estimates were made by DTI.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48393]

Ms Hewitt: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

EU Structural Funding

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, ref. 44277/44278, what percentage of the population of *(a)* each NUTS 2 area and *(b)* each shire county, unitary authority London borough or metropolitan borough which is not terminous with a NUTS 2 area lies within an area holding EU objective 2 status. [48388]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is available for NUTS areas 1–4, and has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of the current overall EU Objective 2 budget for the UK has been (i) committed and (ii) spent in each of the UK Objective 2 regions. [45816]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

As soon as the information has been collated I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of that letter in the Libraries of the House.

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service, in its corporate Plan 2001–04, includes the objective to "develop policy and legislative solutions needed to support and underpin a modern commercial and financial infrastructure and which reflect both national and global changes in economic and business dynamics, and perceptions and expectations of society".

In addition, the Insolvency Service undertakes or commissions research to inform both the development of policy and the formulation of operational strategy.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the objectives are of the Insolvency Service; [42083]

(2) if she will make a statement on the development of the Insolvency Service's research function, including its role in *(a)* policy formulation and *(b)* operational strategy formulation. [42079]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service objectives are set out in its published Corporate Plan 2001–04 a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Merchant Ships (Steel)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will ban the use of grade A steel for the construction of merchant ships. [47571]

(2) if she will reappraise the use of high tensile steel in the construction of merchant vessels. [47572]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The toughness grades of steel used in shipbuilding are regulated by the International Association of Classification Societies through their unified requirement UR S6. The current version of UR S6 permits limited use of grade A mild steel, as well as grade AH high tensile steel, in structures contributing to overall strength.

This standard limits the use of grades A and AH steels according to their rolled thickness and mean air temperatures in expected area of operation, requiring grades with a higher standard of fracture toughness for high thickness and low temperature.

There are no plans to ban the use of grade A mild steel or to reappraise the use of high tensile steels for merchant ship construction, given the fracture toughness now achieved with grades A and AH.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45057]

Mr. Wills: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases which we consider may be of particular significance to this department. We have recorded 29 cases to date.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to identify costs referable to the human rights element.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will answer the quesion tabled by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough on 26 February regarding the closure of courts. [45686]

Mr. Wills: I am sorry that your question tabled on 26 February was not answered. You ask how many *(a)* county courts, *(b)* crown courts and *(c)* magistates' courts have been closed in each year since 1 May 1997. Based on the latest survey information the numbers of courts closed since that date are:

Year	Magistrates' Courts	County Courts	Crown Court Centres
1997[1]	16	7	0
1998	24	6	0
1999	8	2	0
2000	13	4	0
2001	29	1	0
2002[2]	0	0	0
Totals	90	20	0

[1] from 1 May 1997

[2] to date of answer

Specific details of the Magistrates' courthouses and county courts closed are given in the attached tables.

Court Closures 1997–2002

Court	Date of Closure	Post Closure Jurisidiction
Andover[2]	30 June 1997	Basingstoke, Salisbury, Winchester
Braintree +	1 December 1997	Chelmsford, Harlow and Colchester
Bishop's Stortford	1 December 1997	Cambridge, Harlow and Hitchin
Alnwick +	15 December 1997	Morpeth
Blyth	15 December 1997	Morpeth
Berwick upon Tweed [1]	15 December 1997	Amalgamated with Morpeth
Bridlington +	24 December 1997	Scarborough
Rochdale	7 September 1998	Oldham and Rawtenstall
Holywell*	7 September 1998	Rhyl and Chester. * (Caller Office formally closed wef 17 January 2002)
Camborne and Redruth +	24 December 1998	Penzance
Hemel Hempstead +	24 December 1998	Aylesbury, Luton and Watford
West Bromwich	24 December 1998	Birmingham, Dudley and Walsall
Loughborough	31 December 1998	Derby, Leicester and Nottingham
Corby + (local sittings on trial basis to July 1999)	1 March 1999	Kettering and Peterborough
Bridgewater +	20 December 1999	Taunton
Great Yarmouth +	31 January 2000	Lowestoft and Norwich
Grays Thurrock	31 January 2000	Basildon
Lichfield	3 July 2000	Burton on Trent, Stafford, Tamworth and Walsall
Caerphilly	30 November 2000	Cardiff and Blackwood
Workington	2 January 2001	Whitehaven
Chepstow +	1 April 2002	Newport, Hereford and Gloucester
Monmouth	1 April 2002	Newport, Hereford and Gloucester

218 courts left when Chepstow and Monmouth courts closed.

[1] courts with caller office status

[2] courts where Circuit Administrators have undertaken to continue local District Judge sittings in suitable accommodation subject to demand

Magistrates' Courts

Magistrates' Courthouse	Closure Date
Bromsgrove	31 May 1997
Ledbury	31 May 1997
Hebburn	5 June 1997
South Shields (Kepple Street)	5 June 1997
Bargoed Chippenham (Market Place)	30 June 1997
Monmouth	30 June 1997
Pontlottyn	30 June 1997
Pontypool	30 June 1997
Ashton under Lyne (Manchester Road)	31 August 1997
Duckinsfield	31 August 1997
Thorne	31 August 1997
Braintree	31 December 1997
Clacton on Sea	31 December 1997
Saffron Walden	31 December 1997
Stokesley	31 December 1997
Malton	6 February 1998
Appleby	31 March 1998
Bishop's Stortford	31 March 1998
Chertsey	31 March 1998
Farnham	31 March 1998
Hatfield	31 March 1998
Hitchin	31 March 1998
Market Rasen	31 March 1998
Marlborough Street	31 March 1998
Oxted	31 March 1998
Lutterworth	31 July 1998
Ripon	1 August 1998
Barnard Castle	31 December 1998
Clerkenwell	31 December 1998
Corwen	31 December 1998
Diss	31 December 1998
Felixstowe	31 December 1998
Haverhill	31 December 1998
Lytham	31 December 1998
Newmarket	31 December 1998
Saxmundham	31 December 1998
Sheerness	31 December 1998
Stowmarket	31 December 1998
West Malling	31 December 1998
Abingdon	31 March 1999
Christchuch	31 March 1999
Henley on Thames	31 March 1999
Morley	31 March 1999
Pudsey	31 March 1999
Windsor	31 March 1999
Stow on the Wold	30 June 1999
March	31 December 1999
Apmthill	1 January 2000
Biggleswade	1 January 2000
Apmthill	1 January 2000
Dunstable	1 January 2000
Leighton Buzzard	1 January 2000
Lichfield	31 March 2000
Keighley	1 April 2000
Keswick	30 April 2000
Appleby	31 May 2000
Windermere	31 May 2000
Wigton	31 May 2000
Gravesend	9 June 2000
Wootton Bassett	2 October 2000
Abergele	31 December 2000
Alfreton	1 January 2001
Ashbourne	1 January 2001
Bakewell	1 January 2001
Matlock	1 January 2001
Leigh	31 March 2001
Middleton	31 March 2001
Leek	31 March 2001
Worcester	31 March 2001
Macclesfield Park Green	1 April 2001
Warrington Patten Hall	1 April 2001
Bideford	30 April 2001
Exmouth	30 April 2001

Magistrates' Courts

Magistrates' Courthouse	*Closure Date*
Kingsbridge	30 April 2001
South Molton	30 April 2001
Teignmouth	30 April 2001
Tavistock	30 April 2001
Axminster	4 May 2001
Tiverton	4 May 2001
Newquay	30 June 2001
Womborne	31 August 2001
Southampton (Commercial Road)	31 August 2001
Gillingham	30 September 2001
Bridlington	9 November 2001
Brough	9 November 2001
Driffield	9 November 2001
Hull (Guildhall)	9 November 2001
Hull (Lowgate)	9 November 2001
Pocklington	9 November 2001
Withernsea	9 November 2001

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the recommended time is for departments to decide the results of an internal appeal under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. [48611]

Mr. Wills: It is for individual bodies subject to the Code to make their own arrangements for the procedure used to review cases internally where information has been refused and the applicant has made a complaint. Appendix 5 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Monitoring Report for the year 2000, published in September 2001, sets out the target times adopted by bodies subject to the Code for deciding the results of an internal appeal. The majority have adopted a target of 20 working days or less. The target for decision on an internal appeal within this Department is 20 working days.

Freedom of Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the guidance distributed to officials to advise them on how to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [48612]

Mr. Wills: A circular (IT Security News) was issued to staff in November 1999 about the Data Protection Act. I have placed a copy of *IT Security News, Issue 6* in the House Library. No separate guidance has been issued since then. I expect to be able to make an announcement on central guidance on handling subject access requests shortly.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor will reply to the letter to him dated 18 February for the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Wellings. [47768]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor wrote in reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton's letter of 18 February on 27 March 2002.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48406]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

Fraud (Dentists)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many dentists have received custodian sentences since 1997 arising from a conviction for fraud against the NHS. [43813]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1997, of all National Health Service fraud and corruption cases involving dental contractors, there have been eight cases, which have been successfully prosecuted. Of these five received a custodial sentence. There are currently six cases awaiting court proceedings and 34 alleged cases of fraud and corruption under investigation by the NHS Counter Fraud Service.

SCOTLAND

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38929]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

In buildings where the department is the sole occupier, there are no in-house canteen or catering services. In accommodation shared with the Scottish Executive, catering services are provided by that department as the major occupier.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years, and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38935]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

No equipment leasing arrangements have been made by the Department since that date.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41063]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is not available in the form requested.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42110]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The Department has had no contracts with accountancy firms since that date.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42435]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44882]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no private finance initiative or public private partnership projects.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44828]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

There have been no cases of criminal damage to the Department's buildings since that date.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45259]

Mrs. Liddell: No staff employed by my Department were seconded from the private sector between 1999 and 2001.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members of staff were employed by the Scotland Office on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45223]

Mrs. Liddell: One member of staff was seconded to the Scotland Office from a non-governmental organisation in 2001.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48394]

Mrs. Liddell: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards on Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what crèche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44859]

Mrs. Liddell: No crèche facilities are provided by my Department.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44889]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what crèche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44857]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44830]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Value for Money

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General, pursuant to her answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 181W, on value for money, what specific measures she has put in place to provide for efficient operation and a contribution towards securing better value for money. [45782]

The Advocate-General: My office, like the rest of the Scotland Office, has been in existence for less than three years and, in developing suitable working systems, officials have sought to ensure that the work is done in a way which makes the most efficient use of staff and other resources.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Government Agencies and Quangos

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 876W, what assessment he has made of *(a)* the total number of Government agencies and quangos operating in each of the regions and *(b)* their annual budgets. [42260]

Mr. Leslie: In respect of *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green on Wednesday 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1070W.

In respect of *(b)*, information on the total gross expenditure of individual non-departmental public bodies, and information on the funding of this, is set out in the annual publication "Public Bodies", copies of which can be found in the Libraries of the House. Information on annual budgets of executive agencies is set out in each Agency's Annual Report and Accounts.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many members of staff were employed by the Cabinet office on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45235]

Mr. Leslie: The number of secondees employed in the Cabinet Office from non-governmental organisations for the period 1 April 1999 to date are as follows:

Period	*Number of Staff*
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	41
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	37
1 April 2001 to date	35

Note: This data only includes Governnment Offices for the Regions for 2001–02 as they joined the Cabinet Office in June 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45079]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Cabinet Office.

Three people employed by the Cabinet Office, initially under the New Deal for Young People (one in 1998 and two in 2000), have subsequently been employed by the Cabinet Office on permanent contracts following fair and open competition. We do not hold information on people employed under the scheme who have not left the Department.

Cabinet Offices Agencies and Government Offices of the Regions

(i) Government Car and Despatch Agency

No staff employed by the GCDA under the New Deal arrangements have subsequently been employed by the GCDA on permanent contracts. GCDA do not hold information on people employed under the scheme who have now left the Department.

(ii) Central Office of Information

COI have not employed anyone under the New Deal for Young People, However, the Department has employed one person under the New Deal for Lone Parents who was subsequently employed by the Department on a permanent contract.

(iii) Government Offices for the Regions

No staff employed by the GO under the New Deal arrangements have subsequently been employed by the Government Offices on permanent contracts. GO do not hold information on people employed under the scheme who have now left the Department.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents, and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44927]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State:

Cabinet Office

Since April 1999 11 people have been employed by the Cabinet Office under the New Deal arrangements and are categorised as follows:

	Young People	*Lone Parents*	*Over 50's*
1999	4	–	–
2000	4	1	–
2001	2	–	–
2002	–	–	–

The average cost per placement was £17,833 (which is made up of basic salary, Employers National Insurance and Pensions Contributions).

Cabinet Office Agencies and Government Offices of the Regions

(i) Government Car and Despatch Agency

The Government Car and Despatch Agency has employed 1 person under the New Deal for Young People for one week in 2001.

The cost of this placement was £220 inclusive of Employers National Insurance and Pensions Contributions.

(ii) Central Office of Information

Since the New Deal began in COI, the Department has employed one person. This person was employed under the New Deal for Lone Parents.

The cost of this placement was £7,320 (which is made up of part-time basic salary, Employers National Insurance and Pensions Contributions.

(iii) Government Offices of the Regions
The Governement Offices for the English Regions have been taking people under unsubsidised New Deal arrangements since October 2000. Since October 2000 the GOs have employed 4 people.

	Young People	*Lone Parents*	*Over 50's*
1999	–	–	–
2000	2	–	–
2001	2	–	–
2000	–	–	–

[1] The average cost per placement was £17,045 (which is made up of basic salary and employers NI).

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44843]

Mr. Leslie: Figures requested are as follows:

	£
1998–99	1,600
1999–2000	2,000
2000–01	1,100
2001–02	1,000

[1] There has been no lasting damage done to the fabric of any of the department's buildings.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47183]

Mr. Leslie: Progress on/against PSA targets will be reported and published in the Cabinet Office's annual Departmental Report for 2002.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46944]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: At 9 April 2002, there were four special advisers in my office, including two part-timers.

On salaries, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47100]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Since 1999 this Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48405]

Mr. Leslie: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

Magistrates

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many serving magistrates live in *(a)* St. Helens, South constituency and *(b)* St. Helens Metropolitan Borough. [46987]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is responsible for the appointment of magistrates in Merseyside, has provided the following information.

There are 50 magistrates serving on the St. Helens Bench who live in the St. Helens South constituency.

There are 93 magistrates serving on the St. Helens Bench who live in the Metropolitan Borough of St. Helens which covers the constituencies of St. Helens North and St. Helens South.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to compel pension trustee boards to appoint independent chairmen. [43953]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no plans to compel pension trustee boards to appoint independent chairmen.

We believe that requiring independent chairmen for trustee boards would discourage employers from continuing to provide occupational pension schemes, would be difficult to implement in practice, and would make little difference to the way schemes are run.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been spent to date on the New Deal for Young People. [44898]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to March 2001 £1,063 billion was spent on the New Deal for Young People, of which £860 million was funded from the Windfall Tax and £203 million from the Department's own resources. Forecast expenditure for 2001–02 will be published in the Departmental Report in May this year.

IT Projects

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the IT Projects being undertaken by his Department; and which companies have been awarded the contracts. [46317]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 26 March 2002]:* Our main IT suppliers are:

EDS—for our Employment Service modernisation programme;

Affinity, (led by EDS with IBM UK, PricewaterhouseCoopers and AT Kearney)—for our Department for Work and Pensions modernisation programme (major contracts include Child Support Reform, Strategic Outsourcing and some elements of the Department's Early Office Infrastructure programme);

Arcway, (led by BT Syntegra with Bill Information Systems and Schlumberger Sema)—for the new network needed to support our modernisation programme.

Incomes

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the latest figures on households below average incomes to be published. [49445]

Mr. Darling: Today I have published Households Below Average Income for 1994–95 to 2000–01. This is a report published under National Statistics arrangements with results that cover Great Britain. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The report shows the position during the financial year 2000–01. Consequently, it does not reflect the full impact of policies introduced part way through that year, or the changes introduced since—for instance the Children's Tax Credit or enhancements to tax credits and benefits made in 2001.

Nonetheless the report shows that this Government's policies are working. The new economic stability has delivered strong income growth since 1996–97 that is consistent across the whole income distribution. Furthermore our priority to target help to those most in need has delivered real improvements for those on the lowest incomes. There have been significant falls in the numbers of people below "absolute" low-income lines (1996–97 low-income thresholds in real terms). There are now 1.4 million fewer children and 1.1 million fewer pensioners below 60 per cent of 1996–97 median income in real terms (after housing costs).

Against this backdrop of rising prosperity across the income distribution, we are still reversing the long-term trend of rising relative income poverty for children that we inherited. There are now around half a million fewer children living in households below 60 per cent of contemporary median income.

Jobcentre-Plus Offices

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the impact of the decision to remove screens from the pilot Pathfinder offices; and if he will make a statement. [45507]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 25 March 2002]:* The Pathfinder offices are delivering the new Jobcentre Plus service in a predominantly unscreened environment. In every Jobcentre Plus area there remains screened provision for dealing with those customers and transactions known to give rise to particular risk.

Fifty-six Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices are open and operating effectively—with positive feedback from staff and customers. For each of these offices a risk assessment has been conducted and its recommendations implemented in full. These assessments will be regularly reviewed in light of experience.

Pensioner Poverty

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to tackle pensioner poverty. [45912]

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to ensure that pensioners share in the nation's prosperity. [44516]

Mr. McCartney: We are committed to tackling pensioner poverty. In 2001–02 around £5 billion extra has been spent on pensioners as a result of our policies since 1997. In 2002–03 this will rise to £6 billion a year. This includes £2.5 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

This government introduced the Minimum Income Guarantee and is committed to raising this in line with earnings throughout this Parliament, ensuring that pensioners share in rising prosperity. From April, around 1.8 million of the poorest pensioner households will be over £1,000 a year better off in real terms as a result of the Government's tax benefit reforms.

From 2003 the Pension Credit will ensure that it pays to have saved, with those entitled standing to gain an average of around £400 a year.

Advertising/Public Relations

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list each *(a)* public relations and *(b)* advertising firm that has been employed by his Department since 1997, indicating the (i) subject area and (ii) campaign they worked on in each case. [33628]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department of Work and Pensions is a new department formed in June 2001. Since that time the following PR and advertising agencies have been employed in the subject areas and on the campaigns indicated:

PR company	*Subject area and campaign*
Geronimo	New Deal/Age Positive
Media Moguls (ethnic specialists)	New Deal

Advertising agency	*Subject area and campaign*
Publicis	New Deal for Disabled People
A national campaign to launch NDDP, covering press advertising in national and regional titles, supported by a help line, website and publicity material.	
St Lukes	New Deal 50 Plus
A regional campaign to encourage more of the over-50s into work and to increase their awareness of the local help available.	
St Lukes	New Deal 25 Plus
A national campaign to inform the public about changes to the programme through radio advertising, a video and printed materials, supported by research.	
Ogilvy & Mather	Work Incentives
Advertising campaign on local radio to raise awareness of the range of financial initiatives available to those moving from benefits into employment if they meet the qualifying criteria.	
Delaney Lund Knox Warren & Craik Jones Watson Mitchell Voelkel	Pension Education
A publicity campaign to encourage people to save for their retirement and understand the pension options available to them.	
Ogilvy & Mather	Winter Fuel Payments
Information for people aged 60 plus and advisers about winter fuel payments and activity reminding them to claim and telling them how to claim for winter 2002 and relevant previous winters.	
D'Arcy	Targeting Fraud
A national advertising campaign on television, radio, press and posters to deter dishonest behaviour, reinforced by regional press advertising showing that benefit fraudsters are regularly caught and punished.	
D'Arcy	Disability Discrimination Act Awareness
A national, regional and trade press advertising campaign to raise the public's awareness of the DDA and specifically to encourage service providers to ensure that disabled people have access to their services.	

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43248]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Following machinery of Government changes in June 2001, the Public Service Agreement targets for the Department of Social Security were carried forward with the addition of the target shown below which was transferred from the Department for Education and Employment.

"A continued reduction in the number of unemployed people over the age of 18 over the three years to 2004, taking account of the economic cycle."

DEFENCE

Defence Medical Agencies

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the quinquennial review of the defence medical agencies; and if he will make a statement. [46935]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: As indicated in my written answer on 15 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 274W–275W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) the Review has covered the functions and organisation of the Ministry of Defence's four medical agencies—the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA), the Defence Dental Agency (DDA), the Defence Medical Training Organisation (DMTO) and the Medical Supplies Agency (MSA)—and other aspects of medical provision. I announced the results of the initial phase of work in my written answer of 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1223W–1224W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright).

The Review Team has now completed its work, and I am today placing a summary of its conclusions in the Library of the House. In brief, the main points are that:

There must be a clearer focus on delivery of the two key Defence medical outputs—deployable operational medical capability, and timely appropriate healthcare for Service personnel;

Accountability for the delivery of these outputs by both central and single-Service authorities must be defined unambiguously, as part of a clear tri-Service strategy and plan;

The Surgeon General (SG), working to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, will be empowered to undertake effective oversight and direction of the DMS in meeting the key output requirements, including those elements which remain under single-Service management;

A stronger partnership will be established between the DMS and the National Health Service;

Management capabilities throughout the DMS will be strengthened, drawing on expertise from the parent Services and, where relevant, the NHS;

The Defence Medical Services will be re-aligned and restructured to focus more effectively on the two key Defence medical outputs. The DSCA will be disestablished on 31 March 2003, with its training-related functions transferring to an expanded medical training agency, and healthcare commissioning being undertaken by a new group within the Surgeon General's staff. The MSA has now transferred into the Defence Logistics Organisation as of 1 April 2002.

The review has provided an important opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made since the announcement of the New Strategy for the DMS at the end of 1998. It is no surprise that it has concluded that while much has been done over the last three years there are further steps to be taken—and changes to be made—that will help the process of restoring DMS capability and ensuring that key Defence medical outputs are delivered. The Government is committed to achieving those aims and, subject to the normal consultative process, to implementing the outcome of the review.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence What progress has been made with the quinquennial review of the medical agencies; and if he will make a statement. [8603]

Dr. Moonie: I am pleased to say that the review team have completed the first phase of its studies. As indicated in my written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) of 15 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 275W, the team has covered medical arrangements for personnel in Germany and Northern Ireland; and the inter-relationships between primary and secondary care as

well as the functions and organisation of the Ministry of Defence's four medical agencies—the Defence Secondary Care Agency, the Defence Dental Agency, the Defence Medical Training Organisation and the Medical Supplies Agency.

I have endorsed the broad lines of the review team's report on the first phase of its studies and have agreed a package of further work to underpin and confirm its provisional conclusions. A paper summarising the main features of the team's initial report and the phase 2 work, which will take place between now and the end of the year, is being placed in the Library of the House. As the paper indicates, this further work will result in a detailed report which will form the basis of full consultation.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence What new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47250]

Dr. Lewis Moonie *[holding reply Wednesday 10 April 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 February 2002. (*Official Report*, column 682) which gave details of new and existing measures to deter and detect fraud and theft. It is a prime feature of delegated line management responsibility to operate procedures protecting assets from theft and damage. These procedures are always subject to review. They are enhanced where possible through central initiatives directed at the deterrence and detection of fraud and theft and the introduction of resource accounting arrangements. Recent developments include the promulgation of a policy statement on fraud and theft and the development of a programme of fraud and theft awareness training across the department. Key controls, such as the maintenance of asset registers requiring a physical description of assets, spot checks and random searches, authorisation to remove assets from sites and physical security are underpinned by published guidance and direction.

Joint Services Group

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Joint Services Group was formed; what its mission is; how many soldiers are assigned to it; what ranks are represented in its leadership; and to whom its commanding officer reports. [48026]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding this information under Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (information whose disclosure would harm national security or defence).

Warships

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his written answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 562W, on warships, if the companies mentioned will be involved with nuclear material as part of their contract; and if he will make a statement. [48178]

Mr. Ingram: Babcock Naval Services Limited at the Clyde and Devonport Management Limited at Devonport will be required to provide direct support to Royal Navy nuclear powered submarines and this will involve nuclear material. Both of these companies are already engaged in work of this type.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42298].

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: The hon. Member is referred to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell) to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Tim Yeo) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W, in respect of her Department's responsibility for supporting and facilitating the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

The Home Office flies the Union flag on St. George's Day and St. David's Day, and this year will also be flying the flag on Coronation Day—2 June 2002.

Staff will benefit from an additional bank holiday which will take place on Monday 3 June 2002 to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

The Home Office issues a calendar of religious and cultural festivals each year and the Saints' days are included in that. Managers are encouraged to be flexible where possible and to make a reasonable accommodation for staff wishing to take leave for religious observance and festivals.

HOME DEPARTMENT

James Ashley

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 49–54, on James Ashley, what progress has been made in conducting disciplinary proceedings in relation to the police officers involved in the shooting of James Ashley. [43299]

Mr. Denham: One superintendent and two chief inspectors are facing a number of disciplinary charges. One officer has obtained leave for judicial review of his suspension. All three officers are seeking leave for judicial review of the chief constable's decision to proceed with disciplinary charges. It is unlikely that any disciplinary hearings will take place until those matters have been resolved.

Court Hearings

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of contractors in delivering prisoners to magistrates courts in the West Midlands in good time for court hearings. [43425]

Beverley Hughes: Premier Prison Services, who operate the court escort contract in the west Midlands and mid Wales, are required to deliver prisoners to magistrates courts in their area 30 minutes before court start time. In the six months to February 2002 over 20,000 prisoners have been escorted by Premier Prison Services to those courts and of these approximately 82 per cent. have arrived by the time stated in their contract. A further seven per cent. have arrived before court start time.

All failures to meet the obligations placed on Premier Prison Services by the contract are examined by the Prison Service court escort monitor for the area and, where they are considered to be at fault, penalty points are imposed. If these exceed a prescribed level then financial remedies may be applied. Not all late deliveries are the direct fault of Premier Prison Services. Late discharges from prison, long journeys occasioned by the general population pressures on the prison estate and circumstances beyond the control of the parties involved may all be contributory factors in any individual case.

Sex Offender Treatment Programmes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on availability of sex offender treatment programmes in prison. [42891]

Beverley Hughes: There are five versions of the accredited Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP) delivered in prisons: a core programme for all except those with learning difficulties and those at low risk of re-offending; an adapted programme for those with learning difficulties; an extended programme for those at high risk of re-offending; a rolling programme for those at low risk of re-offending; and a booster programme for those who have completed other versions of the programme and are preparing for release.

The Prison Service's targets for numbers of prisoners completing versions of the programme in 2002–03 and 2003–04 are 950 and 1,240 respectively. Versions of the programme are currently delivered at 25 prisons. This is planned to rise to 27 prisons in 2002–03 and 28 in 2003–04. Prisoners may need to be transferred in order to undertake the programme.

It is not possible to be precise as to whether provision exactly meets demand. For example, the programme is also delivered to those serving sentences for other offences but who have previous histories of sexual offending; and some offenders have to be excluded from treatment temporarily or permanently because clinical assessment at the start of the programme is that they are unlikely to be responsive. However, the Prison Service keeps the programme under review to ensure its availability to all eligible prisoners with sentences long enough to complete it.

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Prisons

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on overcrowding in prisons. [42893]

Beverley Hughes: At the end of February 2002, a total of 13,963 prisoners were held in overcrowded conditions. This is 20 per cent. of the prisoner population.

Most overcrowding is attributable to the numbers held two in a cell designed for one, commonly known as doubling. Within the total overcrowding figure above, 12,516 prisoners were held doubled. The average rate of doubling for the current year to the end of February is 17 per cent. which remains below the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) target for 2001–02 18 per cent or less.

Data are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to address overcrowding in women's prisons. [43536]

Beverley Hughes: The female prison population on 15 March 2002 was 4,229. This was 146 below the total certified operational capacity of 4,375 for the same day. The Government sets no target for the prison population as it is for the courts to determine who is sent to prison. The Government will provide the places necessary to accommodate safely and securely those sentenced by the courts. New prison capacity is opening this year for female prisoners. Buckley Hall, a 350 place prison near Rochdale, will change function shortly from male to female use. Female capacity will increase by 80 places later this year when two ready use units are opened at Morton Hall in Lincolnshire. A further 810 places will be provided by 2004, in new prisons at Ashford (near Heathrow) and at Peterborough.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what aftercare is made available to women prisoners with mental health problems after they have been released. [43558]

Jacqui Smith: The Care Programme Approach (CPA), which is intended to address the health and social care needs of individual service users, applies to those women with mental health problems who leave prison in the same way that it applies to other mental health service users. It is intended to deliver care through a care plan to meet the individual needs of the

service user, and is an effective co-ordination process. Most women prisoners with a serious mental illness should leave prison on enhanced CPA.

Women prisoners with mental health problems should be able to access a full range of the community supports they need in order to promote their recovery and integration back into society through their CPA care co-ordinator or general practitioner. This should include housing, education, employment and leisure and the establishment of appropriate links with the benefits agency and probation service.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what ratio of prison officers to inmates is provided for *(a)* female and *(b)* male prisoners. [43539]

Beverley Hughes: On 31 January 2002, the ratio of prison officer grades to prisoner was—within public sector prisons:

1:2.54—female prisoners;

1:2.73—male prisoners,

within privately managed prisons:

1:2.18—male prisoners only.

The definition of prison officer grades differs within the public and private sector. On 31 January 2002, no privately managed prison accommodated female prisoners.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if they Pay Review Board's recommendations for pay increases for prison offices will be met in full. [44420]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend (Huw Edwards) on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 480W.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the companies from which his Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43407]

Angela Eagle: Current data capture systems do not enable the information to be reported in the format requested. From April 2001 the Department has instructed procurement staff to record information on timber and timber-based purchases by volume per species but there have been difficulties in obtaining the data. The Department proposes to review its capture of information on timber and wood purchases once cross government guidelines have been agreed.

Knife Crime

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department has collated on the incidence of knife crimes in Falmouth and Camborne. [43419]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prison workshops are in use at Wandsworth Prison. [44633]

Beverley Hughes: Workshops currently in use at Wandsworth prison are a Laundry, Data Entry Shop, Brush Manufacturing Shop, Textile Shop, Tailoring Shop and Contract Services Workshop.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates at Wandsworth Prison are working gin prison workshops *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time, as at 15 March 2002. [44622]

Beverley Hughes: 263 prisoners were employed in prison workshops at Wandsworth prison on 15 March 2002. Of these, 121 were employed full-time and 142 part-time.

Arrest Statistics

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made, broken down by police force area, in each year since 1997. [44460]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for South East Cambridgeshire (James Paice) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1246W.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column 622W, if his Department is planning to apply for a special grant to pay for additional police officers and other exceptional additional costs which could not be met from within existing budgets for the Queen's Golden Jubilee; what the procedure is for applying for such a grant; how much money the Department anticipates requesting; and if he will make a statement. [44570]

Mr. Denham: Where it can be demonstrated that exceptional additional costs could not be met from existing police authority budgets or reserves it is open to forces to apply for a special grant. Any such application would be considered within existing Departmental provision for special grants.

In general terms we would expect police authorities to meet the additional costs of policing Golden Jubilee events from within their existing budgets or reserves. Criteria for consideration of a special grant application were agreed in 2000 between the Home Office, Association of Chief Police Officers and Association of Police Authorities. Under those criteria police authorities are normally expected to meet additional costs up to 1 per cent. of the force budget set by the policy authority. Grant would be considered in relation to the balance of cost above that 1 per cent.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how it has been allocated; and if he will make a statement. [44571]

Angela Eagle: There was no Home Office expenditure in connection with the Golden Jubilee in 1999–2000. In 2000–01, £72,375.15 was spent on the administrative costs of setting up the Golden Jubilee Unit, which is co-ordinating the arrangements for the Jubilee celebrations

Responsibility for the Golden Jubilee Unit was transferred to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport following the General Election. Funding had passed through the Home Office accounts in February 2002: up to that point £721,861.53 was spent by the Golden Jubilee Unit. This comprised £594,824 on the Unit's work in co-ordinating arrangements for the celebrations, £95,110 in grants and £31,927 on providing information about how to stage the jubilee events. Of the grant expenditure, the majority £50,000 was given to the "London String of Pearls" (as a contribution to the costs in opening up buildings to the public during Jubilee) and the rest to the Commonwealth Institute (to help towards the cost of its role in the planned national parade).

Yarl's Wood

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if prison officers were called to attend at Yarl's Wood during the recent riot. [44418]

Beverley Hughes: Yes. At the request of Group 4 and in accordance with the Prison Service's protocol with the Immigration and Nationality Department, prison officers were deployed to assist in restoring order at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre on 14 and 15 February 2002.

Wellingborough Prison

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the number of prison officers at Wellingborough Prison attending prison visits. [44417]

Beverley Hughes: Management Consultancy Services (MCS) carried out a staffing and regimes review of Wellingborough Prison during October 2001. The MCS report contained recommendations about staffing levels required to supervise domestic visits. The report will now be discussed by MCS, management of the prison and the relevant staff associations.

Greater Manchester Police

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community police officers there are in Greater Manchester, broken down by constituency. [42844]

Mr. John Denham *[Holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The information in the table has been provided by the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (David Wilmot). The number of community police officers is shown for each police division. A breakdown by Parliamentary constituency is not available.

Division	*Community Police Officers* [1]
North Manchester Division	54
South Manchester Division	100
The City of Salford Division	75
Tamside Metropolitan Borough Division	34
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Division	53
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Division	66
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Division	53
Tafford Metropolitan Borough Division	38
Bury Metropolitan Borough Division	32
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Division	47
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Division	36
Total	588

[1] Greater Manchester police have defined a 'community police officer' as an officer who dedicates their duties to working within the community in partnership with other agencies, examples are school liaison officers and youth offender officers.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for review of notification of determination by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority there have been in each of the last three years; and what percentage of these requests subsequently result in a changed decision. [43990]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority have provided the following information:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Review requests	19,891	20,521	18,002
% Decision changed	16	15	12

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for review of determination by the Criminal Injury Compensation Authority there have been in the current financial year; what the waiting time is for allocation of review requests; and what the average time is for completion of the review. [43991]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority advise that 15,792 review requests were received in the period 1 April 2001 to 14 March 2002. The waiting time for allocation of review requests is currently 14 weeks and falling, and the average time for a completed review in the 2001–02 financial year is 439 days.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many determinations by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority on which the application for compensation is declined due to the applicant refusing to give evidence in court there have been in each of the last three years; and what percentage of the total number of determinations were *(a)* approved and *(b)* declined. [43989]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority advice that the number of applications rejected on account of the applicant's failure to give evidence in court was 236 in 1998–99, 158 in 1999–2000 and 274 in 2000–01. In the

same three years, the percentages of all determinations approved were 54, 52 and 53, and of those rejected were 46, 48 and 47.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 834—5W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42642]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44956]

Angela Eagle: For 2002–03 the Home Office targets for replying to letters will continue as follows:

(a) Ministers to reply to 95 per cent. of MPs correspondence about the Prison Service within 20 working days, and within 15 working days on all other matters.

(b) Officials to reply to 95 per cent. of correspondence from the public within 20 working days.

Drug Use (Prisoners)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Deparment what (1) the rate of testing for cannabis use among prisoners has been in each of the past five years. [45076]

(2) what estimates his department has made of the use of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* heroin, *(c)* crack cocaine, *(d)* all drugs, including alcohol among prisoners in each of the past five years. [45077]

Beverley Hughes: The most reliable indicator of drug misuse in prisons is data from the random mandatory drug testing (MDT) programme. National figures are given in the table.

Percentage of positive tests from random MDT

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Cannabis	17.2%	14.5%	10.2%	7.5%	6%
Opiates (including heroin)	4.3%	4.5%	4.3%	4.7%	4.7%
Cocaine (including crack)	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
All drugs	20.8%	18.3%	14.2%	12.4%	11.4%

[1] Figures are based on the year to date—to 31 January 2002.

No central record is kept of the amount of alcohol use in prisons. However, the best available indicator is the number of punishments handed down to prisoners for knowingly consuming alcohol. Between 1997 and 2000 these were:

1997—297
1998—524
1999—632
2000—547

Alcohol-related Crime

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces in England and Wales keep records of alcohol-related crime. [44001]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: The term alcohol-related crime potentially covers any criminal act where the perpetrator may have been drinking alcohol prior to, or at the time of, the offence. While the relevant offence may be recorded, there is at present no requirement on police forces to record whether or not the offender had been drinking. Many forces do, however make their own assessment of alcohol-related crime problems, to inform their operational policing decisions.

The suite of Best Value Performance Indicators for the police for 2002–03 include both a measure of violent offences committed in connection with licensed premises and a measure of violent offences under the influence of an intoxicating substance. This will provide a consistent measure of alcohol-related violence across all police forces in England and Wales.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1100W, if he will list the occasions on which his Department has applied the special urgency provisions of circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments), stating *(a)* the date, *(b)* the nature of the development and *(c)* a description of local consultations conducted. [45560]

Angela Eagle: Crown land is exempt from statutory planning control. Under the provisions of Circular 18/84 Government Departments instead must consult with local planning authorities before proceeding with Crown developments. In the event of an objection to the proposed development the matter may be referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Stephen Byers), who may arrange for a non-statutory public local inquiry to be held. A decision will then be issued to all interested parties.

Paragraph 22 of the Circular permits Departments to seek responses from local planning authorities within just 14 days, instead of the normal eight weeks. Unlike the normal procedure there is no obligation on the local planning authority to seek third party views. If no

response is received after 14 days the Department can proceed with the development by the service of notice on the authority.

The special urgency provisions of circular 18/84 have been applied in the following cases:

Globe House, 89 Eccleston Square, London SW1;

Date: January 1999;

Nature of development: New London Passport Office—removal of asbestos and stripping of the interior (Phase 1), redevelopment of the building, change of use and construction of a two-storey side extension (Phase 2);

Description of consultations: Consultations took the form of meetings between retained consultants and Westminster City Council.

Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre;

Date: May 2000;

Nature of development: Redevelopment and use of the site for an immigration detention centre;

Description of consultations: Consultations included public meetings in Clapham and Milton Ernest village halls on 6 and 8 June 2000 respectively.

Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre;

Date: May 2000

Nature of development: Redevelopment of the site to provide an immigration detention centre, with associated hearing centre, administration building, visitors centre and car parking.

Description of consultations: An application letter and drawings were sent to the local planning authority and subsequent consultations were undertaken on an informal basis.

Formerly Her Majesty's Prison Aldington (Immigration Detention Centre);

Date: June 2000

Nature of development: Construction of a 300-place immigration detention centre

Description of consultations: Consultations took place with the local planning authority and three public meetings and an exhibition were held. This scheme has not been implemented.

Logford House Removal Centre (Harmondsworth 2);

Date: December 2001

Nature of development: Development and use of the site as a second immigration detention centre.

Description of consultations: An application letter and drawings were sent to the local planning authority and subsequent consultations were undertaken on an informal basis.

Langhurst House, Horsham;

Date: February 1999

Nature of development: Construction of single-storey laboratory facility

Description of consultations: An application letter and drawings were sent to the local planning authority and subsequent consultations were undertaken on an informal basis.

The special urgency provisions have also been used for 120-place blocks at the following prisons:

Her Majesty's Prison Garth, Chorley (June–July 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Holme House, Stockton-on-Tees (July 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison New Hall, Wakefield (June–October 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Bullingdon, Bicester (June–July 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Wetherby, Leeds (November 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Moorland, Doncaster (June 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Styal, Macclesfield (June 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Wymott, Chorley (July–August 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Onley, Daventry (June 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Guys March, Dorset (June 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Rangy, Ranby (August–October 1996).

The special urgency provisions were also used for 40-place living units at the following prisons:

Her Majesty's Prison Stocken, Rutland (November 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Norwich (November 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Downview, Banstead (November–December 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Kirklevington, Stockton-on-Tees (November–December 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Wayland, Thetford (November–December 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Haverigg, Millom (October–November 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Kirkham, Fylde (October 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Littlehey, Huntington (November 1996)

Her Majesty's Prison Ashwell, Rutland (November 1996)

In the period since the answer of 13 March 2002 special urgency provisions were applied in respect of 40-place rapid modular units at the following prisons:

Her Majesty's Prison Acklington, Morpeth

Her Majesty's Prison Eventhorpe, Brough

Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution Hatfield, Hatfield

Her Majesty's Prison Haverigg, Millom

Her Majesty's Prison Highpoint, Stradishall

Her Majesty's Prison Hollesley Bay, Woodbridge

Her Majesty's Prison Leyhill, Wotton-Under-Edge

Her Majesty's Prison Lindholme, Hatfield Woodhouse

Her Majesty's Prison North Sea Camp, Boston

Her Majesty's Prison Prescoed, Usk

Her Majesty's Prison Ranby, Ranby

Her Majesty's Prison Standford, Eastchurch

Her Majesty's Prison Stocken, Stretton

Her Majesty's Prison Spring Hill, Grendon Underwood

Her Majesty's Prison Wayland, Thetford

Her Majesty's Prison Wealstun, near Weatherby (clearance received in April 2002)

Finally, special urgency provisions were applied in March 2002 in respect of a 40-place ready-to-use unit at the following prison:

Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Morton Hall, Swinderby (clearance received in March 2002)

In the case of all prison developments an application letter and drawings were sent to the local planning authority and subsequent consultations were undertaken on an informal basis.

Animal Experiments

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on animal experiments. [45920]

Angela Eagle: The use of animals in experiments and other scientific procedures is strictly regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which is widely regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world. It offers a high level of protection to animals whilst recognising the need to use animals in

research. It also requires the latest ideas and technology to be taken into account when deciding whether the use of animals is justified.

We are working to ensure that the highest possible standards of animal welfare are applied and that animals are used only where it is fully justified. To this end, the Home Office has developed and put in place a strategy to ensure that policy is reviewed continuously as scientific and ethical considerations evolve; checking that the costs to animals are minimised and remain outweighed by the potential benefits of the work; compliance and high standards are reinforced through consistently applied inspection, training, guidance and (if necessary) infringement procedures; the advice of the Inspectorate, other welfare and scientific expertise, and the products of local ethical review processes is harnessed in ensuring that there are no alternatives which either replace animal use entirely, reduce the number of animals needed or refine the procedures to minimise suffering (the 3Rs). It also ensures that these are rigorously applied in every case and that the highest standards of animal welfare are implemented.

It is also our strategy to encourage the development and use of alternatives and relevant databases through research funding and education, and through support for the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM); to take a lead in formulating European policies, standards and targets which neither disadvantage the United Kingdom nor drive work abroad to countries where lower standards apply; to liaise actively with legitimate interest groups and encourage the Animal Procedures Committee to take a more public role and offer broadly based and independent advice to Ministers; and to seek to make the administration of the 1986 Act as transparent as possible.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will estimate the cost of converting the Centrex Site at High Ercall, Shropshire, to a centre for housing asylum seekers; [45165]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Angel Development Corporation and *(b)* other interested parties on the suitability of the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire, for housing asylum seekers since 27 November 2001. [45164]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: The Angel Group is under contract to the National Asylum Support Service to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. I can confirm that no discussions have taken place with the Group or other interested parties into the possibility of using the Centrex site at High Ercall as a centre for housing asylum seekers. Since no discussions have taken place I am unable to estimate the cost of converting the site.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent changes have been made to the asylum support system. [49015]

Angela Eagle: Amendments to the Asylum Support Regulations 2000 came into effect on 8 April 2002. From that date levels of support provided to asylum seekers and their dependants under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 have been increased. Also from 8 April all payments will be paid in cash.

In addition, the Regulations have been amended to extend the prescribed period for discontinuing the support of asylum seekers whose claims have been fully determined. From 8 April when the Secretary of State notifies the claimant that he accepts the asylum claim, or notifies the claimant that the asylum claim is rejected but at the same time gives him limited leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or where an appeal by the claimant against the Secretary of State's decision has been disposed of (within the meaning of Section 94(4) of the Act) by being allowed, the period is increased from 14 days to 28 days. In any other case, the period is increased from 14 days to 21 days.

Amendments to the Asylum Support (Interim Provisions) Regulations 1999 have also been made. These extend the duration of the Regulations until 5 April 2004; amend the prescribed period for asylum seekers supported by local authorities in the same way as for those supported under Section 95 of the 1999 Act and remove the restrictions on the payment of subsistence support in cash.

The new rates of support for the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) supported asylum seekers are shown in the table:

Levels of cash subsistence support for NASS supported asylum seekers and any dependants from 8 April 2002

	Rates
Qualifying couple	£59.26
Lone parent aged *Qualifying couple* 18 or over	£37.77
Single person aged 25 or over	£37.77
Single person aged at least 18 but under 25	£29.89
Person aged at least 16 but under 18 (except a member of a qualifying couple)	£32.50
Person aged under 16	£33.50

Criminal Justice System Annual Report

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the criminal justice system annual report for 2000–01. [49014]

Mr. Blunkett: My noble and learned Friends the Attorney General, the Lord Chancellor and I will today be publishing jointly an annual report for the criminal justice system for England and Wales.

The document is a formal report back on the criminal justice system strategic and business plan, which was published in May 2000.

Copies of the Report will be placed in the Library.

TREASURY

Euro

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what date he expects to complete his five economic tests for determining whether the UK should adopt the euro. [44499]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I have made clear on a number of occasions to this House that the Treasury will complete the assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to present to Parliament regular progress reports on the preliminary technical work on the assessment of the five economic tests on the euro. [44519]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete the assessment within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, the Government will publish the conclusions and the report.

Tourism Exports

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the level of tourism exports in the last five years from each region of the country. [44518]

Ruth Kelly: Figures on incoming tourists by UK region, alongside estimates of their expenditure, are contained in Table 4.11 of the Office for National Statistics 2001 Travel Trends publication (ISBN 0 11 621477 55). This covers years up to and including 2000. Figures for 2001 will be published in the Autumn.

Child Poverty

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what action his Department is taking to reach its goal on lifting children out of poverty in this Parliament. [44521]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government is committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. As part of this commitment, we recently published a strategy document entitled "Tackling child poverty: giving every child the best possible start in life" which will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002. As a result of tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been.

As part of the next stage of tax and benefit reform, a new tax credit for families with children—the Child Tax Credit—will be introduced from 2003, building on the foundation of universal Child Benefit. It will bring together the strands of support for children in Children's Tax Credit, Working Families Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and Income Support/Job Seekers' Allowance, and will be a seamless and transparent system of support for children, paid to the main carer, whether the family is in or out of work. Decisions on rates and thresholds will be set out in Budget 2002.

National Insurance

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the revenue implications of aligning the national insurance upper earnings limit with the higher rate of tax threshold. [44522]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 742W.

NHS Funding

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with Derek Wanless regarding the contents of the final Wanless report. [44524]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given today by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for New Forest West (Mr. Swayne).

Sports Clubs

Gillian Merron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received to implement separate tax proposals for community amateur sports clubs in the 2002 Budget. [44525]

Mr. Boateng: A range of responses to the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document has been received. Decisions on the best way forward will be made with regard to these responses and in the context of subsequent meetings with sports' representative bodies and the Charity Commission. A summary of responses will be made publicly available at the time of any announcement.

Manufacturing

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of trends in tax receipts from manufacturing industry in the south-west since January 2001. [44526]

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the changes in tax receipts from the manufacturing sector in the south-east of England during 2001. [44534]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is not available. This is because the difficulties involved in apportioning taxes between different regions and sectors mean that the estimates would not be robust.

Climate Change Levy

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from industry on the climate change levy. [44527]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the normal process of contact with business, the Chancellor and the Treasury Ministerial team have met with a variety of business organisations and individual companies, and have heard a variety of representations on Climate Change Levy, and on other matters.

Privy Council Silverware

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the Privy Council silverware. [44528]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 March, *Official Report*, column 46W.

Oil Prices

Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the economy of the recent rise in oil prices. [44529]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will publish updated forecasts for the UK economy in the Budget on 17 April, taking into account all recent developments and risks.

Unemployment (North-East)

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on measures being taken to reduce unemployment in the north-east. [44530]

Ruth Kelly: Figures recently announced show that the employment level is at 28,232 million, and the claimant unemployment level stands at 951,000. Claimant unemployment stands at 5.3 per cent in the North East and in North Durham it is down by 44 per cent. since 1997. The New Deal has been a contributing factor to these reductions in unemployment.

In particular New Deal for young people has been successful in its four years of operation; it has placed over 340,000 18–24 year olds into work. 27,858 individuals have been placed into work in the North East. The New Deal for 25 plus and the enhanced programme (since April 2001) has helped a further 92,000 long-term unemployed people into work. For the North East region, 4,934 individuals have moved into employment and since the enhanced programme 1,616 individuals.

Action teams are in place to help individuals into employment, as well as Employment zones. For instance, within the North East region these have been launched in Stockton and Middlesbrough RC.

To build on this performance, the Government has introduced further measures to increase the effectiveness of the New Deal and other employment programmes, including:

Piloting greater flexibility in the Options section of NDYP from November 2001 to give personal advisers more freedom to tailor the provision of support to meet the needs of the individuals, local employers and local labour markets;

Establishing a pilot mentoring scheme from January 2002 to assess how mentoring can best be used to improve employment chances and job retention under the New Deal;

Step-up a new programme of transitional employment pilots will, from April 2002 target our hardest to help clients who have not been able to find a job through the New Deal are going to be in place for instance in, Knowsley and Lambeth areas. People who take up these jobs will receive individual support so that they can eventually make the transition to unsupported jobs in the open labour market;

To support those communities affected by large-scale redundancies, the Government is allocating additional resources to strengthen the Job Transition Service over the next two years; and

The Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) is helping to make work pay for low to middle income families' with children. Nearly 1.3 million families with children are currently receiving the WFTC, around 400,000 more than received its predecessor, Family Credit. On average these families are receiving £35 a week more on WFTC than under Family Credit.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the results of his welfare to work proposals in deprived areas. [44531]

Ruth Kelly: Figures recently announced show that the employment level is at 28,232 million, and the claimant unemployment level stands at 951,000. Claimant unemployment in Tottenham is down by 44 per cent. since 1997. The New Deal has been a contributing factor to these reductions in unemployment.

In particular New Deal for young people has been successful in its four years of operation; it has placed over 340,000 18–24 year olds into work. The New Deal for 25 plus and the enhanced programme (since April 2001) has helped a further 92,000 long-term unemployed people into work.

To build on this performance, the Government has introduced further measures to increase the effectiveness of employment programmes in deprived areas, which include:

Tackling the obstacles to employment in some of the worst affected regions in Britain. the Government has established 63 Action Teams in England, Scotland and Wales that suffer from particularly high levels of inactivity and long-term unemployment. Action Teams are a dynamic and innovative resource to tackle some of the UK's most deep-seated and protracted employment problems. So far 6,934 people have moved to work through Action Teams;

The Government has PSAs targets for increasing employment in the most deprived areas within the UK. The employment rate for these 30 areas currently stands at 63.2 per cent. (Autumn 2001) up from 60.2 per cent. in Spring 1997;

Step-up a new programme of transitional employment pilots will, in deprive areas such as Knowsley and Lambeth from April 2002 target our hardest to help clients who have not been able to find a job through the New Deal. People who participate in Step-Up will receive individual support so that they can eventually make the transition to unsupported jobs in the open labour market;

The Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) helps to make-work pay for low to middle income families' with children. Nearly 1.3 million families with children are currently receiving the WFTC, around 400,000 more than received its predecessor, Family Credit. On average these families are receiving £35 a week more on WFTC than under Family Credit.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what preparations his Department has made to call for the acceleration of debt cancellation under the HIPC process to the level required to help achieve international development targets set at the bank April meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. [44532]

Mr. Boateng: The Government continues to press for rapid implementation of the HIPC debt relief initiative to ensure that all eligible countries benefit and achieve sustainable debt levels.

The cost of achieving the International Development Targets has been estimated at an additional US$50 billion per annum, equivalent to a doubling of current global aid. Debt reduction under the HIPC initiative can therefore be only one element of the additional finance required. For this reason the Government has been calling for substantial increases in aid and has welcomed

recent commitments by the US and EU, announced in advance of the UN Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey, of an US$12 billion per annum increase in aid levels.

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department plans new bilateral loans to *(a)* the heavily indebted poor countries and *(b)* other countries. [45188]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

All DFID bilateral assistance to heavily indebted poor countries and to other developing countries is in the form of grants.

Employment Tax Credit

Miss Begg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his proposals for an employment tax credit. [44533]

Dawn Primarolo: In April 2003 the Government are planning to introduce the Working Tax Credit to help make work pay and tackle in-work poverty. The Working Tax Credit will replace the adult elements of the Working Families' Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and the Employment Credit 50+. It will also extend the principle of Working Families Tax Credit to workers aged over 25 without children or a disability. The Working Tax Credit will be complemented by the Child Tax Credit. The rates and tapers of the Working Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit will be announced in Budget 2002.

VAT

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the costs to small businesses of administering VAT. [44535]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 630W and 631W.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48407]

Ruth Kelly: This information is not held centrally, and could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Exports

Paul Holmes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the level of UK exports if the pound fell 10 per cent. against the euro; and if he will make a statement. [44536]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 696W.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent steps have been taken by the Treasury concerning the planning and control of health expenditure. [44517]

Mr. Andrew Smith: These are matters for consideration by the Chancellor prior to the Budget and Spending Review.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Secretary of State for Health to discuss planned levels of health spending after 2003–04. [44520]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor meets with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss a variety of issues on a regular basis.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, Ref. 37050, with reference to Clause 19 of the Cabinet Office Guidance to Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities, if he will place the written agreement between his Department and Andersen in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [39615]

Ruth Kelly: The commercial arrangements for the "Creating Knowledge: Creating Wealth" conference on 14 April 1999 were as follows. The Treasury paid £15,500.85 (including VAT) for the hire of the conference facility, catering, staging and audio/visual equipment. Arthur Andersen incurred costs of £5,499.15 for the preparation of conference packs and for graphic design.

Arthur Andersen's role was to help identify speakers and with the administration of the event. I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of a letter from my officials dated 25 November 1998 setting out these arrangements.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44880]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

(*a*) PFI Projects Delayed

Inland Revenue—Archer House project, Stockport. The delay was due to a proposed site change and an interim change of specification.

(*b*) There have been no delayed PPP projects.

Scottish Transport Group

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date his Department was first informed of the level of Scottish Transport Group pension scheme's surplus. [48168]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The wind up of the STG pension scheme is being taken forward by the Scottish Executive following privatisation. The Scottish Executive

announced in December 2000 how the surplus was being distributed following agreement with Treasury Ministers.

Scottish Bus Group

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules in respect of double taxation are applicable to the Scottish Bus Group employee pension fund. [48284]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A surplus from a pension fund scheme can carry a tax liability. A tax charge is provided for under section 601 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. It applies to all payments to an employer from the funds of an exempt approved pension scheme, as the Scottish Transport Group schemes are. The current rate at which the tax is charged is 35 per cent. in accordance with Section 74 of the Finance Act 2001. The tax payable on payments to pensioners will depend on the personal tax circumstances of the individual. Payments have yet to be finalised.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what legal advice his Department has obtained in relation to the distribution of the Scottish Bus Group employee pension funds; under what statutory provisions these funds are liable to public general taxation; to what extent ex-gratia payments made to former members of the fund are liable to tax; to what extent this applies in respect of payments in excess of £30,000; and at what rate. [48282]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive is taking forward the wind up of the STG pension schemes. The tax position is set out in the answer I am today giving to another question of the hon. Lady's ref. 48284.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreements targets. [47186]

Ruth Kelly: Information about the measures put in place to achieve the Treasury's PSA targets will be published in the Treasury's 2002 Departmental Report.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his overseas visits since 7 June 2001. [46173]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend the answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 7 February 2002, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), *Official Report*, columns 1142–43W, on tax credits, what the average penalty imposed on each person who has been subjected to a penalty as a result of an investigation into a WFTC or DPTC claim is, broken down into each financial year. [40509]

Dawn Primarolo: The average penalty imposed as a result of an investigation into a WFTC/DPTC claim is as follows:

	October 1999–March 2000	*April 2000–March 2001*	*April 2001–December 2001*
Average penalty	£481	£521	£593

Widows' Pensions

David Burnside: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the difference in the treatment for tax purposes of the attributable pension awarded to war widows and widows of disabled service personnel. [46410]

Dawn Primarolo*[holding answer 26 March 2002]*: Specific rules mean that pensions paid under the War Pensions Scheme to widows or widowers in respect of the death of their spouses are exempt from tax. Pensions paid to widows or widowers of service personnel under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme are taxable in the normal way.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the cost to the Treasury of collecting capital gains tax. [47635]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of collecting Capital Gains Tax in 2000–01 was £43 million. This equates to 1.33 pence for every pound of Capital Gains Tax collected.

The figure relates mainly to costs arising from gains to individuals and trustees but some other costs (mainly of land valuations for companies) that cannot be separately identified are included in the collection costs of capital gains tax.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the income from capital gains tax was in each of the last five years. [47655]

Dawn Primarolo: Receipt of capital gains tax in each of the last five years are given on the Inland Revenue website at: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax—receipts/g—t02—1.htm.

Research and Development

Rob Marris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial measures the Government have implemented since 1997 to stimulate research and development, and production, in the sectors of medical technology and of pollution control. [44493]

Mr. Boateng: In Budget 2000 the Government introduced the R&D tax credit for small and medium sized companies. In Budget 2001 consultation was announced on two further measures supporting R&D:

- extending R&D tax credits to all companies; and
- a tax credit for research into drug and vaccines for killer diseases—TB, malaria and some strains of HIV/AIDS—primarily affecting people living in developing nations.

The Chancellor confirmed on 25 March that a wider volume based R&D tax credit, applying to spending on or after 1 April 2002, would be introduced.

Budget 2001 introduced enhanced capital allowances for investment in energy efficient technologies, allowing companies to immediately write off the full cost of qualifying investments against taxable profit. In Pre-Budget Report 2001 the Government announced proposals under the Green Technology Challenge to introduce further enhanced capital allowances to tackle climate change and improve air quality, and to reduce water use and improve water quality.

Small Landlords

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the tax system to assist small landlords. [44494]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keeps all taxes under review and any changes will be announced in the Budget Report.

Vocational Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 578W, on vocational training, if he will provide a breakdown of the courses being followed by the claimants of vocational training relief in 1998–99. [48639]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Family Incomes

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to increase the take-home pay of families of those in low paid work. [44504]

Dawn Primarolo: Over the last Parliament this Government introduced the following measures to make work pay:

National Minimum Wage

Working Families Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit

The 10 pence and 22 pence rates of income tax; and

Reforms to National Insurance Contributions.

As a result of these measures families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are on average £1,700 a year better off in real terms.

In April 2003 the Government is planning to replace Working Families Tax Credit with the Working Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit. The Child Tax Credit will provide a seamless stream of support for families, paid direct to the main carer, building on the foundations of universal Child Benefit.

Parliamentary Questions

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the advisory cost limit of £550 for answering written parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement. [49257]

Ruth Kelly: The advisory cost limit was last increased in 2000, *Official Record*, 15 May 2000, column 47W and is to be further increased to £600 from today.

The purpose and application of the advisory cost limit remains unchanged. It is intended to act as a threshold for disproportionate cost parliamentary questions (PQs). Any written PQ where the marginal cost of preparing the answer is considered likely to exceed the threshold may be refused in whole or in part on the grounds of disproportionate cost. Alternatively the Minister may decide that the PQ is to be answered irrespective of cost. There is no advisory limit for oral PQs.

The advisory limit continues to be based on eight times the average marginal cost for written PQs, which is now £75, rounded down to the nearest £50 for convenience of application.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of answering *(a)* a written parliamentary question and *(b)* an oral parliamentary question. [49258]

Mr. Boateng: As at April 2001, the average cost of answering a written parliamentary question and an oral parliamentary question was £129 and £299 respectively.

Monterey Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions took place at the Financing for Development Conference in Mexico on the reform of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers to take into account the financial resources required to reach the 2015 development targets. [46657]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The UK delegation to the Conference was not aware of any specific discussions at Monterrey about the need to reform the PRSP process to take into account the financial resources required to reach the 2015 development targets. UK policy is to support improvements to poor countries' public expenditure management systems so that poverty reduction policies and programmes can be clearly costed and prioritised in PRSPs. We also support the work of the World Bank and UNDP which looks at the costs for individual countries to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BSE

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make available the latest progress report prepared by her Department on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [49671]

Mr. Morley: A further Progress Report on BSE in Great Britain was placed in the Library of the House today.

The report outlines the measures which have been taken to protect public health since June 2001 and includes the latest EU requirements for testing and surveillance.

There is also a section on the protection of animal health which covers controls on animal feed.

The epidemiology section shows that the epidemic of BSE in Great Britain continues to decline.

The report is also published on the DEFRA website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index.html.

Livestock Movements

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will end the 20-day standstill rule for livestock. [48193]

Mr. Morley: The interim rules for livestock movements, which we announced on 5 February, allow greater flexibility for farmers to move their animals. The 20 day standstill rule has been waived for some types of movement, subject to conditions and we will continue to keep these arrangements under review. However, veterinary advice is that the 20 day standstill needs to remain in place for the time being as a disease control measure. A copy of a document explaining the Veterinary basis for the Interim movement rules has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on the DEFRA website.

Oil Seed Rape Contamination

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the report being prepared by the Canadian seed authorities on the possible causes of the GM contamination of hybrid oil seed rape exported to the UK in the spring of 2000 has been received. [49672]

Mr. Meacher: The report to which my hon. Friend refers has recently been issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House Libraries.

Risk Transfer

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department intends transferring forms of risks associated with farm businesses to farmers. [46748]

Mr. Morley: My officials are currently discussing with the livestock and insurance industries a number of options on the transfer, to farmers, of some of the costs of animal diseases.

Regulations

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department plans to help farmers rationalise regulations. [46746]

Mr. Morley: My plans were set out at paragraph 4.61 of "Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together", published on 26 March, which reads:

"The Government accepts that there is a need to find better ways for farmers, DEFRA and the regulatory bodies to work together to achieve improvements in standards without imposing unnecessary burdens. This need arises on a wide range of issues—including animal health and welfare, food safety, employee health and safety and nature conservation as well as environmental regulation. On 26 March my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State announced that DEFRA would give high priority to work on new approaches to regulation, including the need for DEFRA and the regulators to consider the cumulative effects of regulatory requirements on the farm business as a whole. These commitments reflected a new approach to regulation in which DEFRA promised to:

be open with industry—consulting early and often;

minimise the bureaucracy of regulation using Regulatory Impact Assessments in a joined up way to assess impacts in the round (across regulatory regimes), and to cut duplication of effort;

provide advice and information easily and up front—to help farmers comply, not just punish them for failure;

join up government and join up the regulators—provide business advice and regulatory advice as a package;

ensure regulations are risk-based and proportionate.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, also said that she will press hard for better integration between the agricultural and environmental agendas at the European level, and called on the farming industry to play a bigger role in helping to devise environmental legislation within the EU."

LGC

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, on genotype test errors, if she will list the contracts that her Department and its predecessor Department has had in the last five years with LGC. [33776]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The following are the contracts undertaken by LGC in the last five years:

Speciation, bioavailability, biopotency and functional markers for D vitamers;

Development of methods to detect protein standardisation of cows' drinking milk;

Methods for the detection of rectified grape and apple juice in fruit juices;

The immunological determination of meat content;

Evaluation of a DNA Method for Meat Species Identification;

A novel method for the detection of neuronal tissue from beef by the identification of tissue specific DNA modification;

Differentiation of species of meat in particular cooked products by DNA methods;

Evaluation of a suite of methods to distinguish cheese analogues from genuine cheese;

Optimisation and validation of DNA assay for detection of select non-muscle tissues in meat products using tissue specific DNA modification;

Vitamin B6 improvements in extraction and determination—Resolving inaccuracy and bias from its measurement;

Development and validation of two analytical procedures for the quantitative determination of fatty acids;

Further studies on the determination of heme and non-heme iron;

Develop and validate a routine HPLC method for the determination of folates and folic acid in foods;

development and validation of rapid viable pathogen testing and enumeration by a simple and low cost new method;

An improved analytical method for gellan gum;

Development and validation of procedures to detect and quantify the use of dimethyl dicarbonate in non-alcoholic drinks;

Biomarker assessment of benzoate consumption;

A regiospecific immunoassay screening test for contaminants from food contact plastics;

Develop a novel molecular typing method for comparison of foodbourne pathogens using VTEC as a model organism;

Efficacy testing of disinfectants used in the food industry against a range of pathogens including E-coli 0157;

Processing LINK Offers of Grant;

Organochlorine residue in poultry resulting from the use of hyperchlorinated water in poultry washes;

Chain of custody audit at Institute of Animal Health;

Development of a Sensitive and Specific Molecular Typing Method for the Epidemiological Study of Salmonella;

Investigation of glufosinate residue analysis in potatoes, soya products, legume and maize;

Development of methods for the determination of thyreostats in poultry and bovine livers;

BSE Testing in Cattle: Analytical Work on Veterinary Residues in Foodstuffs of Animal Origin;

National Scrapie Plan "Blood Sampling";

Feasibility Study of the Determination of Oestrone, etc. in Drinking Waters;

Analysis of Oestrone, Oestradiol and Ethynyl Oestradiol—Supervision of Performance Tests;

Investigation of Solvent Contamination Incidents and Provision of Scientific Advice on Drinking Water Quality and Health Issues;

Leaching of Lead from Approved u-PVC Water Supply Pipes;

Consolidate two GCMS methods for the determination of three oestrogen steroids in water and review of the potential for determining the same steroids using LCMSMS;

Exposure to chloropropanol isomers via polyamines.

Correspondence

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria she uses to decide which letters from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public will receive an answer signed by herself. [7562]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 October 2001]*: A range of criteria—including the position held by the individual concerned, the subject matter and the background to the correspondence—is used to determine whether my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State responds to letters from hon. Members or asks one of her Ministerial team to reply on her behalf. By convention, Privy Councillors only receive replies from fellow Privy Councillors, unless they have expressly written to another Minister.

Similarly, whether or not my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State replies in person to letters from members of the public depends on whether the letter-writer holds a particular position in public life, or if he or she is known personally to the Secretary of State and on the nature and content of the letter.

The hon. Member may be interested to know that since the beginning of January 2002, DEFRA Ministers have received over 4,200 letters from hon. and right hon. Members, and in excess of 45,000 letters from members of the public. The majority of these were addressed to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated 20 June 2001 relating to the future prospects of livestock auctions. [33877]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent on 8 April to the right hon. Member.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 6 August from the hon. Member for North Shropshire concerning his constituent Ms J. Vernon. [12632]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]*: I am sorry for the delay in replying to the hon. Member's letter. A reply was sent on 26 March.

Ministerial Meetings

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Prime Minister regarding *(a)* the future of farming and *(b)* the future prospects of small family farms; and if she will publish the record of those discussions. [16394]

Margaret Beckett: On 9 August the Prime Minister announced the setting up of the Independent Policy Commission on farming and food. Government asked it to advise on how we create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector within a thriving rural economy which advances environmental, health and animal welfare goals and is consistent with the Government's aim for CAP reform, enlargement of the EU and increased trade liberalisation.

Following the publication of the Policy Commission's Report on 29 January, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister and I met leaders of farming, food, rural, environmental and consumer bodies to discuss how to take the recommendations forward. The outcome of that meeting was published in a News Release (No 117/02), issued by my Department on 26 March.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34413]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Illegal Meat Imports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government are introducing to curb the importation of illegal meats. [35710]

Mr. Morley: On 28 March the Government published an action plan which commits it to a range of measures to reduce disease risks presented by illicit imports of animal products. A copy of the plan is being placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress has been made with investigations into the feasibility of using x-ray machines to detect illegal meat imports; and if she will make a statement; [47912]

(2) what progress has been made with the pilot scheme for dogs to sniff out meat which is being brought into the country illegally; and if she will make a statement; [47913]

(3) what plans she has to make the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 more effective; and if she will make a statement; [47914]

(4) what material is issued to inform people travelling to the UK of the regulations regarding personal imports of meat and tne penalties for importing meat illegally. [48390]

Mr. Morley: The Government has published an action plan, the aim of which is to reduce the risk of exotic animal and plant diseases entering the country. The plan takes account of recent discussions the Government has had with stakeholder interests on the priorities and actions for the coming year to tackle the issue of illegal imports. A copy of the plan has been placed in the library of the House. It contains a range of measures, including those listed in these questions.

We are gathering information to help examine the potential benefits of using x-ray equipment to scan containers and personal baggage to detect illegal imports, leading if successful to a trial. On the use of dogs, we are working towards commencing a pilot this summer.

Enforcement officers will be given new powers (already available to customs officers) in April to search baggage, etc for illegal imports of animal products. The central and local government agencies involved in importation of food and other goods are working closely together to achieve effective inter-agency co-ordination of checks, and which will include discussions about how these search powers will be used.

Information about our import rules has been provided to Embassies to publicise locally through travel agents and when visas are issued. Posters have been put on display in the arrival baggage halls at UK airports advising of the penalties for smuggling animal and plant products. Information on restricted produce is also contained in HM Customs' Guide for travellers entering the UK, and which can be viewed on-line at http://www.hmce.gov.uk/forms/notices. Further publicity measures will be developed.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what outbreaks of disease in animals in Britain have been linked to the import of illegal meat products in the past five years. [46789]

Mr. Morley: We cannot be certain as to the precise origin of the Classical Swine Fever and Foot and Mouth Disease outbreaks in 2000 and 2001. However, absence of any evidence that these diseases were introduced through the import of live animals suggests infected meat or meat products are the source. The precise route for introducing infection is likely to remain unknown, though the controls in place for legal imports point to an illegal or inadvertent introduction.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the role of her Department has been in checks on illegal meat imports at airports in the last two years; and if she will make a statement. [46383]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has lead responsibility for animal health controls on imports of meat, working with the Food Standards Agency which has responsibility for public health aspects, and HM Customs, the devolved administrations, and Local and Port Health Authorities. The last two years has seen greater co-operation between these authorities.

The Department held a meeting on 21 March with all the public enforcement authorities, the ports, airports, airlines, agriculture and food industry to intensify efforts to reduce illegal meat imports.

Refrigerators (Disposal)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Ministers and officials attached to her Department were directly involved in discussions with the European Commission concerning the implementation of EU regulation 2037/2000 in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [40365]

Mr. Meacher: I negotiated the draft Regulation at the EC Environment Council meeting in December 1998, and the Council adopted a common position at the meeting in February 1999. Negotiations at official level took place in the Environment Working Group of the Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. At official level, further discussions with the European Commission and other Member States on introduction and implementation took place at regular Management Committee meetings on both the previous legislation, EC Regulation 3093/94, and EC Regulation 2037/2000.

Animal Medicines

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that animal owners are not limited to buying animal medicines from veterinary surgeons under EU directive 2001/82/EC; [39300]

(2) what assessment she has made of likely employment effects of the implementation of EU directive 2001/82/EC. [39299]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]*: Directive 2001/82/EC consolidated a number of Directives concerning veterinary medicinal products into a single text. Its purpose was not to introduce any substantive changes to the controls on veterinary medicines that

previously existed. Therefore there are no likely effects on employment as a consequence of its implementation. Nor is there anything in Directive 2001/82/EC that would limit animal owners to buying veterinary medicines from veterinary surgeons.

However, the European commission has proposed amendments to Directive 2001/82/EC, one of which would require medicines for food-producing animals to be supplied only in accordance with a veterinary prescription. Under UK legislation veterinary medicines for which a prescription is required may be supplied by veterinary surgeons or registered pharmacists. In its present form this particular proposal could result in UK farmers having to pay more by incurring veterinary surgeons' fees when obtaining those medicines that are currently available without veterinary intervention. Furthermore, it could restrict the number and types of veterinary medicines that may be supplied by registered agricultural merchants and saddlers, to a limited range of products for dogs and cats. This could have significant adverse effects on those businesses.

In considering this proposal the Government has taken account of its likely impact on the supply of veterinary medicines and has agreed that, during negotiations, UK officials should seek to modify the proposal to enable a flexible approach to the distribution of veterinary medicinal products that takes advantage of existing national practices, so long as consumer protection and animal welfare can be demonstrably assured.

The proposed amendments to Directive 2001/82 do not change the current arrangements for selling medicines for companion animals.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department for each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [41036]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001. Forecast running cost expenditure on Ministers' private offices for 2001–02 is £2.2 million. This includes £1.5 million for staff costs. The 2001–02 Administrative Cost budget for the whole Department is £653.6 million.

Manpower

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42455]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 19 March, *Official Report*, column 295W.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42197]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In connection with celebrations to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Tim Yeo) on 11 February, *Official Report*, column 58W/59W.

On flag flying, the Department and its Executive Agencies routinely follow central guidance from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on flying the Union flag from its buildings on "named days". They will similarly observe any agreed Union flag flying protocol for the Golden Jubilee but the flag will fly routinely on Coronation Day (2 June) as this is a "named day".

Staff in the Department and its Agencies will benefit from the additional public holiday granted on 3 June to celebrate the Golden Jubilee.

Pig Farms

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice the Department has issued to farmers regarding the legality of continued use of the stall and tether pig housing system in the UK. [45155]

Magaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Legislation originally introduced in 1991 to ban close-confinement stalls for breeding sows came into full effect from January 1999. During the eight year phase-out period advisory material was issued and a video showing alternative systems produced.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports the Chief Veterinary Officer has received from *(a)* animal welfare organisations, *(b)* members of the public, *(c)* Farm Assurance scheme inspectors, *(d)* other Government officials and *(e)* other persons that animal welfare had been compromised in pig units at (i) Oldlands Farm, Wiltshire and (ii) Shoddesden, Hampshire. [45149]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* No complaints were received about either unit before allegations made by Sky News in June 2001.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations have been made by the Government into use of sow stall and tether housing systems on the pig units of *(a)* Oldlands Pig Unit, Wiltshire and *(b)* Shoddesden Pig Unit, Hampshire since 1999. [45154]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* There have been veterinary inspections of both of these units. Allegations that illegal stall and tether systems were in use on these units after the ban was not substantiated.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to investigate the treatment of pigs at *(a)* Oldlands Pig Unit, Wiltshire and *(b)* Shoddesden Pig Unit, Hampshire. [45156]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: There are no plans to investigate the treatment of pigs at these units as there are currently no pigs on either unit. Previous complaints were investigated and no breach of welfare regulations were found.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when *(a)* Government ministers and *(b)* Government officials were first informed of the possibility that animal welfare had been compromised on pig units in (i) Oldlands Farm, Wiltshire and (ii) Shoddesden, Hampshire since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [45148]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: Sky News first made allegations of poor welfare conditions on both units in June 2001. Allegations made in the media were fully investigated at the time and various claims made could not be substantiated by veterinary inspection.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* unannounced and *(b)* pre-arranged welfare inspections have taken place at the pig units of (i) Oldlands Farm, Wiltshire and (ii) Shoddesden, Hampshire since 1996. [45151]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: There have been six welfare inspections of these units since April 1996. Whether the visits were pre-arranged or unannounced was not recorded in all cases, but the most recent visits in June 2001 and January 2002 were pre-arranged in order to have a responsible person on site to facilitate inspection and respond to enquiries.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance she will give to pig farmers following the ban on feeding swill. [45386]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: The Government does not consider that financial assistance is appropriate for producers who have been required to change the feeding regimes of their animals. However, assistance was provided at the time of the introduction of the swill ban in the form of advice on alternative methods of feeding and alternative feeds that would be acceptable.

Pollution (Irish Sea)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on co-operation between the UK Government and the Irish Government on monitoring pollution in the Irish Sea. [44005]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: There has been extensive co-operation in recent years, including shared research programmes, between the UK and the Irish Government on the pollution of the Irish Sea, particularly in the production of the Quality Status Report (QSR) for the Celtic Seas in 2000.

This report, which is available in the Library, forms part of a wider assessment made within OSPAR, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic. It concluded that ecosystem effects due to pollution are generally confined to urbanised estuaries and that environmental effects of most contaminants routinely monitored appear to be either stable, or decreasing, with the main problem being caused by tributyl tin.

Co-operation continues through the joint work undertaken in the OSPAR Monitoring and Assessment Committee.

Although there is no specific co-operation on monitoring of radioactivity in the Irish Sea, officials from the UK and the Irish Government meet on a bi-annual basis in the form of the UK/Irish Contact Group on Radioactivity where information on monitoring of the Irish Sea is passed to the Irish side.

Brucellosis

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what checks are made by the State Veterinary Service on imports of cattle from France as part of re-stocking schemes following foot and mouth disease; how many cattle have been found to be carrying the disease brucellosis; when the last case of brucellosis was reported in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [46384]

Mr. Morley: Post import checks for the following diseases are carried out by the State Veterinary Service on cattle imported from France:

Enzootic bovine leukosis
Brucellosis
Warble fly

Since imports were allowed to restart following foot and mouth disease, no imported cattle have been confirmed as carrying brucellosis. Although initial blood tests on a consignment of cattle imported in February gave a single positive and four inconclusive results, subsequent tests have proved negative and brucellosis was not confirmed.

The last case of brucellosis reported in Great Britain was in Anglesey in 1993.

Nitrates

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the regulations governing the spreading of farms' *(a)* own manure and *(b)* brought-in manure on set aside land under the Nitrate Vulnerable Zones Directive. [46389]

Mr. Meacher: Under the Nitrates Directive 1991, Action Programme measures operate in existing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) which were designated in 1996 and currently cover around 8 per cent. of England's land area.

The Action Programme measures for spreading organic manure currently apply to all land within an NVZ, irrespective of whether the manure is a farm's own or imported from another farm. Spreading organic manure is prohibited when:

Soil is waterlogged, flooded, frozen hard or snow-covered.
Fields are steeply sloping.
Applying slurry, poultry manures or liquid digested sewage sludge on sandy or shallow soils between:
1 August–1 November (arable land)
1 September to 1 November (grassland or arable land with an Autumn-sown crop).

Certain other detailed requirements also apply, described in the DEFRA booklet PB5505 "Guidelines for Farmers in NVZs", available through DEFRA publications (08459 556000) or the internet (via a web link at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/water/quality/nitrate).

Under the Arable Area Payments Scheme Regulations, the storage and application of manure on set-aside land is restricted to manure produced on the farmer's own holding between 15 January and 31 August each year. DEFRA is currently considering whether any change to this set-aside rule could be justified.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on ground phase hydrological cycle water quality of the four specific months during which manure is not to be spread as defined in the Nitrate Vulnerable Zones Directive in those areas to which the Directive is applied. [46387]

Mr. Meacher: Scientific studies such as "Strategies to Encourage Better Use of Nitrogen in Animal Manures" contained in MAFF Booklet PB4401 "Tackling Nitrate from Agriculture—Strategy from Science", available from DEFRA publications (08459 556000), demonstrate that autumn months are the most crucial ones for reducing the risk of nitrate pollution.

Under the Nitrates Directive 1991, farmers inside Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) follow Action Programme measures detailing closed periods which prohibit the spreading of slurry, poultry manures or liquid digested sewage sludge on sandy or shallow soils between 1 August to 1 November (arable land) or 1 September to 1 November (grassland or arable land with an autumn-sown crop).

These closed application periods are carefully targeted at those manures containing a higher proportion of available nitrogen when applied to soils which are prone to nitrate leaching.

On uncropped land there is no crop uptake of nitrate in the autumn so the closed period during August, September and October aims to prevent applications of slurry, poultry manures or liquid digested sewage sludge on sandy or shallow soils between harvest and 1 November. August application of these manures on grassland and land sown with autumn sown crops allows time for uptake of nitrate by growing crops; the closed period is limited to September and October where the risk of nitrate leaching remains high. Applications after 1 November entail a lower risk of nitrate leaching because conversion of manure nitrogen to nitrate in the soil is limited by lower soil temperatures in most winters.

Details of Action Programme measures are described in DEFRA booklet PB5505 "Guidelines for Farmers in NVZs".

River Aire

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she will take to address pollution in the River Aire at Skipton. [45793]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency received a report of pollution entering the River Aire from a closed landfill site in March 2000. The incident was investigated and was categorised as a minor incident which has a limited effect on water quality. Their enquiries showed the cause of the incident to be a malfunctioning pump carrying leachate from a decommissioned landfill site to the public foul water sewer. North Yorkshire County Council is responsible for maintaining the pump and is taking steps to gain access to the land, which is controlled by a tenant farmer, in order to carry out the necessary work.

The River Aire at Skipton is routinely monitored for chemistry and biology at two sampling points—Carleton and Cononley. The most recent results recorded for Carleton are class B (good) for both chemistry and biology.

At Cononley the chemistry has improved from D (poor) to B (good) over the last 10 years. Biology has improved from E (poor) to C (fairly good) in the same period.

Overall, there has been a continuing trend of improving quality to this stretch of the Aire in response to improvements at Snaygill (Skipton) sewage treatment works. Results for 2001 are not yet available.

Traffic Noise

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated on the *(a)* health consequences and *(b)* public nuisance arising from traffic noise pollution; and if she will make a statement. [45943]

Mr. Meacher: The government has supported a number of studies into the health effects of various sources of noise. A number of these consider road traffic noise including: "Health Effects based Noise Assessment Methods: A Review and Feasibility Study", which is available on the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk), and "The effects of relieving traffic congestion on noise exposure, noise annoyance, well-being and psychiatric morbitdity: annex to the by-pass study" which is available from the Department of Health. The government is also contributing to the European study: "Road traffic and Aircraft Noise exposure and Children's cognition and Health" (RANCH).

Road traffic noise does not generally fall within the legal definition of a public nuisance and, as such, there are no figures available relating to this. The government does, however, take the issue of noise seriously and periodically records people's attitudes to noise. This exercise established that in 1991 29 per cent. of respondents who reported hearing road traffic noise stated that they were adversely affected by it. This survey has recently been repeated and the results are expected to be published in May.

The repeated survey and the development of the Ambient Noise Strategy, which includes establishing the number of people exposed to road traffic noise, will build on the work already carried out to address noise from this source.

Energy Efficiency

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the percentage improvement of energy efficiency is of each Governmental department from 1990 levels; and whether these improvements are in line with the objectives laid out in the Model Policy Statement for Greening Government Operations. [45790]

Mr. Meacher: Details of the improvements in departmental energy efficiency for Government Departments for the years between 1990–91 and 1999–2000 can be found in Tables 1 to 4 of Part 2 of the Greening Government Third Annual Report 2001. Copies are available via: http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/gm2001/part2/search.asp?chooseSection=5.1 or in the Library of the House. For convenience the relevant data, without the footnotes, are reproduced in Tables 1 to 3. Positive figures represent an improvement in performance.

Data for 2000–01 will be published in the next Green Ministers Report in Autumn 2002.

The Government's targets to achieve a 20 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency over 1990 levels by 31 March 2000 was included within Objective 7(a) of the Model Policy Statement for Greening Government Operations. Until 1998–99, steady progress had been made towards meeting the targets with an overall improvement of around 19 per cent. compared with 1990. In 1999–2000, however, performance slipped back to an overall improvement of around 17 per cent. compared with 1990. Paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8 of the Greening Government Third Annual Report 2001 give a fuller explanation of this situation. Copies are available via http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/gm2001/part1/05a.htm or in the Library of the House.

Government Estate Energy Efficiency Performance 1990–91 to 1999–2000

Table 1: Civil Departments recent performance in improvements in Energy Efficiency relative to 1990–01

Department or Agency	*Adjusted for estate size changes and weather correction 1999–2000 Percentage*
MAFF (Main Estate)	24
MAFF (Laboratories)	21
Cabinet Office	15
Culture, Media and Sport	28
Customs and Excise	−8
DfEE	−11
DfEE (Employment Service)	−10
DETR	11
Health and Safety Executive	22
QEII Conference Centre	−10
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	−26
Health	−77
Home Office	0
HO (Prisons)	2
Inland Revenue	17
DfID	38
FCO	15
National Savings	n/a
Northern Ireland	4
Scottish Office	n/a
Scottish Court Service	30
Scottish Prison Service	2
Social Security	10
Trade and Industry	47
Treasury	−23
National Assembly for Wales	−24
Total	8.3

Table 2: MoD recent performance in improvements in Energy Efficiency relative to 1990–01

MoD Department or Agency	*Adjusted for estate size changes and weather correction 1999–2000 Percentage*
Civil	0
Navy	33
Army	20
RAF	22
Procurement Executive	−7
DERA	−4
MOD Total	21.1

Table 3: Total Government Estate, recent performance in improvements in Energy Efficiency relative to 1990–01

	Adjusted for estate size changes and weather correction 1999–2000 Percentage
Civil Departments Total	8.3
MoD Total	21.1
Civil and MoD Total	17.1

Environmentally and Socially Responsible Investment

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Government have taken to encourage environmentally and socially responsible investments in least developed countries. [46561]

Mr. Meacher: There is an increasing understanding by institutional investors and financial service providers of the benefits of environmentally and socially responsible investment. The demand for more disclosure by investors on social and environmental policy has been stimulated by the disclosure requirements of the 2000 amendment to the Pension Act, and the debate about replicating these requirements in other areas.

The Department has taken the lead in working with the UK financial services sector on the "London Principles—finance and insurance for sustainable development". The Principles encompass three key areas: pricing asset and exercising ownership; providing new finance; and risk management. The Principles will be launched later this year as part of the UK's contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We hope that they will serve as a model for resolutions on financial sustainability at the World Summit.

We and the Department for International Development are also working with the FORGE consortium of banks and insurance companies to develop management and reporting guidelines on corporate social responsibility for the sector, to follow up on their environmental management guidelines published last year.

The Department for International Development has also undertaken several studies and consultations to identify those tools which most effectively encourage equitable and sustainable investment in developing countries, and the best ways to mainstream them in the investment community. An example is the Just Pensions project which is concerned with encouraging trustees to use their influence to persuade fund managers to invest in socially responsible investment.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the diseases and infections for which imported livestock is checked; and how many *(a)* positive results, *(b)* negative results and *(c)* dangerous contacts were identified through livestock tests in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [45841]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: Livestock are inspected by an official veterinarian of the exporting country immediately prior to export in order to certify that the animals are free of the diseases mentioned in the export health certificate.

Post import checks on livestock are carried out for the following diseases and exposure to infections:

Cattle

Foot and Mouth Disease;
Enzootic bovine leucosis;
Brucellosis;
Warble fly; and
Contagious bovine pleuropneumonia.

Sheep and goats

Contagious agalactia;
Brucella ovis;
Brucella melitensis;
Bluetongue.

Pigs

Aujeszky's disease;
Swine vesicular disease;
Classical swine fever.

Other ungulates

Trypanosoma;
Caprine arthritis-encephalitis syndrome;
Internal and external parasites;
Leptospirosis;
Johnes's disease;
Malignant catarrhal fever;
Piroplasmosis;
Yersiniosis.

Tests for other diseases may additionally be made if the veterinarian carrying out the post-import check suspects the presence of other diseases.

The total number of positive test results on livestock imported into Great Britain for the period 22 March 2001 to 21 March 2002 was 14.

The total number of negative test results on livestock imported into Great Britain for the period 22 March 2001 to 21 March 2002 was 11,207.

No figures are available for dangerous contacts but all suspicious animals are isolated and placed under movement restriction.

All figures are provisional and subject to change.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by her and her predecessors since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43385]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: For details of unpaid appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer the right hon. Member to the Answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the interested parties with whom she discussed the measures necessary to allow for practical co-existence of GM and non-GM crops. [46623]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA officials have had preliminary discussions on this issue with the National Farmers Union, the Soil Association, the National Consumers Council, the British Retail Consortium, national bee-keeping groups, Organic Farmers and Growers Limited, the Food and Drink Federation and the Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops.

Organic Farming

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the change in the external costs of agriculture which would be achieved if 30 per cent. of all agricultural land in the UK was converted to organic. [46625]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to make reliable estimates of the reduction in the external costs of agriculture arising from organic farming, however, the Department has commissioned the University of Cambridge to carry out an evaluation of the "Organic Farming Scheme" which will provide information on the environmental impacts of the scheme. We expect this to be completed in April 2002 and it will be published on the Department's website.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what powers the proposed new advisory body on organic standards will have; [48056]

(2) what plans she has to disband the UK register of organic standards; what it will be replaced by; with whom she has held discussions on her proposals; and what representations she has received from the Food Standards Agency on the UK register of organic standards; [48054]

(3) what powers the proposed new UK accreditation service will have in respect of organic standards; [48057]

(4) what representations she has received from organic producers on her proposals to disband the UK register of organic standards. [48055]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: The consultation period on the Quinquennial Review of the UK Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) ended on 31 March. A summary of responses will be available shortly and will be placed on the Department's website www.defra.gov.uk. The Government has made no proposals on whether the Review's conclusions should be accepted, and no decisions have been taken.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average dairy farm income was for each of the last 10 years in *(a)* the parliamentary constituency of the Ribble Valley, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the North West of England and *(d)* England. [48606]

Mr. Morley: The average net farm income for full-time dairy farms in England is given in the table.

	Average net farm income (£ per farm)
1992–93	29,300
1993–94	34,900
1994–95	30,300
1995–96	36,200
1996–97	30,400
1997–98	19,800
1998–99	11,700
1999–2000	9,400
2000–01	14,000
2000–02 (prov.)	32,000

Source: Farm Business Survey

[1] This information is not available for the North West of England, for Lancashire nor for the parliamentary constituency of the Ribble Valley.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what average payments per hectare from the Common Agricultural Policy's production subsidies are received by *(a)* non-organic farmers and *(b)* organic farmers. [46627]

Mr. Morley: Subsidies to production are available, either as direct payments per hectare or per head of livestock, or as support to prices through market support mechanisms. No distinction is made between organic and non-organic production for determining the eligibility of these subsidies.

Data is not available to calculate the average payment per hectare for organic and non-organic farmers.

Environmental Protection

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department has played in discussions relating to *(a)* the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environment Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and *(b)* the Kiev Ministerial Conference in 2003; and if she will make a statement. [46571]

Mr. Meacher: Responsibility for matters relating to the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (The "Espoo" Convention) rests with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Department has participated in two preparatory meetings for the Kiev Environment for Europe conference where discussion has focussed on the identification of possible themes and the likely agenda. This includes the possibility of reaching agreement on several protocols under discussion by their respective Conventions, one of which is the proposed protocol on strategic environmental assessment currently being negotiated under Espoo.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department has played in developing and implementing *(a)* the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Compact Initiative, *(b)* the UNEP Global reporting Initiative and *(c)* the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. [46562]

Mr. Meacher: (a) The Global Compact was a special initiative by the Secretary-General which is implemented directly with companies. However, officials from my Department remain in touch with the Compact Secretariat in New York.

(b) The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) was launched by the Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES). It is now affiliated to the Global Compact. The GRI is a welcome initiative but is most suited to larger companies already experienced in environmental reporting. My Department has, therefore, developed and published jointly with the Department for Trade and Industry simpler guidance which is very similar to the environmental elements of the GRI. These guidelines should help any business to report on their environmental impacts, and have been endorsed by the CBI, which has sent copies to all of its members including all of the FTSE 350 leading companies.

(c) The Department played a full role in formulating the UK position during negotiations on the revised OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises which were concluded in June 2000. Since then officials from my Department have worked with the UK National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines, based in the Department of Trade and Industry, to help ensure that the Guidelines are taken into account in relevant parts of my Department's work, for example the promotion

of the Guidelines to the UK water industry and in preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken in response to the UNEP Governing Council Decision 21/21; and if she will make a statement. [46566]

Mr. Meacher: Decision 21/21 of the UNEP Governing Council in February 2001 established a Working Group to review international environmental governance. The UK funded a meeting of international experts in Cambridge in May 2001 to contribute to the debate. I represented the UK at two meetings of the working Group, and the other three were attended by DEFRA senior officials, I chaired the contact group which agreed the final report of the working group at the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Cartagena in February.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps have been taken to strengthen UK commitments to multilateral environmental agreements; and if she will make a statement. [46557]

Mr. Meacher: Along with other EU Member States the UK is committed to early ratification of international instruments on climate change, biosafety, persistent organic pollutants and prior informed consent. The UK is fully committed to meeting its global environmental responsibilities.

Forests

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps have been taken to *(a)* promote sustainable management and *(b)* strengthen conservation of use of forests. [46558]

Mr. Morley: The sustainable management of forests, including conservation, is a cornerstone of our forestry policy, and it was then the main issue discussed at the United Nations Forum on Forests which I attended in New York last month. This event provided an international stage to promote sustainable forest management, and in my speech to the Forum I highlighted the lead being taken by the UK, including our joint work with industry and NGOs, the development of a forest business sectoral sustainability strategy, and the introduction of a UK Standard for independent certification of forests.

It was, of course, this work on certification which led to the Forestry Commission recently being awarded the World Wide Fund for Nature's Gift to the Earth Award. The UK is, in fact, the only country where the entire state forest area has achieved creditable certification to an independent Standard recognised by the Forestry Stewardship Council. Many private owners are now following suit.

Sustainable forest management will feature prominently at the World Summit for Sustainable Development later this year in Johannesburg. We are currently working in partnership between government, business and NGOs in the forestry sector to ensure that we demonstrate the progress being made in this country and also press for more action to be taken globally. As part of our preparations for the Summit, we will be publishing a new Statement on Sustainable Forestry. This will be one part of our National Forest Programme, drawing together the actions we have taken since Rio and addressing the challenges for Johannesburg and the future.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to forestry issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44382]

Mr. Meacher: The management, conservation and sustainable development of forests was one of the key issues at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. The main outcome for forests was the adoption of a Statement of Forest Principles which included a commitment by countries to publish national forest programmes. In 1994 the UK set out its aims for forestry in *Sustainable Forestry—the UK Programme*. In 1999, we published our strategy for sustainable development for the UK, *A Better Quality of Life*. This includes a section on forests and woodlands setting out the contribution that forestry can make to meeting sustainable management of forests in the UK. We also facilitated the development of the *UK Woodland Assurance Standard* for forest certification and environmental labelling of wood products. About 40 per cent. of the UK's woodlands have now been certified, including the entire public forest estate.

The UK has made considerable progress on forestry issues by increasing timber production and the environmental and social outputs from forests. These outputs are reported in British Timber Statistics and Forestry Commission Facts and Figures, which are in the Library of the House. Following consultation with stakeholder groups and the public, the Forestry Commission will be publishing a new set of indicators of sustainable forestry in the UK. These will make an important contribution to the monitoring processes set out in *A Better Quality of Life* and the *UK Forestry Standard*.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by her Department. [48340]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: The Department does not hold centrally a record of its television licences. Records are, though, held centrally for televisions in the Department's London buildings. For these my Department holds three television licences each of which are priced at £104.00 per annum, totalling £312.00.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by

her Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48341]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: DEFRA Ministers and their private offices operate solely from Nobel House, Smith Square, London. There are currently no subscriptions to any digital services into the building. All cable services are currently provided as analogue.

Warden Bay, Kent

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has taken to protect the cliffs at Warden Bay, Kent, from disintegration; and what plans she has to use concrete structures to protect the cliffs at Warden Bay. [48551]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides funding for capital flood and coastal defence works which meet set criteria but operational responsibility rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. I understand that Swale Borough Council is currently undertaking a scoping study at Warden Bay but at present has no plans for works to protect the cliffs there.

Departmental Policy

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how her Department will ensure that the interests of the food and farming industries are taken into account across the range of Government policy. [46739]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA's Ministerial team and officials already take full account of the interests of the food and farming industries in developing and delivering Government policy, in liaison and co-operation with others in Government. The creation of DEFRA signalled our intention to deal with and balance the needs of these industries, the wider rural economy and communities, and the urban and rural environment in the round. The Prime Minister and Secretary of State's seminar on 26 March with leaders of farming, food, rural, environmental and consumer bodies exemplified this approach. The seminar served to initiate a comprehensive process of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. This process will help inform the construction of a new strategy for sustainable food and farming to be launched this autumn.

Consultants

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many management consultants have been used by her Department since its creation; and how much they have cost. [34354]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]*: The information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost to her Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35024]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the value of all payments made under each project heading to *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche and *(d)* PricewaterhouseCoopers in each financial year since 1996–97. [44032]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33845]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 14 February, *Official Report*, column 564W.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42104]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Stakeholders

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list her Department's stakeholders, as referred to in "Waiting for the Essentials of Life". [46731]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has many stakeholders, indeed our work embraces issues that have a direct affect on the lives of everyone in Britain and many overseas too. In producing *"Working for the Essentials of Life"* we wanted to produce a statement of our work that was accessible to many people. The document was circulated to over 4,800 businesses, public interest, community, representational and other groups who constitute DEFRA's organisational stakeholders. I have deposited a list of these in the Library of the House.

Beef Exports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what

representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the French Government to remove its illegal ban on beef produced in the United Kingdom. [48302]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has repeatedly raised this issue with her French counterparts at Agriculture Councils. The Prime Minister also raised the issue at the highest level at the recent EU summit in Barcelona.

Action to enforce the Judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) lies with the Commission which wrote to the French Government on 20 March seeking observations on France's failure to comply with the ruling. This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the PSA target for the level of UK beef exports in 2001 will be met in 2002. [47907]

Mr. Morley: The target will not be met for several reasons including that progress towards re-establishing beef export markets has been severely hindered by the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic and the continuing illegal French import ban. The conditions of the Date-based Export Scheme have also discouraged potential exporters which is why we are pressing for a relaxation of the Scheme requirements to permit establishments to be dedicated to export on certain days rather than full time.

Climate Change

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the parties involved in the Kyoto agreement on climate change have ratified the protocol; and when the remaining parties will complete the ratification process. [47048]

Mr. Meacher: As at 19 March 2002, 50 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change had ratified the Kyoto Protocol.

The UK and other EU Member States intend to complete ratification of the Protocol by early June in time for entry into force by the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

It is not possible at this stage to say for certain which other Parties will ratify the Protocol and when they will complete the necessary procedures. However, for the Protocol to enter into force, 55 countries accounting for at least 55 per cent. of greenhouse gas emissions by industrialised countries in 1990, must ratify. To secure this, both Japan and Russia need to ratify as well as the EU.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will ratify the Kyoto protocol on climate change. [47046]

Mr. Meacher: The UK intends to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in time for it to enter into force by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September. A European Community decision to ratify Kyoto was adopted on 4 March. This paved the way for the UK and the other EU Member States to complete their own ratification procedures. On 7 March, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement to the House setting in motion the process of UK ratification. Once the Parliamentary process is complete, the Foreign Secretary will be in a position to sign the ratification instrument. For legal and presentational reasons, the European Community and each of its Member States have agreed to deposit their instruments of ratification with the UN Depository simultaneously. Since entry into force of the Protocol will occur only 90 days after the prescribed number of ratification instruments have been deposited, the aim is to do this by early June at the latest.

Horticultural Labour

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the availability of labour to pick and pack horticultural crops. [47594]

Mr. Morley: Growers and packers of horticultural crops have access to labour within the domestic and EU labour markets. In addition growers and on farm packers have access to labour through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) which is operated by the Home Office. Under SAWS students from outside the EU are allowed to come to the UK to undertake seasonal agricultural work between March and November.

The number of students allowed to enter the UK is governed by a work card quota. The quota for 2001 was 15,200 work cards. However on 29 January my right hon. Friend Lord Rooker announced that the quota would increase to 18,700 in 2002 and to 20,200 in 2003.

In addition the Government's nationality, asylum and immigration White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*, published on 7 February, acknowledges that there is a need for short term labour in the UK and in respect to agriculture and horticulture it makes a commitment to review the operation of SAWS to see how the scheme might better meet the needs of those sectors. This review is being taken forward by officials at the Home Office and it will involve consultation with the principal stakeholders in the agricultural and horticultural industries.

Rural Payment Claims

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to accelerate payment of IACS claims. [48018]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: I am very mindful of the effects that delays in IACS payments have on the farming community and can assure you that RPA is doing all that it reasonably can to make payments as quickly as possible.

By the payment deadline of 31 January, 94 per cent. of claims had been paid and by 18 March all processible claims had been paid.

Agri-environment and livestock payments have also been affected but, although RPA has had to upgrade computer software to reflect regulatory changes on the bovine schemes and to carry out cross-checks on claims

where holdings were affected by FMD, we expect to make all the payments within the regulatory timescales. Some advance payments have however been made rather slower than normal.

Looking ahead the Rural Payments Agency is in the process of modernising the way in which CAP schemes are administered by taking full advantage of more modern information systems and the benefits of electronic service delivery.

However, this is a major Change Programme and it will be 2004 before most of the new systems and structures are in place, and the benefits can be fully realised.

Animal Health

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of trading standards officers for monitoring the washing of lorries used for the transport of farm animals. [46792]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not made any such assessment of the numbers of local authority inspectors. The level of resourcing to meet Local Authorities' duty in enforcing animal health legislation is a matter for the individual authorities.

Nevertheless, my department has in place procedures for the monitoring of cleansing and disinfection of vehicles at markets and slaughterhouses using the services of the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Meat Hygiene Service who will inform local authorities of any breaches of vehicle biosecurity discovered.

As we are aware of the need to monitor cleansing and disinfection of vehicles, the department is about to undertake a survey of cleansing and disinfection at markets and slaughterhouses.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department will make at the Convention on Biodiversity in the Hague on 7 to 19 April about trade in bushmeat. [48143]

Mr. Meacher: At the previous Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biodiversity in May 2000, the United Kingdom secured agreement for the inclusion of bushmeat in a COP Decision on forest biological diversity (Decision V/4). This requested a subsidiary body of the Convention to consider the impact of, and propose sustainable practices for, the harvesting of non-timber forest resources, including bushmeat.

The forthcoming COP in The Hague will consider the adoption of the forest biological diversity work programme. This takes forward the issue of bushmeat under the objective of "Preventing losses caused by unsustainable harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products." The United Kingdom will be pressing for action on this objective and for continuing collaboration on the issue between the Biodiversity Convention, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and other relevant members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of trials to establish the links between badgers and bovine tuberculosis in *(a)* Worcestershire, *(b)* Herefordshire, *(c)* Gloucestershire and *(d)* Shropshire. [47592]

Mr. Morley: Three "triplets", namely A, D and I, of the badger field trial are located in parts of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Trial operations which included surveying for badger activity and, in some trial areas, badger culling were suspended during the foot and mouth disease emergency. Surveying for badger activity recommenced in January this year. Further details of progress in all "triplets" are available on DEFRA's website on http://defraweb/animalh/tb/. No badger field trial operations are being undertaken in Shropshire.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on badger culling. [48588]

Mr. Morley: All badger culling which once formed part of the strategy for controlling TB in cattle has been suspended. The only culling presently undertaken is that conducted in connection with the "Krebs" field trial.

TB in cattle is one of the most difficult animal health problems that we face and the Government is determined to look at the full range of factors, including the role of badgers, that might be involved. The Government has put in place a wide-ranging research programme of which the field trial is part. It is designed to determine once and for all the role of badgers in cattle TB and whether culling them is an effective way of reducing the disease. The trial will provide much other data including the spatial relationship between TB in cattle and badgers.

By ensuring that future policies to control cattle TB are underpinned by sound science the Government is seeking to ensure that healthy cattle and badgers can live side by side in the countryside.

Biological Diversity

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the members of the UK's delegation to the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Hague on 7 April and indicate who will be leading the delegation. [48159]

Mr. Meacher: The United Kingdom delegation to the Sixth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 7–19 April at The Hague will be led by myself. Officials from my Department will stand in to lead the delegation when I am absent from the meeting. The United Kingdom delegation is also comprised of officials and advisers from a wide range of government departments and biodiversity organisations, reflecting both our commitment to the Convention and the breadth of issues covered by the Convention and the agenda to this meeting.

Office Relocation (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of her Department to Scotland. [48046]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: There are no plans to relocate any executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies to Scotland.

Fish Farming

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will seek a meeting with officials of the European Commission to discuss the future of the Scottish aquaculture industry and measures which the EC might take to promote the sustainable development of the industry. [48045]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: The future of the Scottish aquaculture industry is principally a matter for the Scottish Executive. The Executive has not asked Officials from This Department to arrange discussions with officials from the European Commission on Scottish aquaculture, and no such discussions are in prospect.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investment her Department has made in fish farming in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02, broken down into expenditure headings. [48047]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: Departmental expenditure on fish and shellfish farming for the three years in question was as follows:

1999–2000—£1.9 million;

2000–01—£1.5 million; and

2001–02—£1.2 million.

The bulk of this expenditure relates to research and development work but it also includes relatively small sums paid out under the Agriculture Development Scheme and FIFG Structural Funds.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to promote the fish farming industry. [48049]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: In March 2000 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food hosted a seminar entitled "Future Strategies for the Farmed Trout Industry" involving all sectors of the industry in England. That seminar and a subsequent study considered ideas for improving competitiveness including generic promotion. In the light of this, the industry is considering its strategy for future development and we expect to be involved in discussions on this and on how this Department might help the industry to achieve its developmental goals.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with other European countries which operate national compensation schemes for losses incurred by fish farmers as a result of the compulsory slaughter of farmed fish; and what information she collates about such schemes. [48044]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: To date this Department has had no such discussions; no information has been collated about the operation of national compensation schemes by other European countries.

Agricultural Competition

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she will *(a)* grant and *(b)* seek aid under article 4 of the EEC Council Regulation No. 26 of 1962 on rules of competition in agricultural products in respect of potatoes. [48069]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: No. The UK potato industry has not sought assistance under this Regulation and we have no plans to offer financial aid to an industry which has traditionally been self-sufficient.

Land Management

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what education and information on land management is given to farmers participating in *(a)* the Farm Biodiversity Action Plan programme and *(b)* the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. [48543]

Mr. Morley: Farm Biodiversity Action Plans are provided commercially by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and are not implemented by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Education and information about the land management required under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme is provided to farmers through the comprehensive Scheme Handbook and through advice and visits by technical staff from DEFRA's Rural Development Service. Similar advice and guidance is also available from FWAG and other partner organisations.

To ensure farmers achieve the environmental objectives of the Scheme, very detailed specifications for the different types of land management required are set out in Stewardship agreements.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent contributions her Department has made to negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services. [47969]

Mr. Morley: Negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Department has not played a part in those negotiations, although we have contributed to the UK Government's general position and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Environment, was present during WTO trade negotiations in Doha last November.

Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47809]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget Report on 17 April.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new steps her Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if she will publish the findings. [47309]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: In 2001–02 DEFRA consulted widely on the development of its new aim and objectives. The Department also consulted on a range of issues related to policy development.

The responses to all these consultations have been published on the DEFRA website at: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/default.asp.

Service Reviews

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of whether the target to review 60 per cent. of departmental services by March 2003 will be met. [47909]

Mr. Morley: The Department has reviewed around £200 million of departmental services to date but has reported some slippage, due to the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease and the creation of a new Department. The target will be reviewed as part of the 2002 Spending Review process.

Poultry Welfare

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of changes in the mortality rates which would be achieved by a move from conventional to enriched cages. [48078]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: We have commissioned research to improve our scientific and practical knowledge of "enriched" cages; mortality rate is being evaluated as part of this research project.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47325]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: Further to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 5 February 2002, I can confirm that during 2001–02 the Department continued to ensure that adequate security measures were in place at all its sites. Every effort is made to introduce measures which are proportionate to the degree of risk and the value of assets (ie staff, equipment, information and property) on site. Site security is checked by means of a programme of audits and in the event of an incident, measures would be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people from ethnic minorities are employed in *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the Countryside Agency and *(c)* the Environment Agency. [48204]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: In common with all other Government Departments, DEFRA is currently conducting a re-survey of all staff. As at 15 March 4,889 (70 per cent.) of the core Department's workforce had declared their ethnic origin. Of these 384 are from ethnic minorities. This is equivalent to 7.9 per cent. of those who have declared their ethnic origin, or 5 per cent. of all staff in the Department.

The Countryside Agency do not at present compile this information, although they are planning to introduce a personnel database in the near future that will hold such information.

As at 28 March 2002, all bar 109 of the Environment Agency's 10,824 employees had declared their ethnic origin. Of these, 178 (1.64 per cent.) are from ethnic minorities. The Agency has in place a Diversity policy, with action plans being developed to improve the attractiveness of the Agency to members of the ethnic minority communities.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the levels of pay within the Rural Payments Agency. [48198]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: Pay increases to staff within the Rural Payments Agency are subject to an annual yearly review and negotiations with the representing Trade Union body.

For the forthcoming pay settlements in 2002 and 2003 the Rural Payments Agency will adopt the pay settlements agreed by its parent department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48402]

Mr. Morley: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than 5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what lessons have been learnt and incorporated into her Department's standard operating procedures based upon the outbreak of foot and mouth. [46750]

Mr. Morley: The independent inquiries put in place by the Government will make recommendations on lessons learned for the future. However, the Department has already taken on board some lessons learned in order to be better prepared should there be any recurrence of FMD before the outcome of the inquiry process. Details are set out in the FMD interim Contingency Plan published on 12 March and in part 3 of the Government Memorandum to the Lessons Learned Inquiry.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost is of the claims, broken down by company, which remain to be paid by her Department arising from work in connection with foot and mouth. [44295]

Mr. Morley: The information cannot be provided at this time for reasons of legal and commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent talks she has had with *(a)* farmers and *(b)* the insurance industry about farmers obtaining insurance against future outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [46785]

Mr. Morley: My officials lead the animal disease insurance working group which includes representatives from both the insurance and farming industries. The group has met on 6 March and is meeting again on 9 April and 8 May.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the application of the 20 day standstill period introduced following the foot and mouth disease outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [48077]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]*: The interim rules for livestock movements, which we announced on 5 February, allow greater flexibility for farmers to move their animals. The 20 day standstill rule has been waived for some types of movement, subject to conditions and we will continue to keep these arrangements under review. However, veterinary advice is that the 20 day standstill needs to remain in place for the time being as a disease control measure. A copy of a document explaining the Veterinary basis for the Interim movement rules has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on the DEFRA website.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44885]

Mr. Morley: The Private Finance Initiative projects which have been delayed are:

Pevensey Bay Sea Defences;

Broadland Flood Alleviation Scheme,

Brooklands Avenue Cambridge—Redevelopment of office accommodation.

The Public Private Partnership projects which have been delayed are:

British Waterways P4;

British Waterways Water Grid.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will conduct an environmental impact assessment across the supply chain to assess whether the aggregates levy meets the Government's sustainable development objectives; and if she will publish the results of this assessment in the Library. [46428]

Mr. Paul Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The aggregates levy will be subject to environmental evaluation in due course, as part of the Budget process. Given that the levy was only introduced on 1 April 2002 it is currently too early to assess its impact.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effect the aggregates levy will have on the ability of SME type quarry operators to compete with large vertically integrated companies. [46477]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. A copy is available in the Library and can be accessed from the Customs and Excise website.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Poverty

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made towards the 2015 targets for reducing world poverty. [44496]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Richmond Park on 4 July 2001.

In addition at the UN conference on Financing for Development in Mexico, the European Union announced a commitment to increase average Official Development Assistance as a proportion of gross national income to 0.39 per cent. by 2006 an increase of $7 billion.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project,

(c) the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48401]

Hilary Benn: In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental Annual Reports.

DFID projects do not receive sponsorship. We do, however, support other organisation's projects, which may in turn have received sponsorship from other sources.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how much aid has been given to the British Overseas Territories in each year since 1997. [46985]

Hilary Benn: The Government's assistance to the Overseas Territories has declined gradually from £52.6 million in 1997–98, when the Montserrat volcanic crisis was at its height, to £39.6 million in 2000–01. The British Virgin Islands graduated last year from the need for our support; and programmes in Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands are now limited to technical assistance. Financial aid, however, continues to be provided for both St Helena and Montserrat. Our ultimate goal, which is shared by the Overseas Territories, is to increase local self-sufficiency to levels where our assistance is no longer required.

Montserrat

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress of the aid programme in Montserrat; and what potential threats there are from further volcanic eruptions. [46986]

Hilary Benn: Substantial progress has been made, since the onset of the volcanic crisis, in returning normality to life in the northern half of the island. Basic infrastructure and essential public services have been restored; housing has been provided for those in need; and a range of expertise has been supplied in support of Montserrat's efforts to recover from the crisis. The focus now is upon sustainable development and eventual return to self-sufficiency for the island. With this in mind, a new airstrip and measures to attract specialist tourism and private sector investment are under consideration. A new volcano monitoring facility, incorporating special viewing areas for visitors, will be commissioned later this year. The volcano, now scientifically classifed as "persistently active", continues to pose a threat to the southern half of the island, including the former capital town of Plymouth. These areas remain uninhabitable. The risk to northern areas of the island is presently judged to be negligible.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 684W, on Israel, if she will list the projects in the area administered by the Palestinian Authority that have been funded by the *(a)* UK on a bilateral basis and *(b)* European Union, stating in each case the (i) nature of the project, (ii) funding to date, (iii) funding in each of the last five years, (iv) provisional assessment made against that project of structural and financial damage by Israeli action in the Occupied Territories and (v) amount of financial compensation to be sought; and if she will make a statement. [46679]

Hilary Benn: An assessment of UK-funded projects has shown only two projects sustaining direct damage. The vehicle provided through our support to the Primary Health Care management-training course at Bir Zeit University was damaged during an aerial attack on Ramallah. The project is the second phase of post-graduate training for primary healthcare managers at Bir Zeit University. The project began in 2000 and to date has spent approximately £1.1 million. In 2000 it spent £0.7 million, £0.3 million in 2001 and £0.1 million so far this financial year. An initial estimate of the damage is approximately £28,000.

Our project with Save the Children Fund (SCF) in Rafah also sustained direct damage when a community centre funded by the project was hit by Israeli Defence Force (IDF) fire. The aim of the project, and its sister initiatives in Jabalia, Anabta and Dura, is to improve access to potable water, sanitation and environmental health. The project in Rafah began in 1999 and to date has spent approximately £2 million. In 1999 it spent £0.4 million, in 2000 £0.7 million, £0.6 million in 2001, and £0.3 million so far in 2002. The final cost of the damage has not yet been confirmed.

For information on projects funded by the European Commission I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 26 March 2002 to Parliamentary Question 46308.

The conflict and closures have had a major impact on all development projects. The matter of financial compensation has not yet been determined. The local Task Force on Project Implementation (EC, USAID, office of the United Nations Special Co-ordinator, and the World Bank) wrote to the Benjamin Ben Eliezer, Israeli Minister of Defense (25 March 2002) conveying the international donor community's concern in relation to the adverse affects of IDF activities upon project implementation. A meeting is to take place in the near future between the Task Force and Minister Eliezer.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects in Israel that have been funded by the *(a)* UK on a bilateral basis and *(b)* European Union, stating in each case the (i) nature of the project and (ii) funding to date, in each of the last five years; what assessment she has made of structural and financial damage by Palestinian action to such projects; and if she will make a statement. [46660]

Hilary Benn: Israel's level of economic development is relatively high. For this reason Israel is not a recipient of UK or EC development assistance.

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support she has provided to agencies working in Malawi to tackle the food shortages there. [47611]

Hilary Benn: We have provided £1.9 million since January for direct food relief in Malawi, including grants to non-Governmental organisations which are providing support to 180,000 beneficiaries, mainly children and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers, in the Districts of Balaka, Machinga, Dedza and Mchinji. In addition, in November we provided £3.5 million for nation-wide cash for work programmes and £3.75 million for free distribution of agricultural inputs. Both programmes were targeted at vulnerable households. To help prevent future food shortages, we are working with Government to help prepare a National Food Security Strategy.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the food shortages in Malawi; and if she will make a statement. [48070]

Hilary Benn: There are severe localised food shortages in parts of Malawi. At this time of year most households depend on the market for basic foods, but grain prices have risen enormously, reducing access by the poor. The maize crop to be harvested from April onwards will provide some relief, but consumption of green maize may have had a significant impact on overall yields and therefore on household food security. Shortages can be expected throughout the 2002–03 agricultural season.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department employs independent auditors to audit the effectiveness of her aid spending in countries in sub-Saharan Africa; and if she will list the countries. [47329]

Hilary Benn: My Department employs an Internal Audit function which is organisationally independent from the rest of DFID and is staffed by professionally qualified internal auditors. Internal Audit Department's remit includes reviews of DFID's operations and funding in sub-Saharan Africa. Reviews of effectiveness of aid funding are also carried out by DFID's Evaluation Department and by the National Audit Office.

The following is a list of sub-Saharan Africa countries in which development funds were used in 2000–01: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she employs independent organisations to measure the level of corruption in Government to Government aid programmes granted to countries in sub-Saharan Africa. [47330]

Hilary Benn: No. The Department has strong programme management systems, supported by Internal Audit and National Audit Office scrutiny, to verify that funds are used for the purposes intended and to prevent or detect misuse or corruption in our programmes.

We fund independent organisations to conduct national corruption perception surveys in African countries which are used to inform governments' anti-corruption strategies.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which country in sub-Saharan Africa she estimates her Department's aid policy to have been *(a)* most and *(b)* least effective; and for what reasons. [47334]

Hilary Benn: DFID's aim is the elimination of poverty. The UN Millennium Development Goals are the main yardsticks against which we measure progress towards this aim. At country level progress towards development goals is principally the responsibility of African governments, in partnership with the donor community. The international community is working with developing countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa, to promote country-led and participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy processes. These processes are intended to develop national policy strategies, agree priorities, and help to develop an institutional framework in which governments can be held to account by their own citizens. The role of donors is to provide financial and technical support to enhance governments' capacity to develop and implement these strategies.

Aid effectiveness has improved in recent years, partly as a result of increasing international agreement on how aid can be most effective in reducing poverty and building capacity in the poorest countries. The evidence shows that aid is effective particularly in those countries with good policy environments and where there are large numbers of poor people, and in such situations has been effective in promoting economic development and poverty reduction. In Uganda aid has supported growth (averaging around 7 per cent. over the past decade) with extreme poverty reduced by over 20 per cent. since 1992, to 35 per cent. of the population. In Tanzania, where GDP growth has more than doubled between 1988 and 2001, HIPC benefits, World Bank and donor aid have helped finance primary education, with net enrolment in primary schools increased from 57 per cent. in 1999 to 65 per cent. in 2001.

DFID's performance against its global objectives, set out in the DFID Public Service Agreement and Service Delivery Agreement, is published in the Departmental Report. DFID assesses its work in each country through an established system of annual performance reviews. However, given our broad approach to development, and the diverse nature of our partnerships, there are considerable technical difficulties in attempting to

quantify the impact of particular levels and types of assistance provided by a particular donor on the overall progress towards development in a particular country.

DFID will publish a Development Effectiveness Report this summer. It will discuss how DFID's strategic, long-term poverty-focused approach can be evaluated, recognising the problems of attributing impact to particular interventions in a context of a broad partnership which is working towards our shared goals of the Millennium Development Goals.

Egypt, Poland and China

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list her Department's total spending in *(a)* Egypt, *(b)* Poland and *(c)* China in each of the last five years and her forecast total spending in each for the next three years. [47335]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is set out in the tables below:

DfID Programme by country

	£ thousands		
	China	*Egypt*	*Poland*
1996–97	30,956	6,299	12,718
1997–98	38,616	7,246	13,337
1998–99	39,189	4,947	7,916
1999–2000	26,260	3,546	4,442
2000–01	29,746	2,661	3,814

	£ millions		
	China	*Egypt*	*Poland*
2001–02[1]	23	2.5	2.5
2002–03[1]	38	4	0.7
2003–04[1]	38	3.5	0

[1] Estimated figures.

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list her Department's total spending on HIV/AIDS for each of the last five years and her forecast total spending on HIV/AIDS in each of the next three years. [47336]

Hilary Benn: There is often no clear distinction between assisting with work on HIV/AIDS and other sexual and reproductive health issues. However, the following is my Department's total bilateral expenditure on reproductive health activities, including HIV/AIDS, from financial years 1997–98—2001–02:

1997–98 to £38.4 million

1998–99 to £45.0 million

1999–00 to £75.7 million

2000–01 to £124.9 million

2001–02 to £206.6 million.

We have also in this period provided funding to support the HIV/AIDS programmes of a number of multilateral organisations, including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the European Community (EC) and the World Bank. However, with the exception of UNAIDS it is not possible to determine the portion of our contributions used for HIV/AIDS work as opposed to the other work of these agencies.

We would expect that over the next three years our HIV/AIDS expenditure will increase above the present level.

Overseas Aid Budget

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of her Department's overseas aid budget was provided to charities and other NGOs for each of the last five years *(a)* as a percentage of her Department's overseas aid budget and *(b)* in real terms. [47332]

Hilary Benn: We do not compile statistics for aid to charities and other NGOs as such. The following table shows estimated figures for the last five financial years, calculated using the nearest equivalents within the bilateral programme. These figures do not include support to in-country civil society organisations or UK groups receiving funds channelled through multilateral organisations.

£ Million	*Total*	*Constant Prices 2000–01*	*Proportion of total DfID expenditure*
1996–97	58	64	3%
1997–98	63	67	3%
1998–99	52	54	2%
1999–2000	63	64	2%
2000–01	101	101	4%

Source: Statistics on International Development 1996–97 to 2000–01

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of her Department's overseas aid budget is provided in the form of Government to Government aid grants for each of the last five years *(a)* as a percentage of her Department's overseas aid budget and *(b)* in real terms. [47331]

Hilary Benn: We do not compile statistics for government to government aid grants as such. The following table shows estimated figures for the last five financial years, calculated using the nearest equivalents within the bilateral programme. These figures do not include support given through mulilateral organisations.

£ Million	*Total*	*Constant Prices 2000–01*	*Proportion of total DfID expenditure*
1996–97	396	438	18%
1997–98	354	380	17%
1998–99	409	427	17%
1999–2000	453	462	18%
2000–01	558	558	20%

Source: Statistics on International Development 1996–97 to 2000–01

Burundi

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is being done to improve the co-ordination of humanitarian relief for internally displaced people in Burundi. [47638]

Hilary Benn: I think that current co-ordination arrangements are working reasonably in exceptionally difficult operating circumstances. The UN is seeking to strengthen the staffing of its operations and of the joint UN/Government of Burundi working arrangements for addressing the needs of displaced people. We continue to encourage non-governmental organisations and UN agencies to co-ordinate closely together under the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with countries in Central and West Africa about the sustainability of the trade in bushmeat. [48148]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 837W. DFID has been funding two bilateral projects in Cameroon with significant elements relating to bushmeat. From 1995–2002, the Mount Cameroon Project team worked closely with the Cameroon Ministry of Environment and Forests to establish field level community management of timber and wildlife resources. The Community Forestry Development Project in Cameroon continues to work up these and other field projects into ways for communities to manage their wildlife resources under the Forest Law.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department intends to undertake researach on the relationship between wildlife and poor people's livelihoods. [48145]

Hilary Benn: DfID is concerned with reducing poverty. We fund and will continue to fund projects and studies that addresss sustainable forest management and bushmeat production where this is key to tackling poverty. Annex 1 lists the main current DfiD activities that have direct impact on wildlife and their habitats.

Annex 1: Examples of DfID-supported bilateral projects, and research and studies, that have a strong focus on wildlife/bushmeat species

Name of Project	*Country*	*Period of Support*	*Amount (£000s)*
Mbomipa Community Wildlife Project	Tanzania	1997–2001	1,973
Wildlife Intensification for Livelihood Development (WILD)	Namibia	1999–2002	1,040
Madikwe Community Wildlife Management	South Africa	1997–1999	622
Amboro Rural Development	Bolivia	1996–2000	3,200
Mount Cameroon Project	Cameroon	1995–2002	10,602
Community Forest Development Project	Cameroon	1999–2002	1,049
Indonesian Multi-Stakeholder	Indonesia	1998–2005	25,150
Cross River State Community Forestry Project	Nigeria	1996–2001	2,000
Forest Sector Development Project Phase II	Ghana	2000–2004	11,963

Annex 1: Examples of DfID-supported bilateral projects, and research and studies, that have a strong focus on wildlife/bushmeat species

Name of Project	*Country*	*Period of Support*	*Amount (£000s)*
Joint-funding scheme with WWF			6,289
—Gashaka-Gumpti/Kupe	Nigeria/Cam	1991–2001	
—Coastal forest/Bogoria/ Udzungwa	Kenya/Tanz	1990–2001	
—Kunene/Caprivi	Namibia	1998–2001	
—Mamiraua/Varzea	Brazil	1991–2000	
Studies and research:			575
—Livestock-wildlife interactions	Africa	1997–2001	
—Illegal hunting in Serengeti NP	Tanzania	1997–2000	
—Bushmeat in rural livelihoods of West Africa	Ghana/ Cameroon	2000–2002	

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what analysis her Department has made of the effectiveness of participatory poverty assessments in analysing the importance of bushmeat in people's livelihoods. [48153]

Hilary Benn: DFID routinely assesses the effectiveness of the methodologies used in poverty reduction initiatives. Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) are an important tool used widely in poverty reduction programmes to ensure that decision-makers are aware of poor people's views. DFID is funding research into the linkages between poverty and environmental issues in PPAs. The research to date has focused on the broad management issues relating to livelihoods of the poor, bushmeat included.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to raise the subject of the trade in bushmeat with Governments in Central and West Africa. [48147]

Hilary Benn: Neither myself, nor the Secretary of State for International Development have any current plans to discuss this issue with governments in Central and West Africa, but my Department will continue to raise these matters where they are relevant to our poverty objectives.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what account has been taken of the bushmeat trade in her Department's Cameroon Country Strategy Paper. [48144]

Hilary Benn: Our Country Strategy Paper is focused on encouraging the sustainable management of forestry resources, of which bushmeat forms a part. The Community Forestry Development Project is working within the Government of Cameroon to establish community wildlife protocols for sustainable bushmeat harvesting. We are supporting the development of a Forestry and Environment Sector programme, one of the conditions for which is enhanced provision for poaching control campaigns. The programme will include a substantial community natural resource management component.

Wildlife and Poverty Study

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Phase 1 report produced for her Department by Joanna Elliot entitled "Wildlife and Poverty Study". [48146]

Hilary Benn: DFID has undertaken a Wildlife and Poverty Study to identify how best to ensure that poor people's wildlife resources are used for effective poverty reduction. We are pleased with the initial Phase One report and the public interest it has attracted.

The initial report documents anecdotal evidence of poor people's dependence on bushmeat. It highlights the lack of reliable aggregate data as to the extent of this dependence, the difficulty and expense of collecting that data, given that so much of the bushmeat trade is illegal, and the lack of proven instruments to enable poor people to manage bushmeat resources sustainably.

Phase Two of the study will focus particularly on the Policy and institutional environment that will improve poor peoples' access to the benefits flowing from the sustainable management of wildlife resources.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the required rate of return on investments is from public-private partnerships with the Commonwealth Development Corporation; and what plans she has to reduce this rate. [46706]

Hilary Benn: The Government does not set CDC a required rate of return.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target that 75 per cent. of bilateral country programme resources should be allocated to low income countries by 2002 will be met. [47905]

Hilary Benn: A report on progress against this particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) target, and against all other PSA targets set by my Department between April 1999 and March 2002, will appear in DFID's 2002 Departmental Report to be published later this month.

Pakistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will make a statement on the flow of refugees from Afghanistan into Pakistan; [46596]

(2) what assessment she has made of the flow of refugees from Afghanistan into the camps in the Balochistan area of Pakistan fleeing economic hardship and tribal instability; and how these problems are being addressed by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the international community; [46595]

(3) what support *(a)* the UK Government and *(b)* the international community are providing to the Government of Pakistan (i) to address overcrowding in and (ii) to provide adequate resources for refugee camps in the Balochistan area. [46598]

Hilary Benn: Pakistan has been shouldering the burden of some two million refugees from Afghanistan for many years. In the light of the stabilising situation in Afghanistan, since 1 March 2002, 150,000 Afghan refugees have been able to return home from Pakistan through the joint voluntary repatriation programme established by the Pakistani and Afghan Governments with UNHCR. However, significant numbers continue to cross into Pakistan from Afghanistan, particularly into Balochistan province, with 10,000 Afghans crossing in the past week. UNHCR reports the majority are fleeing drought conditions in Afghanistan; some are now discussing returning to Afghanistan.

DFID has provided £3 million to UNHCR's operations, in response to the current crisis, to support its operations for refugees in the region, including in Balochistan province. This has included technical personnel, material and financial support. At the request of UNHCR, we have provided three relief flights to Iran and Pakistan transporting tents, shelter material and communications equipment. We have also provided a specialist site planner to UNHCR in Pakistan to assist with the setting up of new refugee camp sites. UNHCR and its partners are working to improve the conditions in all refugee camps, including the water supply, sanitation and health facilities in the waiting area at the border. We have also provided £7 million to the World Food Programme's regional programme, which includes food aid support to refugees in Pakistan—7,000 families waiting to enter Pakistan have been provided food rations. In addition we have provided £6 million to NGOs, much of which has been directed towards Afghans in neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, and £11 million to support communities in Pakistan most affected by the influx of refugees. We have also provided £15 million to support the Government of Pakistan in its economic reforms.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on relations between refugees and the local communities in the Balochistan area of Pakistan. [46597]

Hilary Benn: Relations between Afghan refugees and local communities in Balochistan are reported by agencies in the region to be reasonable in areas where refugee communities are established. The current influx of 40,000 new refugees is reported to have increased tensions somewhat in the Chaman border area, particularly over water supplies, but no major incidents have occurred.

Financing for Development Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the outcome of the UN Financing for Development Conference in Mexico. [46659]

Hilary Benn: Donors and developing countries committed themselves to a new partnership in the "Monterrey Consensus". Developing countries recognised that they need to set in place the right policies to create an enabling environment for foreign direct investment and for the mobilisation of domestic resources through promoting good governance and pro-poor economic policies. In return donor countries agreed to provide better support for developing country efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals

by: giving more official development assistance; enhancing aid effectiveness; ensuring better market access for developing countries; providing support to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to negotiate in international trade fora; ensuring that the HIPC process provides heavily indebted poor countries with a genuine exit from unsustainable debt; and taking steps to strengthen the voice of developing countries in the international financial institutions.

At the Barcelona Council on 15 March, the European Union agreed a package of measures to support the Monterrey Consensus. This included a commitment to increase EU development assistance. The EU average oda/GNI ratio is currently 0.33 per cent., and the EU has committed itself to raise this average to 0.39 per cent. by 2006. The implication of this is that the EU will provide an additional $20 billion of oda between now and 2006, and an additional $7 billion a year from 2006. The Americans followed the EU lead on aid volume by announcing that they would provide an additional $10 billion between 2004 and 2006 and $5 billion a year thereafter. This represents a 50 per cent. increase in US aid. Financing for Development is the first UN Conference that has delivered a concrete increase in oda, and the additional $12 billion a year from the EU and the USA represents a historic reverse in the decline in global oda levels over the 12 years.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial commitments have been made to the New Economic Partnership for African Development by *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the EU and *(c)* other OECD donors in financial year 2001–02. [46882]

Hilary Benn: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is not a financing mechanism or an institution that runs projects. Rather, it is an African-owned and led process which encourages African nations to share best practice, undertake peer review and learn from successful experience in building effective states and reducing poverty. It has not yet sought direct funding. Proposals are currently being developed by NEPAD with the assistance of different African institutions in the areas of economic and corporate governance, infrastructure, agriculture and market access, financial and banking standards, and peace and security.

Developing Countries

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department intends to spend in developing countries in each of the next three years *(a)* as a percentage of her aid budget and *(b)* in real terms, in the form of (i) Government to Government aid and (ii) aid to charities and NGOs. [47333]

Hilary Benn: Revised programme allocations for 2002–03 and 2003–04 have recently been agreed—details will appear in DFID's Departmental Report for 2002. Allocations for 2004–05 have not been agreed pending the outcome of the current Spending Review. I cannot however provide the information requested, as most programme allocations are not made by type of spending.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 12 April 2002

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Congestion Charging (London)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what studies his Department has conducted into the effects on the environment of the London area of the proposed introduction of congestion charging by the GLA. [39846]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Government commissioned and published early in 2000 a report by an independent group of experts called Road Charging Options for London—A Technical Assessment (known as the ROCOL report). Copies are available in the library. The report covers environmental effects. It says that there could be environmental and amenity benefits from the reduced traffic volumes but much would depend on the how the benefits of reduced traffic were allocated. Emissions of CO_2 would be reduced, but there would be no significant improvement in local air quality.

Rail Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the private sector rail investment in the 10 year plan is expected ultimately to be on the balance sheet of Railtrack's successor. [47395]

Mr. Jamieson: This will be determined through the SRA's development of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) and through negotiations with Network Rail and other possible bidders for Railtrack Plc on their proposed Business and Financing plans.

Housing (South-east)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the Government's total targets for new housing in the south-east has been provided for in the strategic plans of local authorities; and what proportion remains to be allocated provisional sites. [47519]

Ms Keeble: Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), issued in March 2001, sets out the level of housing provision to be made in the region. Housing provision in existing strategic plans—namely county structure plans—is broadly in line with guidance in RPG9 for the Government Office South East area, although usually only for the period up to 2011 and in some cases only up to 2006. Some County Councils have started the process of reviewing their structure plans. At the same time, about a third of all local plans have already expired and half are due to expire by 2006. District authorities need to update their local plans in order to allocate sufficient land for housing.

Housing Transfers

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost is to the Department of writing off the over-hanging debt for local authorities transferring their housing stock to RSLs in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the past five years; and what the projected cost is in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [46363]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The overhanging debt payments made to date are £21 million in 1999–2000 and £256 million in 2000–01. No payments were made in 2001–02. The projected costs are £500 million in 2002–03 and £800 million in 2003–04. These are estimates and are likely to change as details of transfer proposals are finalised.

Brownfield Developments

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how close the house-building industry is to meeting the Government's target of brownfield site development. [48592]

Ms Keeble: The Government's target is that by 2008, 60 per cent of additional housing should be provided on previously developed land and through conversions of existing buildings. The latest statistics (for 2000) show that achievement against target is 57 per cent.

Finance (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding he has made available for social services and community care in Liverpool through *(a)* the local authority, *(b)* the Health Service and *(c)* the voluntary sector in each of the last five years; and what funding he has indicated will be made available in 2002–03. [44394]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The table provides details of funding which the Department has made available for social services and community care to Liverpool Health Authority and Liverpool City Council, in each of the last five years and for 2002–03.

	1997–98 £000s	*1998–99 £000s*	*1999–00 £000s*	*2000–01 £000s*	*2001–02 £000s*	*2002–03 £000s*
Liverpool Health Authority[1]	243,040	253,814	350,296	379,504	410,236	453,913
Liverpool City Council	5,262	7,005	8,098	8,698	12,882	25,417

Note:

[1]1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations covering hospital and community health services, prescribing and general practitioner infrastructure. Therefore they are not comparable to earlier years' allocations.

The section 64 general scheme of grants is the Department's main avenue of support for national voluntary organisations in England. Grants are not awarded on a geographical or regional basis.

Children's Homes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authority children's homes there were in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [43233]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Information for the years ending 31 March 1995 and 31 March 2000, latest information available, is shown in the table. Information for 1990 is not available.

Table: Number of local authority children's homes for the years ending 31 March 1995 and 2000

England

Type of LA home	*1995*	*2000*
Maintained	741	672
Controlled	28	28
Assisted	30	21
Total Community Homes	799	721

HOME DEPARTMENT

Smallpox

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been issued to law enforcement agencies in the event of a large-scale smallpox outbreak. [33336]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I apologise for the delay in replying. Smallpox has been eradicated world-wide and no specific guidance has been issued to law enforcement agencies. Guidance on smallpox, accessible both to public and professionals is available from the Public Health Laboratory Service.

A major outbreak of non-terrorist origin would be co-ordinated at the national level through the Civil Contingencies Committee; a terrorist incident would be handled through Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR).

Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33198]

Angela Eagle: No staff were seconded between the Home Department and the companies identified for the periods in question.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to improve the care standards for non-human primates in the Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals Used in Scientific Puposes; and if he will make a statement. [47998]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Standards for the housing and care of laboratory animals, including non-human primates, are currently the subject of review under the auspices of the Council of Europe. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2002. We will review the relevant codes of practice applicable in the United Kingdom in the light of the outcome of the Council of Europe review and any consequential changes to European directive 86/609/EEC.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many breeding establishments in Mauritius are authorised as sources of non-human primates under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [47997]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There is currently authority for non-human primates from one breeding establishment in Mauritius to be used in programmes of work licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Prisoner Escapes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the target for the rate of escapes from contracted-out escorts expressed as a ratio of prisoners handled was met by March 2001. [47234]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Prison Service met this key performance indicator target in the 2000–01 year. There was one escape for every 21,649 prisoners handled during the year. This was better than the target not to exceed one per 20,000 prisoners handled.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationality applications were completed in the year to March 2001; and how many he expects to be completed in the year to March 2002. [47236]

Angela Eagle*[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In the year to March 2001 94,090 nationality applications were completed, exceeding the target of 91,000.

The target for the year to March 2002 remained at 91,000 and indications are that the target will again be exceeded and the final total will be higher than that achieved in the year to March 2001.

Drug Misusing Offenders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the PSA target of a reduction in the level of reoffending by drug misusing offenders *(a)* was met by March 2001 and *(b)* has since been exceeded. [47233]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Public Service Agreement target currently is: to reduce levels of repeat offending amongst drug misusing offenders by 25 per cent by 2005 (and by 50 per cent by 2008). There is no interim target set for 2001.

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We are currently reviewing the drugs strategy targets and progress against them to ensure we still have the right balance and focus.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of decisions on asylum cases will have been made within two months in the year ending 31 March. [47228]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The target for the year ending 31 March 2002 is to decide and serve 60 per cent of new substantive asylum claims made in that same year within two months. The latest provisional data, published on 28 February 2002, indicate that nearly half (48 per cent) of applications received in the period April to September 2001 inclusive had initial decisions served within two months. Information on the percentage of asylum cases in the year ending 31 March 2002 with decisions made and served within two months is not yet available.

The data are published in the quarterly asylum statistics. The next publication will be available from 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers were removed in the year to March 2001; and how many he expects to be removed in the year to March 2002. [47238]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number of failed asylum seekers removed in the year to March 2001 was 8,930. The current Service Delivery Agreement target relating to the removal of failed asylum seekers from the United Kingdom is to remove 30,000 in 2001–02; 33,000 in 2002–03; and 37,000 in 2003–04. The totals include dependants.

The precise number removed in March will be available in about two months.

The 30,000 target for this year has always been ambitious and high risk. To enable us to reach and exceed 30,000 removals per year by 2003, we need to remove about 2,500 people per month. It is our aim to achieve this monthly total as soon as possible.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum decisions were made in the year to March 2001; and how many he expects to be made in the year to March 2002. [47237]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* 132,840 initial decisions were made in the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, inclusive.

Information on the number of initial decisions made in the year to 31 March 2002 is not yet available. However, in line with plans, the number of cases awaiting an initial decision has continued to fall, 71,320 initial decisions were made during the period April 2001 to December 2001, compared with 85,960 in the same period a year previously.

Information on initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to March 2002, and will be available from 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the policy of detaining children who are seeking asylum of the *(a)* provisions of the Children Act 1989 and *(b)* provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998; [48280]

(2) what risk assessments are undertaken before a child seeking asylum is detained; [48278]

(3) whether the rights and needs of the child must be considered before any decision to detain a child seeking asylum is taken. [48279]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local social services departments to provide for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. As a matter of policy and practice all those accepted as being unaccompanied asylum seeking children are referred to the local social services department. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are not routinely detained under immigration powers. But detention may occasionally be necessary in exceptional circumstances whilst alternative arrangements for their care are made. Where detention is in such circumstances necessary, this is normally limited to overnight, with appropriate care.

The decision to detain a family is always taken with due regard to Article 8 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Families may be detained at the Oakington Reception Centre whilst their claim for asylum is processed. In other cases a family would be detained in line with the general detention criteria, which include consideration of the likelihood of removal, evidence of previous absconding and previous history of complying with the requirements of immigration control. There is however, as in any other case, a presumption in favour of granting temporary admission or temporary release.

Any case where it is proposed to detain a family will be risk-assessed by the Immigration Service. Checks are made to see if any child is on the "At Risk" register. In addition the family protection team at the local police station will be contacted. If there has been any involvement by the Social Services in any particular family case, they will also be consulted before an operation leading to the detention of children is undertaken.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other criteria are to be used for measurement of the PSA target on efficiency in the criminal justice system. [47410]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The 2000 Criminal Justice System Public Service Agreement (PSA) committed the criminal justice departments in defining a measure for value for money (rather than efficiency) in the system. Work is continuing

on this, but it has not yet proved possible to devise a satisfactory single measure of system-wide performance. Meanwhile, however, each component part of the system has an efficiency or value for money target, and has plans in place to meet its target.

Immigration (Detainees)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people detained under immigration law have died in each of the past five years; and of those how many are believed to have committed suicide. [48626]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There was one incident of a death in immigration detention in the last five years. The incident occurred in January 2000 and is believed to have been a suicide although the inquest returned an open verdict.

Correspondence

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will reply to the letter dated 18 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell relating to an inquiry by Mr. C Barfield of 2 Cuddington Avenue, Worcester Park, Surrey. [48211]

Angela Eagle: A reply to the hon. Member was sent on 27 March 2002.

Prison Officers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers there were in each year since 1997; and how many retired due to long-term illness. [47376]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information is provided in the table.

	Officers in Post 31 March	*Ill Health Retirements per Calendar Year*
1997	23,058	451
1998	23,444	220
1999	23,875	199
2000	24,090	165
2001	23,777	152
2002 (to 25/03/02)	23,067	18

Figures include prison officers, senior officers and principal officers.

Illegal Immigrants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what extra security measures his Department has taken at Shoreham Port to help combat entry by illegal immigrants; [47374]

(2) how many illegal immigrants have been caught trying to enter this country at Shoreham Port, listed by country of origin; and how many of these have claimed political asylum since 1997. [47373]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* It is not possible to provide statistics for the total number of illegal entrants detected having entered the United Kingdom via Shoreham seaport. This is because illegal entrants are frequently detected inland and will not identify, or cannot be attributed to, any particular port of entry.

Shoreham seaport does not receive any passenger vessels and so has no permanent immigration presence. However, for the purposes of immigration control the port is covered by Immigration Service staff based at Newhaven who may be deployed there should a need be identified. Remote coverage is also provided by officers from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and Sussex Police, Special Branch.

The Immigration Service views very seriously any potential breach of immigration controls, as well as the risks that migrants take by seeking to enter the United Kingdom clandestinely. Whilst there is currently no evidence to suggest that Shoreham seaport is being targeted for such activity, should such information be received, it would be passed to the District Intelligence Unit at Gatwick. They would assess the risk and ensure that appropriate measures were taken to combat any threat to the integrity of the immigration control.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47721]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–2001 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear their commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to Parliamentary Questions. This continues to be the Government's position. I am committed to improving the performance of the Home Office and am working with the Department on practical steps to achieve this.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

PSA Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what new initiatives her Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47189]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Details of new initiatives and policies designed to assist in achieving the Public Service Agreement targets for 1999–2002 were set out in my previous parliamentary answers to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 19 December (*Official Report*, columns 310–15W), 8 January (*Official Report*, columns 543–45W), and 10 January (*Official Report*, columns 971–72W).

The main initiatives undertaken to help achieve the Public Service Agreement targets for 2001–2004 are as follows: the setting-up of Creative Partnerships in 16 deprived areas; the introduction of the School Sports Co-ordinator and Spaces for Sport and the Arts programmes; and the introduction of free access for all to national museums and galleries on 1 December 2001.

Digital Television

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the level of take up of digital television services has been from 1998 to the date for which the most recent figures are available. [46916]

Dr. Howells: These are the figures from December 1998 to December 2001 for digital television uptake, based on subscriber figures supplied by platform operators.

Date	*per cent TV Households which are digital*
31 December 98	0.9 per cent
31 March 99	2.2 per cent
30 June 99	3.9 per cent
30 September 99	7.0 per cent
31 December 99	11.1 per cent
30 March 00	18.0 per cent
30 June 00	19.4 per cent
30 September 00	22.5 per cent
31 December 00	26.8 per cent
31 March 01	30.0 per cent
30 June 01	32.5 per cent
30 September 01	34.7 per cent
31 December 01	36.6 per cent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Information

Mrs. Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the Commission will make further information about its work available to hon. Members. [50505]

Archy Kirkwood: Pages on the Parliamentary Intranet, accessed through "House Administration" give information about the Commission's role, responsibilities and membership, together with contact details. The pages provide links to the Commission's Annual Reports, and to Questions answered on behalf of the Commission. We have now decided to supplement this with periodic reports on Commission business: subjects considered, decisions taken, and work in progress. The first such report, covering Commission meetings between December 2001 and March 2002, will be posted on the Intranet today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

SME Industrial Trends

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on SME industrial trends. [37652]

Nigel Griffiths: The last year for which figures are available (2000) shows an increase in the number of SME manufacturers.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises continue to play an important role in the UK economy accounting for over 99 per cent of businesses, 44 per cent of non-government employment and 37 per cent of turnover. They employ 12 million people and contribute £1 trillion to the economy pa.

Number of SMEs (0–249 employees) by sector

UK, number

Sector	*Number of businesses* 1997	1998	1999	2000
All	3,701,070	3,651,230	3,670,210	3,715,865
Agriculture, Fishing	220,850	192,825	185,285	190,375
Mining & Energy	5,455	5,705	4,085	3,615
Manufacturing	319,610	329,550	329,535	329,685
Construction	828,810	728,445	683,250	678,215
Wholesale, retail & repairs	525,465	552,765	532,155	535,045
Hotels & Restaurants	148,610	153,065	154,125	157,005
Transport	211,395	210,695	225,315	227,635
Financial intermediation	51,160	65,580	59,115	58,690
Real Estate, business activities	707,785	735,995	799,555	825,160
Education	108,610	100,875	107,785	110,965
Health & social work	217,295	202,690	202,910	206,815
Other services	356,015	373,025	387,090	392,660

Source:
Small Business Service, SME Statistics in the UK

Company Auditing Policy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will name the members of the group she has set up to review company auditing policy and practices, together with relevant interests or employment. [42615]

Ms Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have invited the Economic Secretary, HM Treasury and myself, to lead a co-ordinating group on accounting and audit issues, which will

ensure that there is a comprehensive work programme, to be undertaken by individual regulators, and avoiding unnecessary overlap;

provide a progress report by the summer, with a final report at a later stage;

commission additional work or reviews, if that is judged appropriate;

reach a view on the adequacy of the proposals, and, if appropriate, make specific recommendations.

The members of the co-ordinating group are as follows:

Melanie Johnson MP, Minister for Competition, Consumers & Markets, DTI;

Ruth Kelly MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury;

Sir John Bourn, Comptroller and Auditor General. Chairman, Accountancy Foundation's Review Board;

Michael Foot, Managing Director, Deposit Takers and Markets Directorate, Financial Services Authority;

Mary Keegan, Chairman, Accounting Standards Board;

Professor Ian Percy, formerly Chairman, Accounts Commission for Scotland. Former Deputy Chairman, Auditing Practices Board;

Rosemary Radcliffe, formerly a member of the Company Law Review Steering Group and Chief Economist, Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Complaints Commissioner, Financial Services Authority.

The co-ordinating group at its first meeting discussed the work the regulators have in hand to address the key regulatory issues for audit and accounting raised in the wake of the Enron collapse. This focused on audit quality and auditor independence, financial reporting and auditing requirements, and corporate governance, in particular the role of the Audit Committee. The group will ensure that there is a comprehensive and co-ordinated work programme to be taken forward by regulators over the coming months.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the group she has set up to review company auditing policy and practices will take evidence from outside Government; which organisations have been asked to give evidence to it; and whether its report will be published. [42616]

Ms Melanie Johnson: The purpose of the Group is to ensure that the accounting and audit issues raised following the collapse in the US of Enron are addressed by individual regulators in the UK in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

At the first meeting of the group, it was agreed to invite comments from outside Government in relation to the group's coordinating role on the issues for audit and accountancy raised by the collapse of Enron. Further details will appear shortly on the DTI website (www.dti.gov.uk/cld). The group will provide a progress report by the summer, with a final report at a later stage. These will be published.

Small Businesses (Administrative Burden)

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in reducing the administrative burden on small businesses. [46431]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government have put in place a number of measures to reduce the administrative burden of regulations on small businesses, including:

Announced in January 2000 that employers with 4 or fewer employees will be exempt from the requirements to provide access to stakeholder pensions and deduct pension contributions.

Announced in April 2000 an increase in the statutory audit threshold for companies from £350,000 to £1 million. This measure will relieve up to 150,000 small firms from the burden of statutory audit, saving small companies up to £180 million a year.

We have exempted small shops from the new EU unit pricing requirements.

We have exempted employers with twenty or fewer employees from the trade union recognition procedures in the Employment Relations Act.

Small Business Service has produced clear guidance on a number of complex regulations.

The Business Link Website is now attracting 80,000 users per month—and businesses can register to receive alerts about regulations automatically.

A 12 weeks period between regulations being agreed and implemented has been actioned, allowing owner managers time to adapt to the new regulations.

Assisted and supported 6000 individuals wanting to start and grow a business and helped a further 6000 with mentoring advice.

The Patrick Carter review of payroll administration.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which services the United Kingdom will *(a)* as part of the European Union and *(b)* unilaterally be offering for liberalisation under the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services. [47416]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom negotiates in the World Trade Organisation as part of the European Union. Offers of liberalisation of services will be considered in the light of requests received from other WTO Members. The Doha Ministerial Declaration set June 2002 as the date for the submission of initial requests. The Government will consult on any offer they are minded to make as part of the EU's offer. Liberalisation is, however, a matter of domestic policy choice. The current negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services cannot force liberalisation where we do not wish it.

Unsolicited Faxes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department recommend people take if they are the target of unsolicited faxes. [48585]

Mr. Alexander: There are safeguards for both individual and corporate subscribers who do not wish to receive unsolicited direct marketing faxes. Under the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999, no one may send unsolicited direct marketing faxes to individual subscribers without their prior consent. These Regulations are enforced by the Information Commissioner, and any breaches should be reported to her office.

Corporate subscribers have opt-out rights under the same Regulations; no-one may send unsolicited direct marketing faxes to any subscriber who has registered with the Fax Preference Service, or who has told the direct marketer concerned not to send any further faxes. The Fax Preference Service is also open to individual subscribers who may find it useful to register in order to reinforce their rights. Subscribers should report any breaches of these regulations to the Information Commissioner's Office, or to the Fax Preference Service if they have registered with it.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by her Department. [48338]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* No licence is required for equipment use for official purposes. A detailed answer would involve disproportionate cost.

Digital Services

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by her Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (i) purpose. [48339]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* No data are held centrally and providing an answer would involve disproportionate cost.

Post Offices Capital Scheme

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid out each month since its inception under the Start-Up Capital Scheme for Post Offices. [47316]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I have been informed by Post Office Limited that to the end of March 2002, applications totalling £375,431 have been approved under the Scheme and that the following amounts have been paid:

	£
December 2001	13,230
January 2002	11,699
February 2002	10,365
March 2002	43,778
Total	£79,072

Employment Relations

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish a consultation document on the use of section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999 to extend rights contained in employment legislation to individuals of a specified description. [48743]

Alan Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 443W.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Bereavement Allowance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to secure a review of the operation and level of payment of bereavement allowance. [31276]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* I have no plans at present to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions in order to secure a review of the operation and level of bereavement allowance.

DEFENCE

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf war veterans have been diagnosed as suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; and how many of those diagnosed have subsequently died. [32331]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* In the United Kingdom, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is classified as motor neurone disease (MND). As at 22 March 2002, the Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit was aware of four of the 53,462 members of the United Kingdom armed forces identified as having deployed to a state in the Gulf region at some time between 1 September 1990 and 30 June 1991 who have been diagnosed as suffering from MND. We do not however hold complete morbidity data for all veterans of the Gulf conflict so it is possible that MND may have been diagnosed in other veterans without our knowledge.

According to formal notification to my Department by the Office of National Statistics NHS Central Register, and the Register Generals of Gulf veterans whose deaths have been recorded in England, Wales and Scotland, all four of the UK Gulf veterans diagnosed with MND referred to above have died.

Explosives

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many high explosive bombs the RAF purchased in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [43395]

Dr. Moonie: No high explosive bombs were purchased by the RAF during these years. Although some purchases to support training and development were made during this time, these were not classified as high explosive.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many special advisers there were at 10 Downing Street; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [47058]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Two Special Advisers were in post on 9 April 2002. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 10 April 2002 (*Official Report*, column 11W) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Imber

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure has been incurred on the maintenance of the parish church at Imber for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [48624]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Although the parish church of St Giles at Imber is the property of Salisbury Diocese, the Ministry of Defence has always voluntarily maintained the building in a wind and weatherproof condition and has incurred the following expenditure in each of the last five years:

Year	*Amount £*
1997	Details not available
1998	1,256.49
1999	2,747.15
2000	Nil
2001	158.63

Note:
Although general administrative costs are not available, the services of an Establishment Works Consultant has been provided at £210.00 per year—an additional £1,050 over the five year period.

I am, of course, unable to provide details of any expenditure that may have been incurred by Salisbury Diocese.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many days in each of the past five years the roads on Imber Ranges and in Imber village have been open to the public. [48539]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The metalled roads from Gore Cross to Warminster via Imber, and Heytesbury to Bratton via Imber are open for up to

50 days annually depending on operational training commitments. In each of the last five years these roads were open as follows:

Year	Number of Days
1997	21
1998	23
1999	26
2000	25
2001	24

QinetiQ

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if *(a)* UK, *(b)* EU and *(c)* foreign defence contractors will be considered as strategic partners of QinetiQ. [47645]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon Member to the announcement I made in the House on 6 March 2002, (*Official Report*, columns 313–14W). We have always made it clear that we will not consider any defence manufacturers as strategic partners of QinetiQ, nor any parties which would pose a risk to the defence and security interests of the United Kingdom. However, a large number of organisations which provide a wide range of services to Ministry of Defence could be regarded as defence contractors. As long as they do not fall into either of the two categories above, they will not be excluded from the QinetiQ transaction.

Dimbleby Interview

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a transcript of his interview on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme on 24 March. [47664]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not routinely hold full transcripts of interviews given by Ministers on radio or television programmes. I suggest that the hon. Member approaches LWT if he requires a full transcript of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's interview on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme broadcast on ITV on 24 March.

Apprentice Training (Aberporth)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly regarding apprentice training at Aberporth, Ceredigion. [47754]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I have had no discussions with the First Minister for Wales about apprentice training at Aberporth. I wrote to him however on 25 March explaining the situation once the decision had been taken. There was no previous correspondence on the issue.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he met representatives of the Learning and Skills Council for Wales to discuss apprentice training at Aberporth, Ceredigion. [47755]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I have had no discussions on apprentice training at Aberporth with representatives of the Learning and Skills Council for Wales.

MOD and Military Police (Retirement)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many personnel have retired from *(a)* the Military Police and *(b)* the MoD police in each of the last five years. [15166]

Dr. Moonie: Pursuant to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend Adam Ingram of 8 January 2002, (*Official Report*, column 556W). The number of MOD Police retirements during Financial Year 1999-2000, should read 25, not 24.

NORTHERN IRELAND

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44916]

Dr. John Reid: In the last three years the NIO (and its agencies) have employed seven people under the New Deal for Young People, one under the New Deal for Over 50s and no-one under the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Of the seven employed under the New Deal for Young People six were recruited in 1999 and one in 2000.

The one person employed under the New deal for Over 50s was recruited in 1999.

New dealers are recruited to the NIO on a subsidised basis and take up existing vacancies. Therefore extra costs are limited to the subsidy and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Government Procurement Card

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the procurement transactions were made with the Government procurement card by 31 March 2001. [45990]

Dr. John Reid: No procurement transactions using the Government Procurement Card were made by the Northern Ireland Office by the 31 March 2001. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has however commenced a pilot scheme since that date.

Terrorism

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland *(i)* how many political parties in Northern Ireland have informed him that they *(a)* support and *(b)* oppose an amnesty for all terrorist-related offences committed in Northern Ireland before 10 April 1998; and if he will list them; [44323]

(2) what representations he has received from individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland in support of a general amnesty for all terrorist-related offences before 10 April 1998; and if he will list them. [44324]

Dr. John Reid: It is not Government practice to make private discussions or submissions a matter of public record. It would of course be open to the hon. Member to seek the views of the political parties in Northern Ireland directly.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those people subject to extradition proceedings in connection with scheduled offences committed in Northern Ireland before 10 April 1998; and for what offences extradition is being sought. [44335]

Dr. John Reid: There are currently no people subject to extradition proceedings in connection with scheduled offences committed in Northern Ireland before 10 April 1998. In addition, the Attorney General informs me that there are currently no people subject to the Backing of Warrants arrangements with the Republic of Ireland in connection with scheduled offences committed in Northern Ireland before 10 April 1998.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34221]

Dr. John Reid: As there are no records kept centrally of items valued at less than £50 each, either stolen or lost from the Northern Ireland Office, I could only answer this question at disproportionate cost.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44914]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The attached table gives the numbers employed by my Department and its agencies under the New Deal Programme for *(a)* Young People; *(b)* the Over 50s; and *(c)* Lone parents.

New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

New Deal—Lord Chancellor's Department

Year	*No Employed*	*Scheme*
1999	0	Young People
2000	5	Young People
2001	19	Young People
2001	1	Over 50

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45085]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information is not held centrally on the number of New Dealers who have found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks or who have returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. However, New Dealers who have left my Department will have acquired skills making them more marketable for employment.

Illegal Agreements

Andy King: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what assessment he has made of the policy of the Legal Services Commission in supporting actions to enforce illegal agreements; and if he will make a statement; [48065]

(2) whether it is his Department's policy that the Legal Services Commission should grant funding to individuals seeking to enforce illegal agreements; and if he will make a statement. [48066]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission (LSC) would not grant public funding to an applicant seeking to enforce an agreement that was clearly illegal from the contents of the application for funding. Where the legality of an agreement is the issue, funding could only be granted if the type of case fell within the scope of the Commission's Funding Code and the prospects of the applicant succeeding in the case were sufficient to satisfy the rigorous requirements of the Code.

Applications for civil legal aid funding are considered under the Commission's Funding Code. The Code sets out the criteria for deciding whether to fund or continue to fund services. The Code has been approved by the Lord Chancellor and by each House of Parliament.

Marriage and Relationship Support

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what organisations his Department supports under its Marriage and Relationship Support programme. [47610]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Marriage and Relationship Support (MARS) Branch of the Lord Chancellor's Department provides primary support to MARS organisations through its annual grant programme. The grant for the financial year 2001–02 was £4.5 million, and for 2002–03 it is £5 million.

As well as financial support, MARS officials also offer advice, guidance and information to all providers of MARS services, whether funding recipients or not.

Information on the organisations that have received, or are to receive funding for the financial years April 2001–March 2002 and April 2002–March 2003 and the amounts awarded is in the tables.

Organisations funded April 2001–March 2002	*Amount (£000s)*
2as 1	124
Asian Family Counselling Service	51
The Church Of England	45
Family Matters York (Community Family Project)	50
Family Welfare Association	139
Futureway Trust (National Marriage Week)	31
Jewish Marriage Council	78
London Marriage Guidance Council	177
Marriage Care	366
One Plus One	341
Parentline Plus	102
Relate	2,384
Somerset Family Partnership (Community Family)	50
Students Exploring Marriage (Grubb Institute)	4
Tavistock Marital Studies Institute	497
Totnes Family Partnership (Community Family)	10

Organisations funded April 2002–March 2003	*Amount (£000s)*
2as 1	150
Aquila Care Trust	88
Asian Family Counselling Service	50
BASIC For Life	34
Bristol Community Family Trust	50
Brook in Birmingham	39
Care For the Family	19
CFP Guildford	40
The Cogwheel Trust	4
The Church Of England	54
Family Matters York	50
Family Welfare Association	30
Jewish Marriage Council	84
The Lesbian and Gay Foundation	48
London Marriage Guidance Council	174
Marriage Care	330
The Minster Centre	72
Muslim Women's Helpline	20
One Plus One	327
Parentline Plus	62
Poole Community Family Trust	50
Prisoners Families and Friends Service	12
Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education	46
Relate	2,206
The Richmond Centre	38
The Salvation Army	40
Somerset Family Partnership	50
Sussex Family Mediation Service	26
Talking Matters	24
Tavistock Marital Studies Institute	414
Totnes Family Partnership	58
University of Exeter, School of Psychology	43
2as1/Relate Partnership Projects	186

All amounts have been rounded to the nearest thousand

Malcolm Robert Ross

Andy King: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what sums have been paid out in each of the last 10 financial years to solicitors acting for Mr. Malcolm Robert Ross in litigation related to Mr. Ross's bankruptcy and involving disputes with Stonewood Securities Limited and its shareholders; and what sums have been received back from other parties to the litigation in costs recovery; [48064]

(2) if he will request a report from the Legal Services Commission on the handling of the request for funding by Mr. Malcolm Robert Ross. [48067]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have requested a report from the Legal Services Commission (LSC). According to their records, Mr. Ross has been granted a number of civil legal aid certificates. These cases relate either to Mr. Ross's bankruptcy or involve disputes with Stonewood Securities Limited. One case has been concluded; the others are ongoing. As all the certificates are material to ongoing litigation, the LSC cannot provide details of payments made to the solicitors in connection with the closed case.

In respect of the ongoing litigation, the Commission has not yet received final bills from the solicitors involved and so, in any event, is not in a position to provide information about sums paid out. Normally, only when the actions have been concluded and the solicitor's bills assessed would meaningful figures be available on the costs of the proceedings. If the cases are successful, an order for costs in the individual's favour could be made and the Commission reimbursed.

Most of the certificates predate the implementation of the Access to Justice Act 1999 which significantly reduced the scope for funding cases which arise out of the carrying on of a business.

Public Record Office

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much revenue the Public Record Office has received from pre-payment revenues for the Public Record Office on-line-service; and how much has been refunded. [48678]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd has received a total to date of £278,019 from pre-payment vouchers. The refunds requested and paid by the Public Record Office and QinetiQ is £1,287.

Census 1901

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the 1901 Census on-line in-house facilities will be reinstated at designated service centres; and when the full 1901 Census Internet Service will resume. [48679]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd. is continuing to work on the technical enhancements. Once configuring of the technical enhancements is complete, rigorous testing will be undertaken on all aspects of the system. These enhancements are intended to make the site sufficiently robust to permit general Internet access, and are being done with a sense of urgency. However, the most important consideration is to ensure that the service is re-launched successfully. The system will again be made available to designated service centres as part of the general re-introduction of the site. General on-line searches will be available as soon as practicable following testing and availability at the service centres.

Child Killings

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Government are taking to end child abuse deaths; and if he will make a statement. [45883]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply. We are committed to reducing the number of deaths of children through abuse and neglect. That is why over the last few years we have introduced new legislation, new guidance, new structures and new policy initiatives to make children safer and to ensure that there is a proper focus on children at the very heart of Government. These measures include:

The Care Standards Act 2000 to improve the inspection and regulation of children's care services, and the Protection of Children Act 1999 which makes it much more difficult for unsuitable people to work with children;

Revised core interagency child protection guidance: *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (1999) and the new *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families* (2000);

New guidance focusing on *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (2000) and a *National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (2001);

A Minister for Young People, John Denham, and a new Cabinet Committee focusing on Children and Young People's issues;

The first ever national Children's Rights Director for England—Roger Morgan—to act as a powerful champion for some of the most vulnerable children in our country;

The establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit, which is responsible for ensuring the coherence of Government policies that affect all children and young people under 19; and

Radical new initiatives such as the £885 million Quality Protects programme, Sure Start and Connexions.

In addition, the Department will shortly be publishing the first of a series of biennial overview reports drawing out the key findings of a sample of serious case reviews following child deaths or other cases of serious abuse in recent years. These reports will draw out common themes and trends and their implications for policy and practice. We will disseminate these findings widely to enable practitioners and managers to learn from them. It will be important for professionals to consider how their own practice might be developed or improved as a result of these findings to help prevent avoidable injuries to, and deaths of, children.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38919]

Mr. MacShane: In-house canteen services are provided by an external contractor. Staff pay for their own refreshments, although the FCO has provided a subsidy to the contractor as follows:

Financial Year	*Amount Paid*
1997–98	£210,696.31
1998–99	£132,604.26
1999–2000	£99,275.37
2000–01	£200,433.96
2001–02	£179,000.00 (Forecast only)

The information requested on part *(b)* of the question is not centrally maintained and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46959]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Two. I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Yasser Arafat

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made since 18 March to the *(a)* Israeli Government and *(b)* US Administration about Yasser Arafat's attendance at and return from the forthcoming Arab Summit in Beirut. [46645]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In the months leading up to the Arab League Summit in Beirut, we repeatedly called on the Israeli government to release the restrictions on Arafat's freedom of movement. We were also in close contact with our US colleagues who were working to achieve the same goal.

Gibraltar

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the report by the International Monetary Fund on 19 March. [48309]

Peter Hain: We welcome the report, which recognises progress that Gibraltar has made in the regulation and supervision of its developing financial services industry.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the legal basis of his claim that the integration of Gibraltar into the UK would contravene the Treaty of Utrecht. [47565]

Peter Hain: I did not say that the integration of Gibraltar into the UK would contravene the Treaty of Utrecht. I said that it was not this Government's policy to integrate Gibraltar. I reminded the Committee that the Treaty of Utrecht gave Spain first refusal in the event that Britain ever relinquished sovereignty over Gibraltar; and that the position of Gibraltar was therefore different from that of Ceuta and Melilla.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Refrigerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk of food being stored in ineffective refrigeration systems because refurbishment has been delayed because of the inability to recycle redundant refrigerators. [25702]

Mr. Meacher There is no reason why refurbishment should be delayed. Ineffective refrigeration systems can already be disposed of in the UK via mobile fridge recycling plant or high temperature incineration, they can be exported for recycling in other Member States, or they are stored pending treatment in the UK. There is sufficient capacity in the UK to store waste refrigeration equipment for up to one year. The risk of food being stored in ineffective systems for this reason is therefore negligible.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Waste Disposal

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the proportion of waste sent to landfill which could be converted to biofuel through the anaerobic digestion process; and if she will make a statement. [37702]

Mr. Meacher: We have not carried out such an assessment. Experience has shown that although anaerobic digestion is an appropriate treatment for a wide range of biodegradable wastes there are doubts about its commercial viability.

The Government support the development of anaerobic digestion through mechanisms such as eligibility for the Renewable Obligation Certificates. The waste management industry is reviewing the role of anaerobic digestion, along with other treatment options, to achieve the reduction in the biodegradable content of MSW sent to landfill as required by the Landfill Directive.

In these circumstances it is considered to be premature to make a realistic assessment of the quantities of wastes that will be treated by this option.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Government Departments participated in the waste strategy summit. [46791]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste Summit was held on 21 November 2001 and was hosted by the Secretary of State. Government officials who attended represented the Departments for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Trade and Industry and Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Her Majesty's Treasury. Other officials represented No. 10's Policy Unit, the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit and the Devolved Administrations.

EU Directives

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the action she took in response to the formal notice and the reasoned opinion on UK compliance with EU law relating to the *(a)* Drinking Water Directive, *(b)* Hazardous Waste Directive, and *(c)* Waste Framework Directive. [40647]

Mr. Meacher: Cabinet Office rules require that details of relations between the Commission and Member States on inspection proceedings are confidential. However, I can confirm that the Government is dealing with the points made by the Commission in its letters of formal notice and reasoned opinions addressed to the United Kingdom in relation to the implementation of the three Directives.

Manure

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to permit the spreading of organic manure on light to sandy soils in August, September and October under licence under the regulations contained in the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone Directive; and what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* cover crops and *(b)* catch crops in reducing nitrate leaching during autumn and winter months. [46388]

Mr. Meacher: The Action Programme measures required by the Nitrates Directive 1991 which apply in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) detail closed periods prohibiting the application of manures containing a higher proportion of available nitrogen (slurries, poultry manures and liquid digested sewage sludges) on to sandy or shallow soils which are more prone to nitrate leaching. Relaxation of these measures would entail a high risk of increased nitrate leaching so there are no plans to allow exemptions under licence.

The Action Programme measures take account of information produced by the Government funded research programme on nitrates and experiences gained during operation of the Nitrate Sensitive Areas Scheme. For further information about cover and catch crops please refer to MAFF Booklet PB3578 "The Pilot Nitrate Sensitive Areas Scheme: Final Report" available from DEFRA publications (08459 556000).

Cover crops and also catch crops, used late in the year, can help to reduce nitrate loss compared with both uncropped land and land sown with autumn sown cereals. This benefit is recognised in the Action Programme measures with the shorter closed period for manure applications for land sown with a cover crop before 1 October and not removed before 1 December of the same year.

Advice on using cover or catch crops to reduce nitrate leaching in fields that would otherwise be bare over the autumn and winter months is also given in the DEFRA Booklet PB5505 "Guidelines for Farmers in NVZs".

Environmental Impact Assessment

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 28 January, *Official Report,* columns 92–3W, which FTSE companies reported upon their environmental impacts; which mentioned environmental issues; and which did not submit an environmental response to the Government. [46263]

Mr. Meacher: Since my answer of 28 January we have been reviewing the response to the Prime Minister's challenge to FTSE350 companies to report on their environmental performance.

Not all companies have yet published their reports for 2001, but at present we estimate 76 of the top 350 companies have produced a stand alone environmental report, including quantified environmental performance data, or otherwise published this information.

A further 88 have also taken at least one step towards meeting the Prime Minister's challenge such as publishing an environmental policy or environmental performance targets. We are writing to FTSE350 companies to check our estimates and will make the final tally public as soon as possible.

A list of FTSE 350 companies with our latest estimates of their respective reporting performance has been made available in the Library of the House.

Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department has played in discussions relating to the UNECE Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions. [46555]

Mr. Meacher: These Conventions were adopted in 1992 and the UK is a signatory to both of them. My department has been involved in discussions in the past year on a possible liability protocol under both Conventions in a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe working group.

The protocol would provide compensation for damage to transboundary waters from accidents covered by the industrial accidents Convention. The aim is for the protocol to be adopted at the conference of European Environment Ministers next year.

Environmental Protocols

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken in response to the LRTAP Protocols on *(a)* heavy metals, *(b)* persistent organic pollutants and *(c)* abatement of acidification, eutrophication and ground level ozone. [46567]

Mr. Meacher: Since becoming Party to the 1979 Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) the UK has worked at an international level to abate transboundary air pollutants. The UK is preparing to ratify these three Protocols.

I issued a consultation paper on 20 March 2002 outlining the steps necessary to ratify the 1998 Protocol on Heavy Metals; comments are invited by 12 June 2002. I have arranged for a copy of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library. The consultation paper sets out a draft strategy for the UK to meet its commitments under the Protocol. The main requirements are the reduction of annual emissions to air of cadmium, lead and mercury to below 1990 levels. We already meet these requirements as annual emissions in the UK in 1999 were 30 per cent, or less, of 1990 levels for the three metals. Subject to the results of the consultation exercise, I hope to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2002.

The Department is also looking at what measures need to be in place for the UK to ratify the 1998 Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants, although the basic obligation to reduce emissions of POPs below their 1990 levels has already been achieved.

The UK signed the Protocol to abate acidification, eutrophication and ground level ozone (the "Gothenburg Protocol") in December 1999. The main requirement of the Protocol is to reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, volatile organic compounds and ammonia to meet individual national ceilings from 2010. The Protocol covers the same four pollutants as the European Union National Emission Ceilings Directive, adopted last November, and ratification of the Protocol and and implementation of the Directive will be done jointly. I hope to issue a consultation paper later in the year on our proposals. Projections suggest that the UK is on course to meet the emission ceilings from 2010. Subject to consultations I hope that the UK will be able to ratify the Gothenburg Protocol by the end of 2002.

Water Pollution

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of removing pesticide and fertiliser contamination from water in water catchment and other areas that affect drinking water supplies was in *(a)* areas of standard farming procedures and *(b)* areas where farming is carried out to Soil Association organic standards in the last year for which figures are available. [46638]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency, which is responsible for monitoring ground and surface waters for pesticides, does not distinguish between compounds used in conventional and organic farming. Similarly, the costs to water companies of treatment to remove traces of pesticides before water can be put into supply are not quantified and apportioned according to the different farming methods, which may vary within any single water catchment area.

GM Crops

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which EU member states have been notified of the action taken by the National Assembly for Wales under the safeguard clause of the EU Deliberate Release Directive in respect of GM maize being grown in the UK; and when they were informed. [46640]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission was informed of the action taken by the Assembly on 13 July 2001, as required under Directive 90/220/EEC. At the same time, copies of the notification were sent to the Permanent Representations of all other Member States.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the European Commission to respond to the action taken by the National Assembly of Wales under the safeguard clause of the EU Deliberate Release Directive in respect of GM maize being grown in the United Kingdom. [46639]

Mr. Meacher: It is not known when the Commission will respond.

Biodiversity

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the biodiversity action plans for species and habitats at risk have been implemented. [46749]

Mr. Meacher: There are 391 species action plans and 45 habitat action plans. All are being implemented in partnership with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations. A progress report on implementation was made in "*Sustaining the variety of life: 5 years of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan*", published in March 2001. The report can be viewed on www.ukbap.org.uk.

Water Sports

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the University of Brighton report on water based sports and recreation. [47971]

Alun Michael: The report was published in December, since when a number of discussions have taken place. Recently officials met British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England as the other sponsors of the research along with other interested Government Departments. Last month I met representatives of the British Canoe Union with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). In the light of these and other discussions we are considering what action to take in the light of the report's findings.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1032W, when she expects to publish the consultation paper on the closure or diversion of rights of way. [47612]

Alun Michael: I have set high priority on implementing the measures in the CROW Act to enable the closure or diversion of rights of way where this is needed for crime prevention but I also want to make sure that the processes are kept as straightforward as possible. The same applies for the provisions in relation to locations where the safety of school pupils is the issue. With this in mind, I am currently refining our proposals and intend to issue a consultation paper very soon.

CERRIE

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 20 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), *Official Report*, column 372W, on CERRIE, what the terms of reference are for the Consultative Exercise on Radiation Risk from Internal Emitters, including the responsibilities of individual members of the Committee, what reports are to be placed in the public domain from the proceedings of CERRIE; and what guidelines individual members of CERRIE have been given on *(a)* disclosing proceedings and *(b)* publishing material subsequently that relate to CERRIE. [47527]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters (CERRIE) is a working group of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). CERRIE has been given the remit

> "To consider the present risk models for radiation and health that apply to exposure to radiation from internal radionuclides in the light of recent studies and any further research that might be needed".

CERRIE will prepare a report for COMARE, which will be published. COMARE will then advise Ministers on the need for changes to the existing risk models and for further work. Each of the members of CERRIE has been appointed because of their knowledge and experience of the issues under discussion. They have joint responsibility to evaluate thoroughly the existing evidence and make recommendations, in line with the Committee's remit.

In order to facilitate the free flow of views during Committee meetings, CERRIE has decided that its work would be best carried out under the "Chatham House Rule". This approach will allow ideas/information raised in meetings to be discussed outside them, but the anonymity of their authors would be retained so that they will not be inhibited from developing and changing their views later on. In order to be transparent about their discussions, CERRIE are preparing their own website which will include, among other things, summary minutes of their meetings. During and after the period of the Committee's deliberations and preparation of its report, members will be free to publish technical papers that they have prepared to inform the Committee, but the views expressed in them should be clearly attributable to the individual and should not imply that they reflect the views of the Committee collectively.

Climate Change

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions the Government will have with the administration in the United States of America regarding the need to ratify the Kyoto protocol on climate change. [47047]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Government maintain regular contact on climate change with the US Administration, both at ministerial and official levels. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs held discussions on climate change with a range of representatives of the Administration in Washington in December and intends to do so again when she visits Washington in April. Other Government Ministers take every opportunity to raise the issue with our American counterparts.

The UK Government firmly believes that the Kyoto Protocol remains the best way to take forward international action on climate change and will continue to emphasise this point in discussions with the US Administration.

Environmental Protection

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department has taken to promote the implementation of Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration; [46563]

(2) if she will make a statement on action taken by her Department with regards to *(a)* the Aarhus Convention and *(b)* the ECE Sofia Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental decision-making. [46564]

Mr. Meacher: Whilst not formally revoked, the ECE Sofia Guidelines are effectively superseded by the Aarhus Convention. The Aarhus Convention is the primary vehicle for the promotion of Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. The Government strongly support this Convention and signed the treaty when it opened for signature in 1998.

The majority of the Convention is already implemented in the UK. This Department is responsible for some of the necessary legislative amendments, in particular to the Environmental Information Regulations 1992. These will be made as soon as possible after the EU draft Directive on Public Access to Environmental Information is adopted to replace Directive 90/313/EEC. The Government intend to ratify the Convention as soon as all of the necessary legal provisions are in place. This date will depend on the legislative timetables of the devolved administrations.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Young People's Services

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the implementation of the Children and Young People's Unit Core Principles for Government will be evaluated. [46328]

Mr. Denham: Departments will be encouraged to develop an evaluation strategy as part of their implementation of the Core Principles over the coming year. The Unit will monitor action across Government, including on evaluation and will publish reports on the progress made. The Unit will be in an excellent position to identify and disseminate: *(a)* real innovation in how Departments consult and engage with children and young people in the formulation and delivery of their policies, and *(b)* mainstreaming strategies through which engaging children and young people becomes part of Central Government's wider work in consulting with the public.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school playing fields were sold in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and what acreage this involved. [44447]

John Healey: In the financial year April 2000 to March 2001, the Department approved 38 applications to sell areas of school playing field larger than a small sports pitch for the under 10s, that is greater than 2,000m^2. The total area involved was 540,000m^2, or about 131 acres. Of this total, 40 acres were at closed or closing school sites.

In the financial year from April 2001 to date, the Department has approved 18 applications to sell areas larger than a school sports pitch for the under 10s. The total area involved amounts to some 280,000m^2, or about 69 acres, of which 39 acres are at closed or closing school sites. The Department does not know how many of these approved applications have resulted in actual sales. In all cases, we have ensured that the remaining playing fields would meet the full needs of the schools involved and of other schools in the local area.

Some of the proceeds from these approved applications are earmarked to provide 13 new sports halls and to improve other sports facilities at schools, such as new all-weather pitches and to bring other, poorly drained, pitches back into use. In other cases, the proceeds are to be used to improve educational facilities—for example, by providing modern, up to date, teaching accommodation, such as science and technology classrooms. In a number of cases, the proceeds are to be used to help build new schools or to enable multi-site schools to consolidate on to one site.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what planned expenditure on higher education was in 1996–97 and each of the subsequent five financial years; and what the total outturn spending on higher education was in each of those years excluding proceeds of tuition fees. [45256]

Margaret Hodge: Publicly planned expenditure for higher education in England is set out in the annual Grant letter issued to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The data set used in calculating the out-turn for public and student contributions to fees differ from that used in calculating publicly planned expenditure on fees. The tuition fee data for planned expenditure are for all students, including students from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, at English HE institutions, while for out-turn the figures are based on students from England at English HE institutions. The two sets of data are not therefore directly comparable. The figures, excluding all planned tuition fee income, are:

	Publicly planned expenditure excluding fees[1]	*Out-turn excluding fees*[2]
1996–97	3646	3678
1997–98	3702	3743
1998–99	3757	3791
1999–2000	4422	4423
2000–2001	4643	4811

[1]Figures reflect Grant Letter announcements and include ear-marked capital, allocations for access and widening participation paid via institutions, HE expenditure for the British Academy and directly funded DfES small programmes. They exclude public and student contributions to tuition fees and funds paid to students for their maintenance support.

[2]The differences between planned and actual expenditure are explained in part by the different coverage used for tuition fees and by in year adjustments.

School Sixth Forms

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many representations she has received from schools which will lose sixth-form funding as a result of the transition to Learning and Skills Council funding; [45406]

(2) how many schools have sixth-forms which will receive a lower budget after the transition to Learning and Skills Council funding. [45407]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend has received representations from a number of headteachers, deputy headteachers and chairs of school governors. However, through our Real Terms Guarantee, we are ensuring that no school sixth form can lose compared with its 2000–01 funding levels, provided pupil numbers are maintained. For sixth forms that are reducing in size, the guarantee will be maintained but at a proportionately reduced level.

The Learning and Skills Council has calculated two figures for each sixth form—its RTG and its LSC formula allocation—and they will receive the higher of these two. The Financing of Maintained School Regulations 2002 have been amended to ensure that sixth forms funded through the LSC formula see some benefit. Schools should gain at least one third of the potential benefit from the LSC's allocations for 2002–03. We intend to amend the regulations further for 2003–04 to ensure that such schools have a minimum two-thirds gain in that year.

Lecturers

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the *(a)* age profile of university lecturers in engineering departments and *(b)* likely future teaching capacity of those departments. [45831]

Margaret Hodge: The latest provisional data, as collated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, show the age profile of academic staff in engineering disciplines to be:

Age:	0:20	21:25	26:30	31:35	36:40	41:45	46:50	51:55	56:60	61:65	66:95	other	total
Total:	13	876	2194	2193	2151	1741	1475	1596	1222	688	107	10	14266

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record 2000–01.

Higher education institutions are responsible for planning their own future development including academic posts.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46952]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has two special advisers in post as at 9 April 2002.

In relation to special adviser salaries I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W).

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47170]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 10 April.

Faith Schools

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* both primary and secondary schools that select some or all of their pupils on the basis of faith have (i) opened and (ii) closed in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47749]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

University Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 251W, on university funding, if she will list the low participation postcodes which entail additional costs in student recruitment. [47757]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* This is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive of the Funding Council to reply to the hon. Gentleman's question and to place a copy of his reply in the Commons library.

Higher Education Funding

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what decision has been taken on the future of funding students in higher education; and if she will make a statement. [48257]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Government have announced a review of student finance. We are considering a number of options and no decisions have been made.

Higher Education Entrants

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of each year group between 18 and 30 entered higher education for the first time in 1999–2000. [47758]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 March, *Official Report*, cols 114W, which gave the entry rates to higher education for each individual age from 18 to 30.

University Applications

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many university applications there were in England, broken down by *(a)* local authority area and *(b)* local government ward in the last year for which figures are available. [47759]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The latest available information from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), showing the number of English domiciled applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses by their area of permanent residence, is shown in the table. UCAS does not hold data on applicants from each local government ward.

Through the Excellence Challenge, which began in 2001, we are hoping to raise the aspirations and attainment among young people in Excellence in Cities areas and Education Action Zones, to encourage them to enter higher education.

Home Domiciled Applicants to UCAS for entry into HE Courses (Degree & HND combined): and having an Area of Permanent Residence in England 2001 Year of Entry

By Area of Permanent Residence (Local Education Authority)

Applicants Area of Permanent Residence	*Year 2001*
Barking	794
Barnet	3,486
Barnsley	1,023
Bath & NE Somerset	1,318
Bedfordshire	2,498
Bexley	1,211
Birmingham	6,945
Blackburn with Darwen	990
Blackpool	759
Bolton	1,661
Bournemouth	1,109
Bracknell Forest	692
Bradford	3,438
Brent	3,132
Brighton & Hove	1,567
Bristol	2,552
Bromley	2,126
Buckinghamshire	3,770
Bury	1,249
Calderdale	1,262
Cambridgeshire	3,592
Camden	1,717
Cheshire	4,882
City of Derby	1,448
City of London	126
Cornwall	3,354
Coventry	1,927
Croydon	2,758
Cumbria	2,735
Darlington	583
Derbyshire	4,045
Devon	4,607
Doncaster	1,398
Dorset	2,500
Dudley	1,659
Durham	2,605
Ealing	3,116
East Riding	1,934
East Sussex	3,141
Enfield	2,439
Essex	7,311
Gateshead	978
Gloucestershire	4,036
Greenwich	1,576
Hackney	1,846
Halton	662
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,287
Hampshire	8,038
Haringey	2,080
Harrow	2,548
Hartlepool	518
Havering	1,125
Herefordshire	1,156
Hertfordshire	7,537
Hillingdon	1,739
Hounslow	2,002
Hull	1,125
Isle of Wight	705
Isles of Scilly	13
Islington	1,411
Kensington & Chelsea	1,328
Kent	8,133

Home Domiciled Applicants to UCAS for entry into HE Courses (Degree & HND combined): and having an Area of Permanent Residence in England 2001 Year of Entry

By Area of Permanent Residence (Local Education Authority)

Applicants Area of Permanent Residence	*Year 2001*
Kingston	1,337
Kirklees	2,681
Knowsley	770
Lambeth	2,430
Lancashire	8,091
Leeds	4,290
Leicester	2,510
Leicestershire	4,130
Lewisham	2,019
Lincolnshire	3,777
Liverpool	2,738
Luton	1,325
Manchester	2,709
Merton	1,519
Middlesbrough	1,048
Milton Keynes	1,271
N Lincolnshire	850
N Somerset	1,201
NE Lincolnshire	822
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,967
Newham	2,880
Norfolk	4,068
North Tyneside	1,120
North Yorkshire	4,014
Northamptonshire	4,000
Northumberland	1,910
Nottingham	1,477
Nottinghamshire	4,154
Oldham	1,363
Oxfordshire	4,506
Peterborough	960
Plymouth	1,437
Poole	775
Portsmouth	953
Reading	1,033
Redbridge	2,505
Redcar & Cleveland	828
Richmond	1,529
Rochdale	1,316
Rochester & Gillingham	1,382
Rotherham	1,237
Rutland	289
S Gloucestershire	1,292
Salford	954
Sandwell	1,563
Sefton	2,260
Sheffield	2,753
Shropshire	2,057
Slough	947
Solihull	1,555
Somerset	3,309
South Tyneside	786
Southampton	1,200
Southend on Sea	881
Southwark	2,196
St Helens	1,056
Staffordshire	5,269
Stockport	1,997
Stockton On Tees	1,309
Stoke-on-Trent	1,210
Suffolk	3,841
Sunderland	1,449
Surrey	8,182
Sutton	1,233
Swindon	875
Tameside	980
The Wrekin	882
Thurrock	437
Torbay	714

Home Domiciled Applicants to UCAS for entry into HE Courses (Degree & HND combined): and having an Area of Permanent Residence in England 2001 Year of Entry

By Area of Permanent Residence (Local Education Authority)

Applicants Area of Permanent Residence	*Year 2001*
Tower Hamlets	1,589
Trafford	1,523
Wakefield	1,535
Walsall	1,428
Waltham Forest	1,935
Wandsworth	1,973
Warrington	1,053
Warwickshire	3,452
West Berkshire	1,008
West Sussex	4,814
Westminster	1,463
Wigan	1,490
Wiltshire	3,076
Windsor & Maidenhead	1,058
Wirral	2,214
Wokingham	1,295
Wolverhampton	1,743
Worcestershire	3,613
York	1,335
UK not known	273
Grand Total	329,580

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the 2001–02 target of 280 secondary subject and 51 primary inspections meeting HM Chief Inspector's standard will be achieved. [47896]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the target to develop a target for satisfaction for childcare providers by December 2001 was met on time. [47904]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the target to develop targets for dealing with complaints from childcare providers by December 2001 was met on time. [47903]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of whether the performance target to establish integrated inspections of childcare and nursery education by April 2003 will be met. [47901]

Margaret Hodge: The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) has developed an inspection framework for combined care and nusery education inspections which is currently being piloted. The pilot will be evaluated by the end of April 2002 and OFSTED are on course to meet the target of 1,200 inspections per year for those providers which are not schools but offer a service that includes both childcare and Government funded nursery education.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how (1) many three year olds in Lincolnshire are in pre-school education; and how many were in pre-school education in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1992; [48164]

(2) how many three year olds are in pre-school education; and how many were attending pre schools in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1992. [48165]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

The available information on numbers of free early years education places taken up by three year olds in England and Lincolnshire Local Education Authority area is shown in the table.

The information was derived from the table published alongside Statistical Bulletin 11/2001 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age in England—January 2001" on the Department's statistical web site www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/.

The Department is planning to publish information for January 2002 in May.

Number of free early education places taken up by three year olds England and Lincolnshire Local Education Authority area 1997 and 2001

Position in January each year

	1997			*2001*		
	maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[2]	total	maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[2]	total
England	214,173	0	214,173	226,634	108,815	335,449
Lincolnshire	1,686	0	1,686	1,749	41	1,790

Notes:

[1]Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year, from the Annual Schools Census.

[2]Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year, from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

Undergraduates

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of undergraduates failed to complete a course at a higher education institution, broken down by institution and course title, in each year since 1997. [48246]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Nationally, the non-completion rate has remained broadly the same at 17–18 per cent since 1991–92. In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a table comparing estimates of non-completion rates in member countries. They showed an average of around a third of university students did not complete their course in OECD countries. The UK boasts the second lowest non-completion rate among the OECD countries.

The available information on non-completion rates is contained in "Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), copies of which are available from the House library. The figures cover full-time first degree courses only, and show, for each individual HE institution in the UK, the proportion of entrants who failed to complete their course. Copies of the HEFCE publication are available for students starting courses in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. The next edition, covering students starting courses in 1999–2000, is scheduled for publication in autumn 2002.

Local Education Authority Spending

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what checks are made to ensure that local education authorities do not transfer education funds to non-educational activities. [48566]

Mr. Timms: Most of the funding made available to local education authorities by the Government is unhypothecated. In recent years, however, LEAs have been strongly encouraged by the Secretary of State to increase their education budgets annually by an amount at least equal to the increase in their Education Standard Spending Assessments, and the Department monitors the extent to which this target has been achieved. The Education Bill currently before Parliament contains a provision, intended for exceptional use only, empowering my right hon. Friend to set a minimum level for an LEA's schools budget where she considers that the budget proposed by the LEA for a particular year is seriously inadequate.

Specific and special grants from the Government are subject to appropriate audit arrangements, the nature of which varies from grant to grant.

Education Funding (Essex)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received about the allocation of funds for education made by Essex County Council; and if she will make a statement. [48567]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has received one letter from a school in Essex about the decision by Essex County Council not to increase its education budget by as much as the increase in its Education Standard Spending Assessment. Authorities are strongly encouraged to achieve such an increase and the Department publishes annually a table showing which authorities have not done so.

Skills Base (Coastal Towns)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what analysis has been carried out by the Learning and Skills Council on how the skills base in seaside and coastal towns compares to the national average. [48594]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Vacant Teaching Posts

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacant deputy head teacher posts existed in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* all schools, expressed as percentage of the total number of head teachers, for each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [47508]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many vacant teacher posts existed in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* all schools, expressed as percentage of the total number of teachers, in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority; [47507]

(2) how many teacher vacancies in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* all schools there were in each year since 1997 (i) expressed as a percentage of all teachers broken down by local education authority and (ii) broken down by health authority. [47744]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Child Care

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the target to set targets for the registration and inspection of childcare providers by December 2001 was met on time. [47902]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the work of the Early Years Directorate in implementing a national system of regulation of childcare. [47899]

Margaret Hodge: The Department receives regular reports about the work of the Early Years Directorate in the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). We are

aware of the good work that has been done to establish a new national system of childcare regulation, and the considerable progress that has been made during the current transitional period. We understand that OFSTED is on target to achieve the inspection of all childcare providers by the end of March 2003.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the National Register of Childminders and Day Care Providers can be viewed. [47900]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Gentleman and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Nursing Diploma

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many students were recruited into nursing diploma courses in the academic year 2001–02; and what evidence she has collected on the impact of the cost of studying on numbers of nursing students; [43335]

(2) what plans she has to allow nurses on diploma courses access to student loans; [43334]

(3) what assessment has been made of the level of debt incurred by nurses on diploma courses; [43336]

(4) what assessment she has made of the number of nurses on diploma courses who have dependents. [43332]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply

Consistent with our aim of encouraging wider access to the health professions, a significant (and growing) number of student nurses are mature entrants, single parents and others with dependants.

Approximately 13 per cent of diploma level nursing and midwifery students receive the additional dependants' allowances available to those who have financial responsibility for dependants (including adult dependants). Other sources of information available to the Department, including a recent survey from the Royal College of Nursing, indicate that up to 35 per cent of nursing and midwifery students have children living with them.

NHS Bursaries were introduced in recognition of the demands of health professional training and the need to guarantee the supply of staff to the service. The Government are increasing the number of health professional training places at both diploma and degree level, and already during the current academic year 15,000 students have embarked on diploma level nursing and midwifery programmes. The number of individuals applying for these courses is now running at a buoyant level with the number of applicants having more than doubled since the 1997–98 academic year. There are now on average more than two applicants for every training place.

There are no plans to move diploma level nursing and midwifery students (or any other health professional trainees) to a loan-based system of support.

The Department does not routinely monitor the level of debt amongst diploma level nursing and midwifery students. These students are not reliant on student loans and instead receive a flat-rate basic maintenance grant with no contribution required from the student's income or their family's. In addition, the NHS meets students' liability for a tuition fee contribution (currently £1,075 a year) in full and without means testing. This package of support is, in many circumstances, more favourable that the loan-based system of support available to most other students.

HEALTH

RSV

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost in the last 12 months of treating infants suffering from RSV infection in terms of *(a)* hospital stays and *(b)* intensive care unit stays. [41474]

Yvette Cooper: Most children who contract Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) do so by the age of three. In the latest year for which figures are available, 2000–01, there were 182 admissions to NHS hospitals in England for respiratory diseases, with a subsidiary classification of RSV, for children under 4 years. Costs associated with admission vary significantly with severe cases requiring paediatric intensive care, assisted ventilation and specialised interventions. Information on the cost of these admissions is not collected centrally.

Press Officers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press officers there were in each health authority in each year since 1997. [41712]

Mr. Hutton: This information has never been collected centrally.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St Patrick's Day, *(b)* St Georges's Day, *(c)* St Andrew's Day, and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St David's Day. [42...]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

My Department is represented on the Steering Group on Eligibility Criteria for The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. The Medal will be awarded to serving members of the frontline emergency services including the ambulance service in England. No special arrangements have been made to celebrate St Patrick's Day, St George's Day, St Andrew's Day, or St David's Day.

Hospital-acquired Infection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to improve the prioritisation of resources for dealing with hospital acquired infection in response to the report of the National Audit Office entitled "The Management and Control of Hospital-Acquired Infection in Acute NHS Trusts in England" (HC 230). [43120]

Ms Blears: Since the publication of the National Audit Office report in February 2000 we have made it clear that tackling healthcare associated infection is a high priority. It was recognised in the National Plan implementation programme, published in November 2000, as a core requirement underpinning other priorities. We have made it clear to the National Health Service that trusts and health authorities should put infection control and basic hygiene at the heart of good management and clinical practice with appropriate resources.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43278]

Ms Blears: There are currently 2 special advisers.[1]

Under the terms of the *Ministerial Code*, Cabinet Ministers may each appoint up to two Special Advisers.[1]

[1]Details of costs for Special Advisers within the individual departments are not given, in order to protect the privacy of the small number of individuals concerned.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43252]

Ms Blears: The following table sets out revised public service agreement targets since the publication of the Department's 2001 Departmental report.

Old target	*Revised target*	*Reason*
Our objective is to narrow the health gap in childhood and throughout life between socio-economic groups and between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country.	Our objective is to narrow the health gap in childhood and throughout life between socio-economic groups and between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country.	The original wording of the Department's PSA target concerning health inequalities stated that "Specific national targets will be developed in consultation with external stakeholders and experts early in 2001." The first two of these specific national targets (concerning infant mortality and life expectancy) were shown in the 2001 departmental report:
Starting with children under one year, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap in mortality between manual groups and the population as a whole.	Starting with children under one year, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap in mortality between manual groups and the population as a whole.	A third specific national target (concerning teenage pregnancy) has now been developed and will be shown in the next departmental report (due Spring 2002).
Starting with health authorities, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap between the quintile of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole.	Starting with health authorities, by 2010 to reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap between the quintile of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole.	
	By achieving agreed local conception reduction targets, to reduce the national under 18 conception rate by 15 per cent by 2004 and 50 per cent by 2010, while reducing the level of inequality in rates between the worst fifth of wards and the average by at least a quarter.	

Prevention of Admission Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding allocation was provided to the prevention of admission scheme in the last five years by *(a)* region and *(b)* local authority; how many people were assisted as part of the scheme; and how many people were subsequently admitted to hospital after receiving care on the scheme. [42600]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* The NHS Plan announced an extra £900 million annually by 2003–04 for new intermediate care and related services to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people. Further details are in HSC 2001–01, LAC (2001) 01, published in January 2001 [which is in the Library of the House].

The NHS funding earmarked for intermediate care which commenced in 2000–01 forms part of unified allocations to health authorities. Unified allocations are based on a weighted capitation formula that determines every health authority's fair share of available resources. The Government's policy is not to hypothecate resources made available to councils unless it is essential to do so. Deployment of resources made available through the Standard Spending Assessment remains a decision for councils to make in the light of local circumstances.

The results of the survey of NHS intermediate care in England carried out last Summer show that, by the end of this year there will be, compared to the baseline of 1999–2000, around an additional 126,000 people in receipt of intermediate care services. The full results of the survey, giving data by Region and by health authority, are in the Library. Information on the number of people admitted to hospital after receiving intermediate care is not available.

Plasticised Cadavers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what implications there are for public health arising from the exhibition of plasticised cadavers; and if he will make a statement. [43234]

Yvette Cooper: The representatives of Professor von Hagens have been informed that his proposed exhibition would require a licence under the Anatomy Act. Any public health considerations would be addressed when determining whether to grant a licence.

Speech and Language Therapists

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there were for speech and language therapists in each English primary care group trust at the latest date for which figures are available. [43027]

Mr. Hutton: Between 1997 and 2001 the number of speech and language therapists employed in the NHS increased by 810 (17 per cent).

At 31 September 2000 only one of the seventeen Primary Care Trusts (South Peterborough PCT) then existing employed speech and language therapists. The national vacancy rate and information for South Peterborough Primary Care Trust is in the table below.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Vacancies by Primary Care Trusts for Qualified speech and language therapists 3 month vacancy rates[2] numbers[3] and staff in post[3]

Organisation code	*Organisation Name*	*3 month vacancy rates*	*whole-time equivalent 3 month vacancies*	*staff in post*
	England	4.7 per cent	200	4,070
4LA06	South Peterborough PCT	0.0 per cent	0	15

Notes:
1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent)
3. At 3 September 2000 Non-medical workforce census, 17 PCTs were in existence, of which only one, 4LA06, had Speech Language Therapy staff. As SIP figures from the census are required for the calculation of vacancy rates, no rates are available for the PCTs formed on 1 October 2000.
4. Data will be available from the March 2002 Vacancy survey in July 2002.
5. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten
6. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
Source:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Department of Health Non Medical Workforce Census

Abortion

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken in response to the audit of abortion services in 1999 by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; and if he will make a statement. [43329]

Yvette Cooper: The audit of abortion services funded by the Department provided valuable baseline data on abortion services prior to the publication of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' (RCOG) Evidence Based Guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion.*

The audit found good awareness of and compliance with the RCOG guidelines available at the time and the report informed the development of the our sexual health and HIV strategy, which was issued for consultation in July 2001. The strategy recommends that services should be developed in line with the Royal College's guidelines ensuring that women meeting the legal requirements for an abortion are referred without delay. In addition, we have set a target in the strategy that from 2005, commissioners should ensure that women who meet the legal requirements have access to an abortion within 3 weeks of their first appointment with their general practioner or other referring doctor.

An action plan setting out how the strategy will be implemented will be published in the spring. The audit data will help us monitor progress in improving services.

Suicide

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the research commissioned by him in the last five years on *(a)* suicide, *(b)* assisted suicide and *(c)* voluntary euthanasia, with special reference to practice in European jurisdictions. [43321]

Ms Blears: The Department commissioned a research project on suicide in high risk occupational groups, conducted by Professor Keith Hawton and colleagues at the centre for suicide research, University of Oxford. The project was funded over the period 1 December 1993 to 30 June 2000.

In addition, the Department funds the national confidential inquiry into suicides and homicides by people with mental illness to ensure that everyone involved with mental health services learns and implements lessons from the factors associated with serious incidents. The inquiry, led by Professor Louis Appleby, is crucial to gaining a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding homicides and suicides committed by people with mental illness.

Safety First, the 5 year report on suicide and homicide by psychiatric patients, builds on Professor Appleby's earlier report "Safer Services" published in 1999. The Department is committed to taking necessary action in response to the findings of the Inquiry. We have already published the national service framework for mental health and national plan which specifically address a number of the recommendations out lined in the earlier report. The key findings and further recommendations outlined in *Safety First* will be given full consideration and will help to inform the national suicide prevention strategy that we are currently developing.

In addition, the Department has funded:

A trial of social work interventions for adolescents who have attempted suicide.

A pilot study of mental health crisis cards.

Factors underlying and maintaining nurses' positive therapeutic attitudes to patients with severe personality disorder.

A study "Does dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) reduce deliberate self-harm in female patients with borderline personality disorder?"

In addition the NHS funds the following projects:

Suicides and open verdicts on the Railway Network

An investigation into recent temporal trends and geographic patterns of suicide.

Lay understandings of suicide, its aetiology and preventibility: a qualitative analysis of interviews with bereaved relatives.

A case control study of suicide among persons not known to mental health services.

The role of primary care in suicide prevention

Psychosocial characteristics of attempted suicide patients in Oxford

Evaluation of the effects of legislation about the availability of paracetamol and asprin on suicide and attempted suicide

A study to determine the psychological distress experienced by parents bereaved by suicide or by other uncertain causes.

There are currently no directly funded research projects, funded by the Department into assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital bed places have been created in *(a)* England and *(b)* Coventry since 1997. [43526]

Mr. Hutton: Annual information on the average daily number of available and occupied beds for England, regional office areas and each NHS trust is on the Department of Health web site www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

NHS Hospitals

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications to register parts of NHS hospitals as town or village greens there have been; when these applications were made; how many applications were successful; how many have been refused by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [43823]

Ms Blears: Applications for the registration of land as a town or village green are made to the appropriate registration authority who would advise Department officials, or the National Health Service trust owner if appropriate, about the application. The Department is aware of seven applications made between 1992 and 2000, three of which were refused by the registration authority concerned, two have been successful and two are outstanding.

These applications are handled by the relevant registration authority. They make the decisions whether they are successful or not.

Care Resources

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what increased resources have been spent in the last year on *(a)* primary care and *(b)* secondary care in (i) each English health authority and (ii) England. [43609]

Mr. Hutton: The increase in primary care and secondary care expenditure for each English health authority and for England, between 1999–2000 and 2000–2001, is shown in the table.

Health authority	*1999–2000 to 2000–2001*	
	Primary Care £000	*Secondary Care £000*
Avon	10,373	66,133
Barking and Havering	4,046	16,495
Barnet	1,486	64,112
Barnsley	3,310	15,551
Bedfordshire	10,040	21,605
Berkshire	6,955	42,842
Bexley and Greenwich	4,679	26,467
Birmingham	13,310	27,665
Bradford	11,746	3,470
Brent and Harrow	5,703	(1,643)
Bromley	2,739	343
Buckinghamshire	11,103	39,563
Bury and Rochdale	3,436	16,530
Calderdale and Kirklees	6,214	32,030
Cambridgeshire	38,678	20,253
Camden and Islington	6,354	79,677
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	10,057	9,701
County Durham and Darlington	7,695	23,001
Coventry	3,584	19,412
Croydon	4,124	61,354
Doncaster	3,534	6,254
Dorset	38,408	133,761
Dudley	2,620	15,027
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	6,245	46,124
East and North Hertfordshire	5,258	26,027
East Kent	10,318	30,717
East Lancashire	6,942	2,904
East London and The City	4,945	30,474
East Riding and Hull	7,481	29,270
East Surrey	4,967	14,626
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	9,660	(3,788)
Enfield and Haringey	5,897	42,469
Gateshead and South Tyneside	3,925	20,665
Gloucestershire	5,052	20,214
Herefordshire	2,045	(14,484)
Hillingdon	3,333	(1,282)
Isle of Wight	1,903	8,390
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4,585	50,144
Kingston and Richmond	2,762	20,044
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	13,516	37,013
Leeds	10,493	23,345
Leicestershire	10,298	25,906
Lincolnshire	9,784	15,479
Liverpool	12,384	24,234
Manchester	10,455	24,128
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	9,869	(20,754)
Morecambe Bay	2,476	5,758
Newcastle and North Tyneside	4,303	1,878
Norfolk	9,103	24,346
North And East Devon	6,273	22,433
North and Mid Hampshire	5,930	39,556
North Cheshire	4,317	9,311
North Cumbria	6,171	14,516
North Derbyshire	5,570	11,458
North Essex	26,404	41,688
North Nottinghamshire	11,597	6,547
North Staffordshire	11,133	17,619
North West Lancashire	7,175	10,488
North Yorkshire	9,090	27,029
Northamptonshire	3,149	24,348

Health authority	1999–2000 to 2000–2001 Primary Care £000	Secondary Care £000
Northumberland	(718)	4,965
Nottingham	10,046	33,316
Oxfordshire	8,869	26,430
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	5,328	30,116
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	4,506	32,521
Rotherham	4,135	9,834
Salford and Trafford	13,418	16,505
Sandwell	2,629	10,899
Sefton	5,041	87,121
Sheffield	5,247	367
Shropshire	(1,311)	13,658
Solihull	2,098	8,038
Somerset	6,129	23,294
South and West Devon	8,347	21,196
South Cheshire	6,710	21,620
South Essex	8,743	43,993
South Humber	6,090	(2,047)
South Lancashire	2,391	10,284
South Staffordshire	5,990	21,507
Southampton and South West Hampshire	7,136	23,504
Southern Derbyshire	6,028	20,659
St Helens and Knowsley	6,052	17,754
Stockport	3,262	5,818
Suffolk	7,774	27,844
Sunderland	2,838	24,112
Tees	7,392	20,740
Wakefield	10,303	23,669
Walsall	3,939	3,780
Warwickshire	5,209	17,493
West Hertfordshire	7,156	26,648
West Kent	6,286	(5,853)
West Pennine	5,718	19,536
West Surrey	7,578	9,754
West Sussex	11,687	33,752
Wigan And Bolton	7,899	34,635
Wiltshire	17,347	7,237
Wirral	4,226	11,909
Wolverhampton	5,420	9,488
Worcestershire	7,840	32,900
England total	729,780	2,227,439

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure. These include:

the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission healthcare on behalf of other health bodies;

asset revaluations in NHS Trusts being funded through health authorities;

some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area; and

the calculation is not precise as relevant expenditure in primary care trusts is not analysed completely into the purchase of primary and secondary healthcare. Prescribing services expenditure has been added in to primary health care expenditure but there may be other elements of expenditure which cannot be identified which should be incorporated within the answer.

Expenditure cannot therefore be reliably compared between health authorities.

Allocations provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Source: Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–2001

3. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent on primary and secondary healthcare by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. An element of expenditure on pharmaceutical services is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.

4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

5. Major increases in expenditure and reductions in individual cases can be explained as follows:

The increase in Dorset health authority is due to the majority of expenditure being double counted between the health authority and primary care trusts (£38,408,000 primary, £133,761,000 secondary).

The £87,121,000 increase in secondary care expenditure in Sefton health authority is due mainly to an extra £63million included in its accounts as it was the lead body in the region for mental health secure commissioning in 2000–01.

The reduction in secondary care in Herefordshire is caused by Herefordshire PCT taking over the commissioning of community health services in 2000–01 from the health authority and netting off the expenditure against income, resulting in a £14,484,000 apparent reduction in 2000–01.

The apparent decrease in secondary care expenditure in Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth health authority of £20,754,000 is caused by the treatment of asset revaluations in NHS trusts. The reduction is solely a result of accounting practice agreed with their auditors.

Decreases in secondary care expenditure in Brent and Harrow, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Hillingdon, South Humber and West Kent health authorities are also caused by the treatment of asset revaluations in NHS trusts.

Decreases in primary care expenditure in Northumberland and Shropshire health authorities in principally due to lower drug costs in 2000–01.

Refugee Doctors Steering Group

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been disbursed by the refugee doctors steering group since its establishment; and how much of its funds are still to be disbursed. [43417]

Mr. Hutton: The refugee health professionals' steering group has disbursed all £500,000 allocated for the year 2001–2. This has been given to projects targeting all health professionals, not just doctors. The funded projects provide services to help refugee health professionals prepare to take up work in the UK. A further £500,000 has been provided for 2002–03 and bids will be invited in April.

New Status Health Authorities

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role PCTs will play in the new status health authorities. [43397]

Mr. Hutton: From 1 April 2002, primary care trusts have taken on the majority of functions previously undertaken by health authorities. Subject to progress with the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the new health authorities that were established on 1 April 2002 will be re-designated as strategic health authorities, from around October 2002, with further functions devolved at that stage to primary care trusts.

The new health authorities have assumed some of the functions previously exercised by NHS Regional Offices. They are responsible for creating a strategic framework for the delivery of the NHS Plan locally; securing annual performance agreements with, and performance

managing, local NHS bodies, including primary care trusts and NHS Trusts; and building capacity and supporting performance improvement locally.

Primary care trusts are responsible for improving the health and well-being of the community, developing primary care, securing the provision of high quality services and integrating health and social care locally. Subject to legislation, primary care trusts will be given new powers and control over resources to shape and secure the provision of services across hospital, community and primary services and from the whole range of possible providers in public, private and voluntary sectors.

Primary care trusts will also be responsible for the delivery of the public health service at a local level. All primary care trusts will have a Director of Public Health appointed to their Boards who will lead a multi-disciplinary public health team. The style and approach of public health at a primary care trust level will be an operational one with a focus on community engagement and empowering frontline clinicians.

Clinicians (Overspends)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of unnecessary overspends by individual clinicians; and what measures are in place to reduce them. [44013]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Social Care Workers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for outlining the new code of practice for the National Register of Social Care Workers; and if he will make a statement. [44636]

Jacqui Smith: The general social care council (GSCC) is required, under section 62 of the Care Standards Act 2000, to publish codes setting down standards of conduct and practice for social care workers and their employers. The GSCC issued draft codes for consultation on 9 January 2002.

General Practitioners

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time-equivalent general practitioners per 100,000 population there were in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998 and *(c)* 2001. [44276]

Mr. Hutton: The number of whole-time equivalent general practitioners (GPs) excluding GP retainers and GP registrars (the NHS Plan group) per 100,000 population were *(a)* 53.5 in 1997, *(b)* 53.5 in 1998, and *(c)* 53.0 in 2001.

The total number of whole-time equivalent general practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) per 100,000 population for these years were *(a)* 56.1 in 1997, *(b)* 56.3 in 1998, and *(c)* 56.6 in 2001.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average annual increase of whole time equivalent general practitioners was in percentage terms in England in each year since 1996, including the latest year for which figures are available. [45717]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Information is shown in the table, a copy of which is in the Library. Between 1996 and 2001 there was an average annual increase of whole time equivalent general practitioner's (excluding GP Retainers) of 0.6 per cent and an average annual increase of whole time equivalent unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) of 0.3 per cent.

Domiciliary Oxygen Therapy

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the consultation document on the Review of Domiciliary Oxygen Services. [44303]

Ms Blears: We expect to consider possible options arising from the review of the domiciliary oxygen service shortly.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the different forms of domiciliary oxygen therapy available on the NHS drugs tariff for prescription to people who are on longterm oxygen therapy. [44300]

Ms Blears: Long term oxygen therapy should, wherever possible, be provided by an oxygen concentrator installed in the patient's home. Gaseous oxygen in cylinders is also available, but is primarily intended for patients needing intermittent therapy.

Cardiac Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals used by the NHS for cardiac services meet the 400 CABGs standard identified by the NSF for coronary heart disease; and if he will list those that do not. [44284]

Yvette Cooper: According to *Hospital Episode Statistics* for 2000–1, 28 National Health Service (NHS) Trusts meet the national service framework standard. One trust, the Royal Free Hampstead Hospitals NHS Trust, has fewer than 400 coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) procedures recorded. However, that trust stopped performing CABGs early in the year. Other trusts do not carry out CABGs.

Figures for operations carried out by hospitals in the independent sector used by the NHS are not collected centrally at the present time.

Hepatitis B Vaccines

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the criteria to be met for people to receive Hepatitis B vaccines free of charge. [44657]

Yvette Cooper: Hepatitis B immunisation is provided free of charge, if in a general practitioner's clinical opinion, the procedure is medically necessary. Some groups typically at risk from infection are health care workers, medical students, injecting drug misusers, haemophiliacs and patients with chronic renal failure.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44846]

Ms Blears: The recorded costs of repair to the Department's buildings attributable to criminal damage within the last four financial years are:

	£
1997–98	£3,698
1998–99	£5,908
1999–00	£1,650
2000–01	£3,289

Care Homes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing care homes and their beds there were in the borough of Bournemouth from 1997 to 2001. [45952]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the total number of residential care homes and places in Bournemouth for the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in Table 1. Information on the number of nursing homes and places is collected by health authority only. Figures for Dorset Health Authority are in Table 2.

Table 1: Residential care homes and places Bournemouth at 31 March 1997 to 2001

Number

Year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential:					
Homes	—	261	211	181	166
Places	—	3,339	3,043	2,662	2,520

— Not available

Table 2: Nursing care homes and places Dorset at 31 March 1997 to 2001

Number

Year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Nursing:					
Homes	144	124	133	125	117
Places	3,496	3141	3,414	3,126	3,086

— Not available

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the guidance on the decision to admit someone to a care home; and if he will make a statement. [41604]

Jacqui Smith: It is anticipated that guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care will be published shortly.

Hospitals (Shropshire)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice NHS bodies in Shropshire have received about *(a)* the urgency and *(b)* the scope of a merger between hospital trusts in the county. [45730]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I am not aware that NHS bodies in Shropshire received advice concerning any urgent need to prepare an Expression of Interest document to put before the Secretary of State.

The full scope of the proposal cannot be determined at this early stage, although all concerned parties are to be engaged whilst preparing the Expression of Interest document.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice was sought by or given to NHS bodies in Shropshire about the timing of the launch of its consultation on a prospective expression of interest in the merger of hospital trusts in the county in relation to the abolition of the local health authority and the establishment of primary care trusts. [45731]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust and the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust made a decision that preparing the Expression of Interest document should wait until the uncertainty around the future roles of the NHS bodies in Shropshire were resolved to ensure their full involvement in the process.

I understand that the roles have been made clear, and the new Strategic Health Authority and Primary Care Trusts although physically not in place when the Trusts made their intentions public, had been included in discussions affecting the future of healthcare services within the locality.

Audiologists

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many audiologists are employed in the NHS; and how many vacancies there are. [45979]

Mr. Hutton: Workforce and vacancy information collected annually by the Department does not identify audiologists. The Department is working with the professional bodies and National Health Service employers to develop an accurate picture of the entire healthcare scientist workforce.

Hospital Construction

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals construction started in 2001–02. [46118]

Mr. Hutton: The following hospital schemes with a capital value of £10 million or greater began construction in 2001–02.

NHS Trust	*Capital Cost £m*	*Start on site date*	*Funding method*
Thames Gateway NHS Trust	13.5	May 2001	Public capital
West London Mental Health NHS Trust	14.0	September 2001	Public capital
North Lincolnshire & Goole Hospitals NHS Trust	11.8	January 2002	Public Capital
Barnet Primary Care Trust (Edgware)	23.8	April 2001	Public Capital
Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	29.7	April 2001	Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
West Middlesex University University Hospitals NHS Trust	60.0	January 2001	PFI
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust	137.0	May 2001	PFI

NHS Trust	Capital Cost £m	Start on site date	Funding method
Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust (Hexham)	28.8	April 2001	PFI
Royston Buntingford & Bishop's Stortford PCT	14.7	May 2001	PFI
Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust	12.80	March 2002	PFI
Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS (Farnham)	15.0	October 2001	PFI

Adoption

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children were placed for adoption by each local authority with *(a)* a married couple and *(b)* a single person in each of the last three years; [46409]

(2) how many applications for adoption were made to each local authority by *(a)* a married couple and *(b)* a single person in each of the last three years. [46408]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on the total number of adoption orders granted to married couples and single people in England in each of the last three years is shown in the table. The figures include domestic, inter-country and stepparent adoptions and adopters assessed through local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies.

Year ending 31 December	Total number of adoption orders	Number of adoption orders to married couples	Number of adoption orders to single people
1999	4748	4537	211
2000	4789	4546	243
2001	5047	4745	302

Source:
The Registrar General for England and Wales at the General Register Office (Office for National Statistics)

Nurses

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the Key Worker Scheme on recruitment and retention of nursing staff in the South East. [46434]

Ms Blears: The Starter Home Initiative scheme, announced on 6 September 2001, is still in its early stages and will eventually enable around 5,000 nurses and other essential health workers to be assisted in buying homes.

Information on the number of key workers who have purchased homes in the South East under the Starter Home Initiative during the financial year 2001–2002 will be available towards the end of April 2002.

It is proposed that the DTLR will conduct an evaluation of the scheme later this year, or early in 2003.

Cancer Plan

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average wait was for urgent GP referral to treatment for *(a)* children's cancers, *(b)* testicular cancers, *(c)* acute leukaemia, *(d)* breast cancers and *(e)* all cancers at the latest date for which figures are available. [45783]

Yvette Cooper: We do not currently hold data on waiting times from urgent general practitioner (GP) referral to treatment for all cancer patients. Standards of a maximum wait of one month from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and one month from urgent GP referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia came into effect at the end of December 2001. Central monitoring of these standards began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published on a quarterly basis. Data collection on waiting times to treatment for other tumour types will be introduced as we rollout the Cancer Plan waiting times targets.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in developing services to improve genetic risk assessment for cancer under the Cancer Plan. [45775]

Yvette Cooper: In April 2001, the Secretary of State announced a £30 million package of investment in genetic services pver the next three years. Part of this money has been allocated to boost capacity in counselling and testing genetic services around the regions.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellent (NICE) are developing a clinical guideline on the classification of risk in, and management of, patients presenting with a familial risk of breast cancer.

The National Screening Committee (NSC) organised three workshops in autumn 2000 to investigate population genetic screening for colorectal cancer, breast and ovarian cancer and heritable thrombophilia. The outcomes of the workshops and the subsequent advice of the NSC was that at present there was no case for population screening for any of these late onset genetic diseases, however this will be kept under review.

Work on common datasets is being developed as part of the development of the National Cancer Dataset.

Dentists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists worked in the UK in 2001; and what was the comparable figure for 1997. [46180]

Ms Blears: The number of NHS dentists working in the UK is shown in the table for 30 September in the years 1997 and 2001 for each NHS dental service.

These figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent (wte) and take no account of part-time working. Dentists working in more than one dental service are included in each service apart from dentists working in both PDS and GDS who are counted in the GDS only.

Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

Number of dentists working at 30 September in 1997 and 2001 United Kingdom

30 September	General Dental Service[1]	Salaried service of GDS	Personal Dental Service[2]	Community Dental Service	Hospital Dental Service	Total
1997	20,270	220		1,850	2,772	25,114
2001	22,220	130	467	1,832[3]	2,783[3]	27,432

Notes:
1. The General Dental Service (GDS) cover principals on a HA list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.
2. The Personal Dental Service (PDS) began in October 1998. The data covers dentists working in the PDS who are not working in the GDS.
3. For Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, September 2000 figures are used.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in each health authority are practising in the NHS. [46179]

Ms Blears: The number of NHS dentists working in England at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table for each Health Authority for each NHS dental service.

These figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent (wte) and take no account of part-time working. Dentists working in more than one dental service are included in each service apart from dentists working in both PDS and GDS who are counted in the GDS only.

Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

Number of dentists working in the NHS by Health Authority at 30 September 2001 England

Health Authority	General Dental Service[1]	Salaried service of GDS	Personal Dental Service dentists[2]	Community Dental Service dentists[3]	Hospital Dental Service dentists[3]	Total[3,4]
England	18,354	86	467	1,348	2,184	22,439
Avon	441	0	8	40	70	560
Barking & Havering	131	13	0	10	10	160
Barnet, Enfield & Haringey	377	0	1	20	20	420
Barnsley	66	0	1	0	10	70
Bedfordshire	189	6	19	30	20	260
Berkshire	313	0	0	30	20	360
Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich	294	6	5	30	10	340
Birmingham	320	0	24	30	150	520
Bradford	144	0	0	20	20	190
Brent & Harrow	221	0	0	20	20	250
Buckinghamshire	294	1	24	30	10	360
Bury & Rochdale	120	0	5	10	10	150
Calderdale & Kirklees	199	0	0	20	20	230
Cambridgeshire	248	7	4	20	30	310
Camden & Islington	225	1	1	20	110	360
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	178	2	29	40	10	260
County Durham & Darlington	167	0	0	10	0	180
Coventry	94	0	0	10	20	120
Croydon	151	0	0	10	20	180
Doncaster	99	0	0	0	10	110
Dorset	279	0	0	10	30	310
Dudley	91	0	0	10	10	110
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	352	0	6	0	20	380
East Kent	210	0	5	10	20	250
East Lancashire	165	0	3	20	20	210
East London & The City	204	9	1	30	70	320
East Riding & Hull	155	0	7	20	30	210
East Surrey	199	0	0	10	0	210
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove	324	0	1	20	30	370
Gateshead & South Tyneside	125	0	0	10	0	140
Gloucestershire	225	0	13	30	20	290
Herefordshire	74	0	9	10	0	100
Hertfordshire	512	0	0	20	10	550
Hillingdon	104	2	0	0	0	110
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & SE Hampshire	238	0	11	30	30	310
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	217	8	0	40	10	280
Kingston & Richmond	159	0	0	10	30	190
Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham	272	0	27	20	170	490
Leeds	284	0	0	10	70	360
Leicestershire	282	0	1	20	30	330
Lincolnshire	157	2	4	10	20	200
Liverpool	154	0	11	30	60	250
Manchester	171	0	2	20	130	330
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth	298	3	0	30	20	350
Morecambe Bay	117	1	1	10	10	140
Newcastle & North Tyneside	170	0	0	0	110	290
Norfolk	284	0	4	20	40	340
North & East Devon	204	0	5	10	20	230
North & Mid Hampshire	206	0	0	10	20	230
North Cheshire	95	0	7	20	10	130
North Cumbria	107	0	1	10	10	130
North Derbyshire	117	0	5	10	10	140

Number of dentists working in the NHS by Health Authority at 30 September 2001 England

Health Authority	General Dental Service[1]	Salaried service of GDS	Personal Dental Service dentists[2]	Community Dental Service dentists[3]	Hospital Dental Service dentists[3]	Total [3,4]
North Essex	319	0	0	10	30	360
North Nottinghamshire	120	0	0	0	10	130
North Staffordshire	126	0	15	0	0	140
North West Lancashire	172	0	1	10	20	200
North Yorkshire	304	0	4	30	40	380
Northamptonshire	171	0	0	10	20	200
Northumberland	101	0	0	0	0	110
Nottingham	225	0	0	10	20	250
Oxfordshire	257	0	13	20	30	320
Redbridge & Waltham Forest	185	0	0	10	10	200
Rotherham	76	1	0	10	10	90
Salford & Trafford	158	0	3	10	10	180
Sandwell	93	0	2	20	0	110
Sefton	96	0	5	0	30	130
Sheffield	199	0	0	10	70	290
Shropshire	143	0	4	20	10	180
Solihull	68	0	5	10	0	80
Somerset	176	1	7	10	20	210
South & West Devon	254	14	10	20	40	340
South Cheshire	256	0	22	20	20	310
South Derbyshire	180	0	5	20	20	220
South Essex	247	0	0	10	20	270
South Humber	81	0	0	10	10	100
South Lancashire	97	2	2	20	0	120
South Staffordshire	178	0	11	10	10	220
Southampton & South West Hampshire	200	0	19	40	20	280
St Helens & Knowsley	104	0	8	10	10	130
Stockport	119	0	0	10	10	130
Suffolk	228	0	3	0	20	260
Sunderland	95	0	0	10	20	120
Tees	208	0	0	10	30	250
Wakefield	108	0	0	10	10	120
Walsall	57	0	3	10	0	70
Warwickshire	170	0	6	20	10	200
West Kent	367	2	0	30	30	420
West Pennine	151	1	0	10	10	170
West Surrey	307	0	32	30	30	400
West Sussex	349	0	11	0	30	390
Wigan & Bolton	182	0	0	10	10	210
Wiltshire	215	4	6	30	20	280
Wirral	136	0	8	10	10	160
Wolverhampton	71	0	5	10	10	90
Worcestershire	183	0	12	20	10	230

Notes:
1. The General Dental Service (GDS) figures cover principals on a HA list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.
2. The Personal Dental Service (PDS) covers dentists working in the PDS who are not working in the GDS.
3. Figures by Health Authority are rounded to the nearest 10.

Waiting Lists (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting lists are for operations in the Leicestershire health area in each category. [46181]

Yvette Cooper: The table below shows the waiting lists for elective admission by specialty in the Leicestershire Health Authority area as at 31 December 2001—the latest published figures that are available:

Specialty	Ordinary admissions	Day cases
General surgery	1768	1605
Urology	296	442
Trauma/orthopaedics	1698	917
ENT	1393	270
Ophthalmology	717	2083
Oral surgery	159	362
Neurosurgery	21	1
Plastic surgery	444	328
Cardiothoracic surgery	320	—
Paediatric surgery	49	139
A&E	—	30
Anaesthetics	212	231
Pain management	30	163
General medicine	1	67
Gastroenterology	0	103
Cardiology	274	548
Dermatology	0	18
Thoracic medicine	0	6
Nephrology	0	3
Neurology	13	42
Rheumatology	0	7
Gynaecology	707	529
Clinical oncology	0	383
Total (all specialties)	8102	8277

Source:
Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England (copies are available in House of Commons Library and on the DoH website at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes/).

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Department has spent on research into cystic fibrosis since 1997; and which organisations the Government have met to discuss raising awareness of the disease. [46167]

Jacqui Smith: The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. Since 1997 the Department's expenditure on directly commissioned research projects relating to cystic fibrosis is approximately £394 thousand.

In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support funding for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the National Health Service. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department but the total investment is considerably greater than just the spend on directly commissioned projects.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease and receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC has spent an estimated £8.4 million on cystic fibrosis research since 1997.

The Government met with the Cystic Fibrosis Trust in 2001. Discussions included raising awareness of the disease.

Children at Risk

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children classified as at risk have been killed in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [46440]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not currently collected centrally. However, we are developing a comprehensive database of all serious case reviews, carried out in accordance with Chapter 8 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*—the Government's guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, to improve the national recording of serious incidents, including deaths and serious injuries. This will enable us to identify the numbers and types of a range of serious cases, where the children concerned are known to social services Departments.

Correspondence

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 5 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Fareham, concerning his constituent Mr. Fred Johnson. [45807]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 25 March.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the link between air travel and deep vein thrombosis. [47043]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We take the health of aircraft passengers and aircrew members very seriously. Although further research needs to be carried out into the links between deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and long distance travel, blood clots can occur when people remain immobile and seated for long periods of time and therefore could occur in a range of travel situations.

On 30 November 2001 the Department issued information and advice to the airlines and the public about minimising the risk of DVT during long journeys. This included practical advice for air passengers on long haul flights. It also identified certain groups who may be at a higher risk of DVT and advised them to seek medical advice before travelling and described simple in-seat exercises that should be recommended to all air passengers.

To maximise access for the public to this information and advice it is available through health services, the internet, the airlines and NHS Direct and will be kept under review in the light of new research information.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase the proportion of departmental business undertaken electronically to 25 per cent by 2002 will be met. [47363]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the payment of all undisputed invoices within 30 days or the agreed contractual terms will be met. [47280]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the independence of NICE. [46828]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* It has always been our intention that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) should have a large measure of independence from Government and from other interests while remaining visibly a part of the National Health Service. In particular, NICE decides on its own processes for developing its guidance. We have announced in our recently published response to the Kennedy report, that we intend to further strengthen NICE's independence. We will bring forward measures to remove the requirement for approval from the Secretary of State for Health and the National Assembly for Wales for disseminating NICE guidance and for appointments to NICE committees.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding of NICE. [46738]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has allocated £14.8 million for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in 2002–2003.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes; [47209]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46845]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Expenditure arises on hospitality and entertainment only in the context of promoting the Department's business objectives. Departmental information systems do not classify expenditure by Ministers, special advisers or other employment category, nor do information systems provide a detailed breakdown of food and drink.

In the last five years the total amount spent by the Department on hospitality has been as follows:

	£
1997–98	£90,883
1998–99	£67,953
1999–00	£50,114
2000–01	£93,091
2001–02	£80,077 to 31 December 2001

To identify expenditure by Ministers or special advisers on food, alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks would involve disproportionate cost.

Hospices

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he and his Ministers have had with representatives of hospices providing palliative care to children since 7 June 2001. [47023]

Yvette Cooper: Last month I was pleased to meet the management and supporters of the Richard House Children's Hospice in London, on the occasion of the launch of the New Opportunities Fund application process for funding palliative care projects in support of both children and adults. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State previously visited this hospice for its official opening. Last November my noble Friend Lord Hunt met the representatives of two other children's hospices.

Foreign Nurses (English Tests)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will support moves by the UKCC to introduce English tests for foreign nursing recruits. [47871]

Mr. Hutton: The UKCC was replaced on 1 April by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. It will be for the new Council to consult widely on how it proposes to exercise its functions, which include assessing the knowledge of English of overseas-qualified practitioners, other than nationals of European Economic Area States. In the meantime it will inherit existing policies and procedures, which already provide for such assessments.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of sport in the treatment of depressive illness. [47434]

Jacqui Smith: No formal assessment has been made of the use of sport in the treatment of depressive illness. However, regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health including reduced anxiety, enhanced mood and self esteem.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that health and social workers dealing with children and adolescents are trained to recognise mental health problems. [47437]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The national service framework for children, which includes child and adolescent mental health and psychological well being, will consider the training and competencies of health and social care workers and the early recognition of mental health problems.

In September 2003 we are replacing the diploma in social work with a three-year degree level qualification. The qualification will be based on a prescribed curriculum, which will include key areas which students must undertake as part of their learning and assessment. One of these will be human growth and development, which will incorporate mental health matters.

Asthma

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the *(a)* adult population and *(b)* population under 16 use (i) puffer inhalers and (ii) spacer inhalers in the treatment of asthma. [47466]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Broomfield Hospital, Essex

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurse and *(b)* consultant vacancies there are at Broomfield Hospital, Essex at the latest available date. [46709]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April]:* Broomfield Hospital is a hospital within Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust. Data is collected at Trust level only.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001

Vacancies in NHS Trusts by Region, HA area and NHS Trust, consultant and qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] an numbers

	All consultants				Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff			
	3 month vacancy rates per cent	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)	3 month vacancy rates per cent	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)
England Total	3.0 per cent	672	21,580	23,661	3.4 per cent	8,997	255,903	316,280
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	2.1 per cent	2	100	98	2.6 per cent	21	776	1,005

Notes:
1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents)
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical & dental and non medical workforce censuses (whole time equivalents)
3. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest ten
4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place
5. * = figures based on less than ten posts
6. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding
7. HA figures are based on Trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare
8. Figures may not match previously published data due to
(i) a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data ii) NHS Trusts "mapped" into different
(ii) NHS Trusts "mapped" into different HA Areas/Regions to be consistents with Vacancies data (as at 31 March 2001)

Source:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001
Department of Health non-medical workforce census 2000
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census 2000

Tobacco Advertising And Promotion Bill

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to notify the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill to the European Commission as a technical regulation under Directive 98/34/EC. [50050]

Yvette Cooper: We notified the Bill on 28 March 2002. The notification is without prejudice to the Government's view that the Bill does not contain any technical regulations.

Drug-resistant Micro-organisms

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what collections of drug resistant micro organisms are known to the Health Protection Agency; and what steps are being taken to maintain and support such collections. [45751]

Yvette Cooper: Currently, the National Collection of Type Cultures (NCTC) and National Collection of Pathogenic Fungi (NCPF), are comprehensive collections of pathogenic micro-organisms, including strains known to be drug resistant. Both NCTC and NCPF are maintained by the Public Health Laboratory Service in the NCTC laboratory and supported by the funding provided to the Public Health Laboratory Service by the Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Chief Medical Officer's strategy, *Getting Ahead of the Curve*, proposes the creation of a Health Protection Agency which will take over functions currently performed by the PHLS and other bodies. We aim to establish the new agency by 1 April 2003.

Health Services (Barnet)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of waiting times at *(a)* Barnet and *(b)* Northwick Park Hospitals' accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement. [45820]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Waiting times at Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trusts and North West London Hospitals NHS Trust are monitored via the NHS regional office. Information on numbers of patients waiting over 2 hours, between 2–4 hours and over 4 hours for admission is published every quarter. Latest information is available via www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity

Scoliosis

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations for Scoliosis correction were carried out by the NHS in each of the last three years; and what plans he has to increase this number. [45872]

Ms Blears: The numbers of Finished Consultant Episodes for patients with a primary diagnosis of scoliosis* who underwent a procedure in the National Health Service for each of the last three years are outlined in shown in the table. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to decide what services to provide for their populations including those who require operations for scoliosis. There are no plans to introduce national targets specifically for this service.

NHS Hospitals in England

	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01
Finished Consultant Episodes	1,172	1,193	1,212

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health, England.*
ICD-10: M41.0 – M41.9 (ICD-10 refers to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (10th edition)). This is the international classification system for diseases. The codes are 4 digits (a letter followed by 3 numbers).

Retirement Health Checks

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men pensioners in 2000–01 broken down by regional health authority completed a free health check on retirement through the pilot scheme announced in the NHS Plan; and if he will make a statement. [46282]

Yvette Cooper: None. The first pre retirement health check pilots began in 2001–2. They are focused on the health needs of people who have not yet retired, in the 50–65 age group, many still in active employment, although some retired people are also involved in them.

NHS Publications

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what publications were published by NHSplus in 2000–01; how many of each publication were printed and distributed; and what the cost was of each publication. [46347]

Yvette Cooper: There were no publications by NHS Plus in 2000–01. (NHS Plus was launched in November 2001. In 2001–2 its only publication was a "flyer" leaflet, "*Bringing Good Health To Your Business*", the total cost of which was £3,335 for 15,000 leaflets. Generally, NHS Plus provides information via its website (www.nhsplus.nhs.uk).

Doctors (Suspensions)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were on suspension at the most recent date for which figures are available. [45729]

Mr. Hutton: As at 31 December 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, 29 hospital and community medical and dental staff had been suspended for more than six months.

NHS Procurement

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department ensured *(a)* that all NHS trusts set a target of at least three per cent in 2000–01 for procurement savings and *(b)* that delivery of these savings was monitored. [45727]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* All National Health Service trusts were set a target of 3 per cent purchasing savings by the Department of Health for the year 2000–01.

These savings were monitored by National Health Service trusts and by Department of Health regional offices.

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the transfer of a liability to a PCT from a health authority or trust has an impact on the level of resources available to that PCT for spending on patient care; and if he will make a statement. [45851]

Mr. Hutton: The level of resources available to primary care trusts for spending on patient care in year will be unaffected by the transfer of assets and liabilities.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money by way of liabilities each PCT *(a)* has taken responsibility for and *(b)* is expected to take responsibility for; and from whom the responsibility is transferred; [45844]

(2) if he will list the liabilities by value of trusts and health authorities which *(a)* have been and *(b)* are to be transferred to PCTs. [45843]

Mr. Hutton: The transfer of liabilities from health authorities and National Health Service trusts to primary care trusts in 2000–2001 is shown in the table. Information on liabilities transferring for the 2001–02 financial year will be available until the autumn.

Transferring body	*Liabilities £000*	*Receiving primary care trust*
Cambridgeshire HA	1,706	Fenland
	1,190	North Peterborough
	795	South Peterborough
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	660	Carrick
Doncaster HA	2,358	Doncaster Central
Dorset HA	2,950	Bournemouth
	1,577	Poole
	1,558	North Dorset
	1,395	Poole Central and North
East Lancashire HA	2,636	Blackburn with Darwen
Hillingdon HA	7,870	Hillingdon
Norfolk HA	2,869	West Norfolk
North Staffordshire HA	2,280	North Stoke
Northampton HA	1,860	Daventry and South Northamptonshire
South Essex HA	3,286	Southend on Sea
South Humber HA	4,002	North East Lincolnshire
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	2,292	Southampton East Healthcare
Southern Derbyshire HA	1,497	Central Derby
West Kent HA	3,666	Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley
North Nottinghamshire HA	1,733	Mansfield District
	2,450	Newark and Sherwood
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	2,442	Nelson and West Merton
Herefordshire Community	423	Herefordshire

Transferring body	Liabilities £000	Receiving primary care trust
NHS Trust		
Milton Keynes Community NHS Trust	1,642	Milton Keynes

Source:
Health authority audited summarisation forms 2000–01
PCT audited summarisation schedules 2000–01
The table shows only liabilities of over £150,000.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the amount was of NHS trust deficits in each trust in each of the last five years; [45850]

(2) how many NHS trusts have an in-year deficit position; and what is the deficit. [45849]

Mr. Hutton: Information relating to National Health Service trust deficits for the financial years 1996–7 to 2000–01 has been placed in the Library. Changes (in line with best accounting practice) in the accounting and financial reporting arrangements for NHS trusts mean that the figures provided for 1996–97 are not directly comparable with 1997–98 or thereafter.

We are in discussions with NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts about managing their end-of-year positions. The information requested for the current year will be available when the annual audited accounts are completed and published.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the underlying deficits are *(a)* in each NHS trust and/or body and *(b)* in England. [45848]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for National Health Service trusts has been placed in the Library. A change in the format of the annual accounts from 2000–01 means health authorities are no longer required to account on an income and expenditure basis.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the likelihood of his new target for treatment of urgent cancers being met in Oxfordshire in 2002–03. [45931]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Oxfordshire health economy recognises the importance of the cancer targets in 2002–03 and will invest extra resources this year to support their achievement of targets in this area. In support of this, the Four Counties Cancer Network is working to improve cancer services to deliver better quality services to patients.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 April 2002

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

3. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Child Support Agency's achievement against performance targets in the last five years. [45013]

Mr. Darling: Over the years 1997 to 2001 taken together, the Child Support Agency has met the majority of its targets. It is on course to meet all of its targets this year.

Final Salary Pension Schemes

16. **Mr. Pollard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to encourage companies to retain existing final salaries pension schemes and to make them available to new employees; and if he will make a statement. [45027]

Mr. McCartney: We welcome the fact that many employers continue to provide occupational pensions on a voluntary basis to their employees. Final salary and money purchase schemes can both provide good incomes in retirement as long as sufficient contributions are made. When deciding what type of scheme to offer, an employer must take into account the costs of doing so and the long-term impact on their business. The Government want to create an environment in which employers can continue to provide occupational pension schemes. We want to remove unnecessary burdens on schemes. As part of this we have announced the replacement of the Minimum Funding Requirement. We have already introduced interim changes to the MFR designed to enable it to operate more effectively. We have commissioned Alan Pickering to report in summer 2002 on ways to simplify the overall burden of regulation on schemes and will be publishing proposals later this year.

Housing Benefit

19. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the housing benefit system. [45030]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a comprehensive long-term strategy for reforming housing benefit and dealing with the legacy of neglect we have inherited.

Work is already well under way to radically improve HB administration and bear down on fraud. Many of the key measures set out in our response to consultation on the Housing Green Paper have already been implemented. For example, we have launched comprehensive new performance standards, reformed the extended payments scheme to provide better work incentives, reformed the single room rent, and are making housing benefit easier to administer.

These form a firm foundation on which we can build more fundamental reform in the longer term.

New Deal

20. **Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of new deal leavers have entered sustained unsubsidised jobs. [45031]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to January 2002, 56 per cent. of young people leaving the new deal for known destinations entered sustained, unsubsidised jobs. In addition, research shows that an equivalent proportion of those leaving for unknown destinations also move into work.

31. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the New Deal for Lone Parents. [45045]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The New Deal for Lone Parents is a long-term investment, making a real difference to the lives of lone parents and their children. Over 300,000 lone parents have benefited from the help and support offered through the new deal, and over 130,000 of these have found work.

Stakeholder Pensions

21. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the Government's target group have taken out stakeholder pensions. [45032]

Mr. McCartney: Comprehensive information is not yet available (and will not be until the end of the current tax year). However, early figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI), based on a limited sample of information from pension providers, show that in cases where earnings of purchasers are known to providers, then the majority of them have earnings of between £10,000 and £30,000 a year. ABI figures also show that 320,000 employers have designated a stakeholder pension scheme for their workforces as at the end of February 2002; representing a compliance rate of over 85 per cent., and over 750,000 people have bought a stakeholder pension.

Pensioner Poverty

22. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of pensioners living in poverty in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [45033]

Mr. McCartney: Poverty and social exclusion are complex concepts, affecting many aspects of people's lives; including their living standards, health, housing and quality of environment. The third "Opportunity for all" report sets out the Governments strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy.

The Government's first priority was to address the immediate problem of pensioner poverty today. That is why we introduced the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) in April 1999 to provide money for the poorest pensioners as quickly as possible. 2,200 pensioners in the Cotswold constituency are receiving the MIG and over 2 million pensioners nationally benefit from the MIG.

This Government has also introduced measures to ensure that all pensioners share in rising prosperity. From this April the basic state pension has risen by £3 a week for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples above inflation increases last year.

This is in addition to the introduction of winter fuel payments, currently £200, made to over 11 million pensioners and free TV licences for the over 75s which benefit some 3 million pensioners.

From 2003 the pension credit will reward those who have worked hard and saved hard.

We are also committed to tackling the longer term issues by helping people build up good second pensions. To this end we have introduced stakeholder pensions and improved the state earnings related pension scheme through the introduction of the state second pension. This will boost the additional state pension entitlement of £14 million low and moderate earners. Additionally, for the first time, 3 million carers and 2 million people whose working lives are disrupted by long-term illness or disability will also be able to build up entitlement to the state second pension.

Basic Pension

23. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to restore the link between the basic pension and earnings. [45035]

Mr. McCartney: Restoring the earnings link does nothing to help poorer pensioners. We will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2.5 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners. This is three times more than an earnings link since 1998 would have given them.

Increases in the basic state pension over the last two years have given single pensioners £2.10 a week more than an earnings link would have given them and £3.35 more for couples.

Older People

24. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to develop his Department's strategy to help older people. [45036]

Mr. McCartney: The Government is committed to improving the position of older people in our society. This is an issue that is relevant not only to my Department but also to others across Government.

The Government's strategy is co-ordinated by a Cabinet sub-committee of Ministers from several Departments, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The strategy consists of five main strands: encouraging and enabling active aging, promoting age diversity, tackling pensioner poverty for today's and future pensioners, maintaining and supporting independence in later life and working in partnership with older people to provide better services focused on the needs of individuals.

We will publish a report later this year that will show how the Government's strategy is helping to ensure that later life is a time of opportunity for older people.

Jobcentre Plus

25. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are receiving services from Jobcentre Plus. [45037]

36. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress made in implementing the Jobcentre Plus programme. [45050]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus was launched as a national organisation on 1 April, replacing the former Employment Service and the working age functions of the Benefits Agency, and providing services to around 5 million people. The agency's business plan for 2002–03, a copy of which is available in the Library, sets out the organisation's aims and priorities for its first 12 months, including opening around a further 225 fully integrated offices by April 2003.

Unemployment Statistics

26. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the number of people of working age who are neither working nor registered as seeking work or as benefit claimants. [45038]

Malcolm Wicks: About 4.1 million people of working age are not working, registered for work or claiming benefits themselves.

People With Disabilities

27. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made in helping people with disabilities to get and keep employment. [45039]

Maria Eagle: We have introduced a wide range of measures to help people with disabilities secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

We have improved the permitted work rules in incapacity benefit to make it easier for people to make the first moves into work. Over 8,200 people have already been helped into work through the new deal for disabled people pilots. Building on that success we now have a national network of job brokers from the public, private and voluntary sectors who work closely with employers, voluntary groups and health services to help people with health conditions and disabilities move into work. Later this year we are also introducing the job retention and rehabilitation pilots to test the effectiveness of making co-ordinated, earlier health and/or employment interventions to help people who become sick or disabled to stay in work.

Disability employment advisers continue to provide specialist support to disabled jobseekers, and disabled employees and their employers. Disability employment advisers can draw on the expertise of occupational psychologists to help disabled people find and retain work.

The roll-out of integrated Jobcentre Plus offices will provide disabled people with work-focused meetings with a personal adviser to ensure they are aware of all the help and opportunities available to them.

We established the Disability Rights Commission to help disabled people secure their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act, and to provide information and advice to employers and service providers.

Pension Credit

28. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many pensioners will not receive their entitlement to pension credit in this financial year. [45042]

Mr. McCartney: Over 5 million pensioners will be eligible for pension credit when it is introduced in October 2003. Those receiving pension credit stand to gain £400 a year on average.

Benefit Fraud

29. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of fraud there were in 2000–01 in income support. [45043]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to state the exact number. We estimate, extrapolating from the results of the Area Benefit Reviews, that there were 204,000 cases of fraud in income support in 2000–01.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his targets are for the reduction of benefit fraud. [45025]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a target to reduce losses from fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 25 per cent. by 2004 and by 50 per cent. by 2006. We have already achieved an 18 per cent. reduction.

From this month we are beginning to use new powers in the Fraud Act 2001 that make it easier to catch fraudsters and give greater punishments to those who persistently abuse the system.

Also from this month, all local authorities are now operating within the new incentive scheme, focusing on the full range of anti-fraud measures as well as customer error; 77 per cent. of local authorities have now signed up to participate in our verification framework that stops fraud from getting into the system in the first place. So far, net savings from the verification framework are estimated at about £100 million.

We have introduced the Housing Benefit review to provide a continuous measure of fraud and error in Housing Benefit. This will enable us to gauge the success of the range of initiatives we have put in place to tackle Housing Benefit fraud.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much benefit fraud cost his Department in each of the last five years; and how many people have been prosecuted for benefit fraud in the last year; and what range of penalties have been imposed. [47450]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Our latest estimate is that £2 billion is lost each year through benefit fraud in the system. Latest results show that in the 2½ years to March 2001 we have reduced the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 18 per cent. In 2000–01 we imposed 26,958 sanctions, 11,403 of which involved prosecutions and 15,555 of which were cautions or other penalties.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was paid in error owing to benefit fraud in Weston-Super-Mare in each of the last five years. [47761]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the level of benefit fraud at constituency level is not available.

Deprived Areas (Unemployment)

30. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help people back into work in areas of acute social deprivation. [45044]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our policies, built on a foundation of a strong and stable economy, are helping people into work in all parts of the country. The New Deals have already helped well over 600,000 people into jobs.

We have introduced Action Teams for Jobs to tackle joblessness in the most employment deprived areas in the country. They are performing well, and by the end of February had helped over 23,700 people into work. Since October 2001 we have increased the number of action teams from 40 to 63. At the same time, we expanded the Stockton action team to cover six new wards, all in my hon. Friend's constituency. This expanded team has already helped over 100 people into work.

Employment Zones are helping long-term unemployed people in deprived areas into work. By the end of December, the 15 zones had helped over 20,800 people into work. We are in the process of extending the existing zones' contracts until March 2004, and are currently fully evaluating zone performance before deciding how to take the initiative further.

This month we have established Jobcentre Plus which will deliver a single, integrated service to benefit claimants of working age right across the country. Jobcentre Plus will provide a responsive, work-focused service, helping people to find jobs and the support to which they are entitled.

Disabled People (Poverty)

32. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department is doing to tackle poverty among disabled people. [45046]

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to tackle poverty among disabled people. [45040]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to the principle of work for those who can and security for those who are unable to work. We are promoting the rights of disabled people, making work pay and helping more disabled people to get and keep jobs.

This month we have established Jobcentre Plus which will deliver a single, integrated, work-focused service to people of working age claiming benefits. Those making new or repeat claims to incapacity benefit in integrated Jobcentre Plus offices are required to attend a work-focused meeting. These meetings provide disabled people with the opportunity to discuss with their personal adviser the help, benefits and opportunities available to them, including the opportunity to participate in the New Deal programmes.

A disabled person working a minimum of 35 hours a week who claims the disabled person's tax credit is now guaranteed an income of at least £172 a week. By the end of October 2001 disabled person's tax credit was boosting the incomes of over 32,000 working people. From this month we have abolished the earnings limits in the independent living funds—both for these severely disabled people and their partners. At the same time we have extended help to people with savings of up to £18,500 by increasing capital limits in the funds.

We are also providing security for those who cannot work. The disability income guarantee helps around 130,000 of the poorest severely disabled people under 60 and some 34,000 families with severely disabled children. We have extended the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance to severely disabled three and three-year-olds benefiting an estimated 6,000 severely disabled children every year. And from this month we have raised the disabled child premium in the income-related benefits to £35.50 a week giving an additional £5 on top of normal uprating. This will benefit around 80,000 children in the neediest families.

Action Teams for Jobs

33. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the work of action teams for jobs. [45047]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Action Teams for Jobs are helping the most disadvantaged jobless people in the most employment deprived areas into work. They are performing well, developing innovative and individually tailored solutions to the problems people face when looking for work.

By the end of February, Action Teams had helped over 23,700 jobless people into work. In the first six months of the new South Manchester Action Team, which covers my hon. Friend's constituency, the team has engaged with 304 people and already helped 51 of these move into work.

Pensions

34. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to increase public awareness of the state second pension; and if he will make a statement. [45048]

Mr. McCartney: The state second pension reformed the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS) on 6 April 2002. It will boost the additional state pension entitlement of 14 million low and moderate earners. Additionally, for the first time two million carers and two million people whose working lives are disrupted by long-term illness or disability will also benefit as a result of the reforms in that they will be able to build up entitlement to the state second pension.

Most people will benefit automatically from the state second pension without having to do anything new or different. Our publicity activity therefore focuses on the group who may not automatically start building up state second pension and may need to take appropriate action. We aim to encourage carers to check their circumstances now. We have produced a new leaflet and started a programme of activity to inform relevant groups, which includes press advertising. In addition, we included a message in the child benefit uprating letter, are revising existing leaflets, and we are sending copies of the new leaflet to advisers.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the additional cost of the basic state pension would be in *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2020, *(c)* 2030, *(d)* 2040 and *(e)* 2050 if the inflation rate were (i) 2 per cent. and (ii) 1.5 per cent. in one year out of every two, and (A) 2.5 per cent. or more in the other years and (B) 2.5 per cent. each year. [41195]

Malcolm Wicks: Additional cost to basic state pension if in one year out of every two the inflation rate were:

(i) 2 per cent.

(ii) 1.5 per cent.

£ billion

	2 per cent. inflation	*1.5 per cent. inflation*
2010	0.4	0.8
2020	1.5	3.05
2030	3.2	6.55
2040	5	10.5
2050	6.55	13.85

Note:

1. Figures are gross cost for GB rounded to the nearest £50 million.

The basic state pension is to be uprated by the greater of 2.5 per cent. or RPI, and so (A) and (B) would not affect expenditure in real terms.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people he expects to contract back into SERPS/the state second pension over the next 10 years from *(a)* personal pension schemes and *(b)* final salary occupational pension schemes. [44684]

Maria Eagle: No such estimate has been made. The decision to contract out of SERPS/state second pension is a matter of personal choice.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the future of the basic state pension. [45910]

Mr. McCartney: The Government believe that the basic retirement pension should remain the essential foundation of income in retirement.

We increased rates last April by £5 a week for single people and £8 a week for couples and from April 2002 there will be further increases of £3 a week for single people and £4.80 for couples. In future, the state pension will rise by at least 2.5 per cent, or the September rate of RPI, whichever is the higher.

Poverty Initiatives (Westminster)

35. **Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many area-based city of Westminster poverty initiatives are administered by his Department. [45049]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department believes that employment is the best way out of poverty and our Welfare to Work initiatives are helping people move into work in all parts of the country. The new deals have already helped over 600,000 people into jobs, including over 700 in the hon. Member's constituency.

We do recognise that there are some geographical areas that lag significantly behind the national average in terms of work outcomes. The departmental neighbourhood renewal strategy aims to improve the aggregate employment rate for the 30 local authorities with the poorest initial labour market position. The City of Westminster is not one of these 30 areas and so we are not currently administering any area-based poverty initiatives in this area. However, these constituents still have access to our range of national welfare to work initiatives available through Jobcentre Plus.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the winter heating allowance to people with disabilities. [45015]

Maria Eagle: We are mindful of the needs of people with disabilities, that is why the Government have taken steps to provide help towards the extra costs that people with disabilities may have, through Disability Living Allowance and the disability premiums in income-related benefits. This could include heating costs. Most people over 60, including many who are disabled, are entitled to winter fuel payments.

Age Discrimination

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce legislative proposals to tackle age discrimination. [45028]

Mr. McCartney: Ageist employment practices are bad for employers, older workers and society. The cost of the fall in employment of the over 50s is estimated to be in the range of £16 billion to £31 billion per year in lost gross domestic product. The Department for Work and Pensions is promoting the business case for non-ageist employment practices to all employers and individuals across Great Britain through our Age Positive campaign.

The introduction of the employment-related age discrimination legislation, and the consultations on its development, are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It is proposed that age discrimination legislation will be introduced in 2006.

Pension-sharing

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who have benefited from his Department's legislation on pension-sharing after divorce; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of this legislation. [32622]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has been monitoring pension sharing orders made by the courts. Our records show that 367 such orders have been made since December 2000. My Department is currently evaluating the effectiveness of this legislation as it applies to divorce proceedings. I hope to be able to announce the results of this in the autumn.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 420W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37896]

Mr. McCartney: Since May 1997 no refurbishment work has been carried out in ministerial private office outside of the routine programme of maintenance, repair and renewal.

Travel to Work Costs

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons high travel to work costs as a ground of variation have been abolished; and what factors underlay setting the judgment rate at 8 per cent. [44432]

Malcolm Wicks: We believe that support for children must come first. None the less we recognise that there are many calls on the finances of non-resident parents. The standard percentage rates for child support maintenance in the new scheme reflect those other demands. Any attempt to reflect the specific costs of each person would lead to the reintroduction of an overly complex scheme.

The judgment rate is the statutory interest rate. It is set in England and Wales by the Lord Chancellor and in Scotland by the Lord President of the Court of Session.

Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the pensions awareness advertising campaign. [46461]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are committed to ensuring people are properly informed in order to make decisions about saving for their retirement and the "Pensions Education" publicity campaign is a major part of this strategy. Results so far are encouraging—since the campaign started in January 2001 it has provoked more than 1.1 million responses and almost 1.4 million information guides have been sent out. Changing attitudes towards planning for retirement will inevitably take time.

Overseas Pensioners

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of Spanish presidency proposals for an EU wide pension fund solvency test; what impact he estimates such a test would have on UK final salary pension schemes; and if he will make a statement. [48554]

Mr. McCartney: The issue of EU level solvency requirements for pension funds is being considered as part of the proposed directive on occupational pension schemes. Any impact on UK schemes would depend on the details of the requirements. We are working to ensure that the final version of the directive is consistent with UK pension arrangements.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Daventry on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 617W, if he can now publish the findings of his literature and good practice reviews on vocational rehabilitation; and what progress has been made in developing conjunction with the Department of Health and national strategy for vocational rehabilitation. [48295]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The report "Employment Programmes for Disabled People: Lessons from Research Evaluations" was published on 30 January 2002 as Report No. 90 in the departmental in-house report series. A copy is available in the Library.

Ministers from this Department and the Department of Health intend to meet in the near future to discuss possible arrangements for joint working on vocational rehabilitation.

Post Office Card Account

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to delay the introduction of the post office card account. [47423]

Malcolm Wicks: The implementation of the card account is a matter for the Post Office. They hope to have accounts available from 2003 and have recently signed contracts with DWP, IR and NISSA to make these accounts available from this date.

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what has been the *(a)* budget and *(b)* outturn of (i) the community care grant budget and (ii) the loans budget, in (1) cash and (2) real terms in each year since 1997. [48642]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables:

Table 1: Cash terms

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Budgets (£ million)						
CCG Budget	97.0	98.0	98.0	100.0	103.0	108.0
Loans Budget	370.0	402.7	436.7	494.0	516.6	518.0
Contingency Reserve	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.0	1.0	1.0
In-year allocation to loans budget (£ million)	0	2.2	21.2	30.6	31.1	n/a
Outturn (£)						
CCG expenditure	96,499,000	97,774,000	98,139,000	99,978,000	n/a	n/a
Loans expenditure	366,225,000	404,364,000	457,784,000	501,150,000	n/a	n/a

Table 2: Real terms (at 2001–02 prices)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Budgets (£ million)					
CCG Budget	106.6	104.7	102.3	102.5	103.0
Loans Budget	406.5	430.4	455.9	506.4	516.6
Contingency Reserve	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.1	1.0
In-year allocation to loans budget (£ million)	0	2.4	22.1	31.4	31.4
Outturn (£)					
CCG expenditure	106,010,000	104,489,000	102,443,000	102,443,000	n/a
Loans expenditure	402,320,000	432,134,000	477,859,000	513,679,000	n/a

Notes:
1. Figures for budgets and in-year allocations are rounded to the nearest £100,000
2. n/a means figures are not yet available

Source:
Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 1997–98 to 2000–01
Social Fund Accounts 1997–98 to 2000–01

Recruitment

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Benefit Office employees recruited within the last 12 months have been over 55. [48706]

Mr. McCartney: The Department of Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security (DSS) and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. The vast majority of Benefit paying employees were employed by the DSS, therefore the data supplied below has been taken from their legacy systems.

There have been 277 people over the age of 55 recruited into benefit paying offices between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether those entitled to disability living allowance lower rate mobility component, but not the care component, who are also in receipt of disability premium in income support, will lose the latter entitlement if no longer eligible for the lower rate mobility component; and

how many people are in receipt of the disability premium in income support solely as a result of entitlement to lower rate mobility component of DLA. [48640]

Malcolm Wicks: People receiving disability living allowance qualify for the disability premium within income support regardless of whether they receive the higher, middle or lower rate of either the care or mobility component, as any of these elements allows entitlement to the disability premium.

Information on the number of people in receipt of the disability premium in income support solely as a result of being entitled to the lower rate mobility component of disability living allowance is not available.

Social Fund

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for Social Fund loans have been *(a)* refused, *(b)* fully awarded and *(c)* partially awarded yearly since 1997. [48644]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables.

Social fund

Thousands

Year	*Total number of awards*	*Partial awards included in previous column*	*Refusals*
Budgeting loans			
1997–98	916	319	494
1998–99	935	315	442
1999–2000	1,017	533	647
2000–01	1,145	661	531
Crisis loans			
1997–98	803	628	230
1998–99	866	690	247
1999–2000	939	746	336
2000–01	930	746	342

Notes:

1. The figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. The figures do not include awards on review.
3. Comparison of the award figures should only be used as a guide as the award figures and partial award figures are taken from different tables in the Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System and are counted different stages during the claim process.
4. Following the introduction of the new Budgeting Loan scheme in April 1999 there has been an increase in the number of partial awards as individual applicants are limited to a maximum available amount.

Source:

Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 1997–98 to 2000–01.

Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System.

DEFENCE

Underspends

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47795]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence's estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April 2002.

Training Estates Division

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what overseas facilities are run by the British Army's Training Estates Division; and in which countries the facilities are located; [47617]

(2) which military and security forces have received training within the British Army's Training Estates Division overseas facilities since 2 May 1997; which countries were involved; what types of training were provided; and how many personnel were trained; [47616]

(3) what human rights criteria are used to assess which military and security personnel are eligible to receive training within the British Army's Training Estates Division overseas facilities. [47618]

Mr. Ingram: The Army Estates's Division is responsible for managing UK training areas only. Part of the Army's Land Warfare Centre (LWC) (formerly Training Support Command (Land)) has responsibility for the conduct of some overseas training. The LWC conducts training at four overseas facilities. These are in Germany, Canada, Belize and Kenya. In addition, the Field Army maintains a facility in Brunei, though this is not part of the LWC training estate. I should point out that the arrangements under which we use these facilities are different in every country and we are not responsible for the "running" of all the facilities in question.

Since 1997 large numbers of British units have trained at these facilities but details are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Foreign military personnel on attachment to British units and foreign observers have also participated in British exercises, but once again, details are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The LWC does offer jungle warfare training to members of foreign forces at its facilities in Belize. Since 1997 a total of 18 students have participated in this training, 12 from the Netherlands and six from the Ukraine.

In terms of formed foreign units that use the overseas facilities, certain NATO countries are permitted to conduct training at the facilities that the LWC operate in Germany under arrangements contained within the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). This agreement in itself authorises the UK to manage facilities which are owned by the German Federal Government. In summary, the countries whose forces are permitted to train at these UK managed facilities are Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, the USA and of course Germany itself. Since 1997, the formed foreign units that have trained here are Bundeswehr Units (31 Airborne Brigade, 313 Infantry Parachute Battalion, 272 Airborne Attack Defence Battalion, Seven Armoured Recognisance Battalion, 270 Airborne Supplies Company); German Specialist Units (GSG and SEK (German Civil Police Special Operations)); Belgian Units (two (BE) Commando Battalion, Regiment Beveijing—five Linie, Regiment De Chasseurs Ardennais and one BE Parachute); Dutch Units (108 Company (Special Forces) and HQ 11 Air

Mobile Brigade); United States Units (75th Rangers) and multinational formations conducting Allied Rapid Reaction Corps training.

Because of the different arrangements that prevail, if forces from foreign nations wish to use the facilities that LWC use in Canada, Belize and Kenya, that would be matter for agreement between that country and the respective host nation. This would also apply if a country other than those specified in the SOFA wished to train on the British managed facilities in Germany.

The Ministry of Defence continues to play a role in fostering human rights through the Defence Diplomacy Mission which aims to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention. A key contribution to the fulfilment of this mission is provided by military training. Details of the Defence Diplomacy Mission including its objectives and scope is published in the MOD Policy Paper No 1; Defence Diplomacy (2001) a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Imber

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many uniformed staff were on duty in the village of Imber on Sunday on 31 March; for what purpose; and what equipment they used. [48625]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* On 31 March, four uniformed Land Wardens were on duty in Imber in order to ensure the safety of members of the general public. All the Land Wardens drive quarter tonne Land Rovers with radio communication equipment.

Medical Discharges

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons have been discharged from the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Royal Air Force for medical reasons in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [46667]

Dr. Moonie: There have been 10,067 medical discharges from the Naval Services (Royal Navy and Royal Marines), the Army and the Royal Air Force between 1 January 1996 and 31 December 2001. These are broken down by service and year in the table.

Year	*Army*	*Navy*	*RAF*	*Total*
1996	1,189	339	200	1,728
1997	1,067	354	223	1,644
1998	1,060	448	155	1,663
1999	1,099	456	189	1,744
2000	1,023	484	201	1,708
2001	973	413	194	1,580
Total	6,411	2,494	1,162	10,067

Further information on medical discharges can be found in the National Statistics publication entitled "Medical Discharges in the Armed Forces 2001" which was published on 27 March 2002. This publication can be found on the world wide web at http://www.dasa.mod.uk/medstats/discharge/ns—initframe.htm.

United Nations Missions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK service personnel have been deployed working on UN missions in each of the last five years; what the missions are; how many personnel have been involved in each mission; what the cost has been to the MOD; and if he will make a statement. [46674]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not hold information centrally in the form requested and this could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I can, however, provide details of involvement by service personnel in current UN missions, these details being a snapshot only, as numbers vary during the course of a year. The details, including estimated costs for financial year 2001–02, are set out in the table. Costs for UN missions are reimbursed to the MOD from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who in turn are allocated funds from the Global Conflict Prevention Fund.

£ million

Mission	*Country*	*Number of UK personnel*	*Cost*
UNOMIG	Georgia	7	0.5
UNAMSIL	Sierra Leone	22	2
MONUC	D. R. Congo	6	0.6
UNIFICYP	Cyprus	[1]12	15.9
UNIKOM	Kuwait	[2]26	1
UNTAET	East Timor	[3]382	0.4

[1] UNIFICYP headquarters
[2] British headquarters
[3] Roulement regiment

Deployments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what personnel in *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* RAF have been involved in deployments to the Falkland Islands in the last five years; how many of those deployments have been for six months; what the total cost has been to the MOD for the Falkland Islands garrison in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [46666]

(2) what *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* RAF personnel have been involved in deployments to (i) Gibraltar, (ii) Cyprus, (iii) Bosnia and (iv) Kosovo in the last five years; how many of those deployments have been for six months; what the cost has been to the MOD; and if he will make a statement. [46665]

Mr. Ingram: Information regarding the number of deployments undertaken by UK regular forces is not available in the format requested.

As regards lengths of tours, tours in Bosnia, Kosovo and the Falkland Islands are considered as operational deployments. In the main, Royal Air Force operational deployments are four months in duration, whereas Army and Navy operational deployments are usually for six months. There are exceptions, however, such as those posts identified as continuity posts that require a deployment of 12 months duration. For service personnel posted to Cyprus and Gibraltar, which are garrison deployments, a tour length of 24 months is the norm.

The costs for operational deployments are recorded differently from those for garrison deployments. For costing purposes, the Falkland Islands are treated as a garrison.

The additional expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence in Bosnia and Kosovo, beyond normal defence activity, over the last five years is shown in the following table.

£ million

Financial year	Bosnia	Kosovo
1996–97	247	—
1997–98	196	—
1998–99	147	14
1999–2000	108	325
2000–01	120	220

The costs incurred by the Commanders British Forces Cyprus, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands over the same period are as follows:

£ million

Financial year	Cyprus	Gibraltar	Falklands garrison
1996–97	170	63	81
1997–98	165	61	76
1998–99	170	52	72
1999–2000	159	54	71
2000–01	160	60	64

Senior Armed Forces

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W, on senior armed forces, how many officers there are of the rank of General and equivalent or above for each service; what steps the Ministry of Defence takes to ensure that its objective of reflecting the diversity of British society is monitored and implemented; and if he will make a statement on how the Government plan to ensure that senior officers are drawn from the whole range of society. [48701]

Mr. Ingram: There are 12 officers of the rank of full General or equivalent and above currently appointed in the armed forces (Naval Service five; Army four; RAF three). The armed forces are committed to creating an organisational culture that welcomes diversity in which all have equal opportunity and encouragement to realise their full potential, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or social/educational background. Promotion in the armed forces is based on merit.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received on instances of information on the identities of British soldiers or former soldiers who may be called upon to testify to the Saville Inquiry falling into unauthorised hands; and if he will make a statement. [47059]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* I understand that the names of 76 soldiers (some of whom are deceased) have been disclosed in advertently by the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, mainly in historical documents passed by the inquiry to the interested parties. Two names have been disclosed inadvertently by the team of lawyers representing the majority of soldiers. The name of one soldier has been compromised as a result of a security breach in the Treasury Solicitor's Department; this is the subject of a continuing investigation.

Many soldiers' names have become publicly associated with Bloody Sunday. Senior officers were not granted anonymity in 1972, while other soldiers have made statements or given interviews in which they name themselves or colleagues.

The soldiers whose names have been compromised have been, or will be, provided with security advice and additional protective measures where appropriate.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has recently reviewed the security arrangements for the handling of information relating to British soldiers and former soldiers by Treasury Counsel and others concerned with the Saville Inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [47125]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* Security arrangements in Government Departments, and for those acting on their behalf, are reviewed regularly.

The Bloody Sunday Inquiry is independent of government and its security arrangements are a matter for the inquiry itself. My understanding is that in safeguarding sensitive or personal information the inquiry aims to follows normal public sector procedures and standards.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what establishment strength of the Army was set under the Strategic Defence Review. [49746]

Mr. Ingram: The Strategic Defence Review did not set a figure for the size of the Army. A decision was made, however, to increase the Army's manpower requirement by some 3,300 posts to reflect the inclusion of a sixth deployable brigade and a second line of communication. It remains our intention to man the Army to achieve this, although the overall manpower requirement is dynamic and subject to continuing review in light of evolving doctrine, new technology and equipment and possible changes to the operating environment.

Nimrod

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings in terms of equipment acquisition will be made from the decision to purchase 18 Nimrod MRA4s. [49764]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1452–53W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), on the basis of current assumptions, savings in support costs are likely to be some £360 million over the in-service life of the aircraft. The savings in procurement costs arising from the current contract have yet to be finally negotiated with BAE Systems and its principal suppliers, and is a commercial in confidence matter between the relevant parties.

However, as my announcement made clear, we are working closely with BAE Systems to maximise the benefits brought about by this decision.

Unexploded Ordnance (Kenya)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates talks *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be held between his Department and the lawyers representing Kenyan tribespeople who have been injured as a result of unexploded British Army ordnance. [48934]

Mr. Ingram: Meetings between the Ministry of Defence and the lawyers representing Kenyan tribespeople were held on 28 November 2001, 11 January and 8 April 2002. One further meeting has been planned for end of June before mediation talks are held over the period 17 to 19 July 2002.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the policy of the Government are on liability for death and injury caused by unexploded ordnance left behind after British military exercises in Kenya; and if he will make a statement. [49795]

Mr. Ingram: When compensation claims are submitted, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so.

Performance Targets

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Vetting Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [49905]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Vetting Agency is the largest government organisation carrying out national security checks on people to allow them to be employed in jobs involving access to sensitive information or assets. These jobs range throughout the Ministry of Defence and armed services, a number of other Government Departments, and defence contractor companies. This year will see the Agency emerge from a challenging modernisation and rationalisation programme that started soon after it was created in 1997. The completion of the programme will create a much more responsive, integrated organisation, able to exploit the capabilities of modern information technology to the benefit of its customers. The chief executive has been set the following key targets.

Quality

Key Target 1:

To achieve, through external validation, at least a 95 per cent. success rating with specially selected cases, and zero serious errors that could have been identified at the time of vetting.

Key Target 2:

To address the diversity imbalance in the agency and achieve by 2002:

Women (at Band D): 12 per cent.

Women (Field Force): 10 per cent.

Ethnic Minorities (Field Force): 1.8 per cent.

Disabled (at Band D and Field Force): 1.5 per cent.

Timeliness

Key Target 3:

To achieve agreed completion times for priority requests for security clearances:

40 per cent. of counter terrorist and security checks completed within 10 days, and 90 per cent. of developed vetting completed within 30 days.

Key Target 4:

To achieve agreed completion times for routine requests for security clearances:

60 per cent. of counter terrorist and security checks completed within 30 days,

40 per cent. of developed vetting completed within 100 days and 90 per cent. within 182 days.

Key Target 5:

To achieve average completion times of 30 days for counter terrorist checks and for security checks, and 100 days for developed vetting.

Efficiency

Key Target 6:

To reduce the 2001–02 unit cost of output by 2 per cent.

I will arrange for advance copies of the Corporate Plan to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Naval Manning Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [49906]

Mr. Ingram: The key targets that have been set for the chief executive of the Naval Manning Agency for the financial year 2002–03 are as listed. The targets build upon progress made by the agency since it formed on 1 July 1996.

Key Target 1. Deployment:

The percentage of filled officer billets to be: 94 per cent. or greater.

The percentage of filled rating billets to be: 90 per cent. or greater.

The percentage of filled other rank billets to be: 90 per cent or greater.

Key Target 2. Manpower Planning:

The variation of strength to requirement to be: Better than −4 per cent.

Key Target 3. Career Management:

The percentage of officers receiving the required notice of change to be: 60 per cent. or greater.

The percentage of ratings receiving the required notice of change to be: 98 per cent. or greater.

The number of occurrences where minimum time ashore criteria are met to be: 99 per cent. or greater.

Key Target 4. NMA Corporate Efficiency:

To achieve strict control of NMA manpower overheads to within plus or minus 2 per cent. of the baseline established for manpower overheads as at 1 April 2002.

To carry out two benchmarking exercises.

To achieve a customer confidence score of 63.

Key Target 5. Financial:

To operate the NMA within 0 to -1 per cent. of its 2001–02 net cash allocation for operating activities.

Production of annual accrual accounts to be completed by July 2003.

Harrier GR7

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Royal Air Force's total inventory of Harrier GR7s is; and how many are operationally available. [43632]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 450W to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), when he will place a letter in the Library detailing his Department's contracts for which Israeli companies are bidding as *(a)* prime contractors and *(b)* teaming partners; and in the case of the latter, with which companies they are teamed. [49793]

Dr. Moonie: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Navy Vessels

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects HMS Albion to be fully operational; what refit would be necessary to keep HMS Fearless in operation for one more year; how much it would cost; whether he has considered recommissioning HMS Intrepid; whether he foresees any need for CPD capability in the next 12 months; and what contingency plans he has in place. [46971]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans, HMS Albion will be available for operational tasking early in 2003, and she is expected to be fully operational by mid 2003. HMS Fearless would have needed to undergo and assisted maintenance period at an estimated cost of about £1.5 million to allow her to continue in service for a year beyond her decommissioning date. The assisted maintenance period represented the minimum package of work required to keep HMS Fearless in service. Given the age of the vessel, the possibility of additional unplanned repair during this period could not be ruled out. The cost of re-commissioning HMS Intrepid, the sister ship of HMS Fearless, which last put to sea in 1994, would greatly exceed the cost of HMS Fearless's foregone assisted maintenance period. It would not therefore make financial sense to re-commission HMS Intrepid.

The requirement for a docking and heavy lift capability needs to be considered in the prevailing operational context at any particular time. Our assessment is that until HMS Albion enters service, the circumstances in which it is most likely that the UK wold be involved in an operation requiring a dedicated amphibious assault capability would be where we were acting as part of a coalition force. In such a scenario, depending on the requirements of the operation, a docking and heavy lift capability could be provided from within the forces of our coalition partners to enhance the UK's specialist amphibious capabilities of HMS Ocean and the five landing ships logistic. HMS Ocean is available for amphibious force tasking until October this year when she is due, on current plans, to commence a docking period before she again becomes available for tasking early in 2003. However until HMS Albion enters service, the amphibious assault capability will, if operational imperatives dictate, be filled in part by other platforms.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 326W, on strategic lift transport ships, what the date is for the keel lay of HMS 'Beach Head'; and when she is to be delivered. [47391]

Dr. Moonie: I assume that the question refers to the answer that appeared on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 325–26W. I refer the hon. Member to my pursuant answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 32W. The delivery date is 30 April 2003. Beachy Head will be a commercial ship with the designation motor vessel (mv) not HMS.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Congestion Charging

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Council what representations he has received on the exemption of hon. Members from the proposed congestion charge for vehicles entering central London. [48799]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am aware that this is a matter of some concern for Members, but I have received no direct representations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the policy of the Government is on an amnesty for those convicted of terrorist offences. [44402]

Dr. John Reid: At the talks at Weston Park last summer, both the Irish and UK Governments recognised that there is an issue to be addressed, with the completion of the early release scheme, about supporters of organisations now on ceasefire against whom there are outstanding prosecutions, and in some cases extradition proceedings, for offences committed before 10 April 1998. Such people would, if convicted, stand to benefit from the early release scheme. The Governments accept that it would be a natural development of the scheme for such prosecutions not to be pursued. Consideration continues of the best way to discharge this commitment.

Murder Inquiries

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 938W, if he will name the judge who has been appointed to investigate the cases of Chief Superintendent Breen, Superintendent Buchanan, Lord Justice and Lady Gibson and Billy Wright; and if he will make a statement. [35229]

Dr. John Reid: The Government stand by the commitment made at Weston Park to appoint a judge of international standing to investigate allegations of collusion in the cases of the murders of Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan, Pat Finucane, Lord Justice and Lady Gibson, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and Billy Wright. It is intended that the investigation of each individual case will begin no later than April 2002 unless this is clearly prejudicial to a forthcoming prosecution at that time. The British and Irish Governments will make an announcement as soon as an appointment is made.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people convicted of scheduled offences committed before 10 April 1998 are in prison in Northern Ireland. [44325]

Dr. John Reid: There are 11 such prisoners.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of those people who remain in prison for scheduled offences committed before 10 April 1998 how many belong to *(a)* Republican groups and *(b)* Loyalist groups. [44330]

Dr. John Reid: In total there are 11 such prisoners. Information is held for management purposes in relation to the perceived affiliation of prisoners: nine are or were at one time perceived to be associated with Loyalist groups and two with Republican groups.

Released Prisoners

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners have been released from prison in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act; and of those how many belong to *(a)* Republican groups and *(b)* Loyalist groups. [44329]

Dr. John Reid: As at 15 March 2002, 445 individuals had been released from prison under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act. Information is held, for management purposes, in relation to the perceived paramilitary association of prisoners. 240 individuals were perceived to be associated with Republican groups, 193 were perceived to be associated with Loyalist groups and 12 had no perceived association.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33234]

Dr. John Reid: My Department does not hold centrally or separately the number of television sets purchased. Officials, when purchasing television sets follow general guidance and procedures for all procurement.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42417]

Dr. John Reid: Information is not held in the format requested.

The number of people job sharing in the Department is 25, and there are a further 10 in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. This is 2 per cent. of the staff in post.

The number of people engaged in part-time working in the Department is 116, and there are a further 27 in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. This is 8 per cent. of the staff in post.

Manpower

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42464]

Dr. John Reid: Full time equivalent staff numbers in the Northern Ireland Office, for the last 10 years, including civil servants, special advisers and Prison Governor and uniformed Prison Officer grades are as follows:

	Staff numbers
1991–92	5,752
1992–93	5,683
1993–94	5,747
1994–95	5,705
1995–96	4,779
1996–97	4,590
1997–98	4,446
1998–99	4,232
1999–2000	3,929
2000–01	3,306

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43255]

Dr. John Reid: I can confirm that none of my Department's existing PSA targets have been revised and no new targets introduced for the public service agreement since the publication of the 2001 departmental report.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44862]

Dr. John Reid: Although the Northern Ireland Office does not provide creche facilities for its staff, it does provide assistance with the cost of child care to staff with pre-school aged children. In the last financial year the Department and its agencies have assisted 154 staff at a total cost of £114,000.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42481]

Dr. John Reid: The information is as follows:

(a) There are no financial costs as parental leave is unpaid.

(b) The benefits include meeting staff needs, raising staff morale and ensuring the retention of experienced and trained staff.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35020]

Jane Kennedy: Details of the Department's (including it's agencies) total expenditure on the use of external consultants in each of the last four financial years are:

1998–99: £254,080

1999–2000: £486,622

2000–01: £361,971

2001–02: £1,955,910 (to date. There is substantial increase in this financial year due to numerous new IT projects).

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33252]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 59W.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34395]

Dr. John Reid: Details of the Department's (including it's agencies, but excluding NDPBs as we do not have access to breakdown of their expenditure) total expenditure on mobile telephones and calls in each of the last five financial years are:

£

	Line rental	*Call charges*	*Mobiles and equipment*	*Total*
1997–98	36,498	38,293	14,275	89,065
1998–99	33,882	69,224	4,431	107,537
1999–2000	43,175	45,519	5,652	94,346
2000–01	64,297	29,172	3,314	96,783
2001–02	49,457	22,726	2,587	[1]74,770

[1] To 31 January 2002.

Note:
Estimate for full year equals £89,724

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of costs for UK/abroad. We do not hold any information on reimbursement for business calls made on private phones.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44947]

Dr. John Reid: The target time in 2002–03 for Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members is 10 working days.

The target time in 2002–03 for officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public is 15 working days, except in the Compensation Agency where it is 10 working days.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42445]

Dr. John Reid: Financial information for the years prior to 1996–97 is not readily available.

Details of the Department's (including its agencies, but excluding NDPBs) total expenditure on energy costs for the last six years are:

Year	£
1996–97	3,156,147
1997–98	2,981,720
1998–99	2,616,093
1999–2000	2,684,527
2000–01	2,762,408
2001–02	[1]2,762,408

[1] To end February 2002. Total year estimate £2,259,857

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46940]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entry Clearance

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last two years applications for visitors' entry clearances have been given on the basis of the constituency hon. Members where the sponsor resides giving their word that the person would leave the UK at the end of the time permitted. [48798]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not keep records of the reasons behind the issue of entry clearance; it is granted where the applicant meets the requirements of the immigration rules.

Nuclear Materials Transportation

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the Hazards of Nuclear Materials Transported from Europe to Japan by *(a)* CARICOM, *(b)* the Rio Group and *(c)* the Pacific Island Forum in the last 12 months. [49494]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Secretary of State received a representation from CARICOM on the movement of nuclear waste through the Caribbean sea while at the UK-Caribbean Forum in Guyana (3–5 April 2002). The Rio Group Heads of State and Government expressed their concern about the risks related to the transit of radioactive materials in the Santiago Declaration of 17 August 2001. We have not received a representation on this from the Pacific Island Forum.

Gibraltar

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be made on offering the people of Gibraltar a referendum on their future; who will write the referendum question; in what way the UK Government will be bound by the decision of Gibraltarians; what the UK Government policy will be on a referendum for the people of Gibraltar; if he will publish the full text of the Anglo-Spanish accord on the issue of Gibraltar; and whether the referendum question will be put before Parliament for approval before it is put to the people of Gibraltar. [47964]

Peter Hain: No decisions have been made on the timing or modalities of any referendum other than because it could trigger primary legislation in the UK. HMG will expect to oversee the organisation and timing of any such referendum in consultation with the Government of Gibraltar. The Government have also made clear that any proposals affecting the sovereignty of Gibraltar will be put to the people of Gibraltar and implemented only if they approve them.

Israel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), what changes have been made to the evaluation of end-use undertakings issued by the Israeli Government with reference to Israel's assurances on 29 November 2000 on the use of UK originated equipment and systems; and if he will make a statement; [46418]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway), what steps the Government are taking to clarify whether UK-controlled goods have been used by the Israel defence force activities in the Occupied Territories; and if he will make a statement. [46419]

Mr. Straw: The written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W, informed Parliament of information that had come to light about UK-supplied equipment licensed for export under a previous Administration and a different export control regime being used in the occupied territories. I undertook to inform my hon. Friend and the House of the response from the Israeli Government to our request for an explanation.

Following parallel action taken in London—on 12 March—and by our embassy in Tel Aviv—on 13 March—the Israeli Foreign Ministry formally responded on 26 March.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry has said that the assurances given on 29 November 2000 were in good faith, and offered an explanation based on operational need about the use of the armoured personnel carriers in the occupied territories. They did not however accept that this was a breach of the assurances given and they have not committed to stop using the armoured personnel

carriers in the occupied territories. In the light of this response we will (a) continue to assess export licence applications for the proposed export of controlled goods to Israel on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria; but (b) in so doing, we will no longer take the Israeli assurances given on 29 November 2000 into account.

We also have questions about other possible breaches of the assurances with regard to equipment supplied under previous Administrations, which we are taking up with the Israeli authorities. I will report the results of our inquiries to the House once they are complete.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the advice given to travellers to Israel since the outbreak of recent fighting; and what further changes to this advice are planned. [49040]

Mr. Bradshaw: All travel advice notices are kept under constant review and updated to reflect the latest security situation.

Since the most recent invasion of the occupied territories on 28–29 March, the travel advice for Israel and the Palestinian Authority has been updated twice to reflect the developments in the security situation and the risks to British nationals in Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Our key message

"We strongly advise against travel to the west bank and Gaza, the Israel/Gaza border area and the area long Israel's border with Lebanon"

has not changed during this period.

On 4 April the travel advice was updated to state that Ramallah and Bethlehem had been declared closed military zones by the Israeli army. This meant that no one can travel in or out. British nationals in the west bank and Gaza were advised to leave when the situation permitted.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence Her Majesty's Government have that Iraq *(a)* has provided and *(b)* is planning to provide (i) information and (ii) materials for weapons of mass destruction to the al-Qaeda network. [49484]

Mr. Bradshaw: As we have previously made clear, we have no evidence of links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda. But we are keeping an open mind about Iraqi connections to al-Qaeda and are investigating all reports of links.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions his Department has taken in relation to Zimbabwe since the inauguration of Robert Mugabe as President in March. [48786]

Mr. Straw: EU Foreign Ministers will consider further action on Zimbabwe at the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 15 April. I will give a substantive reply after the meeting. We also have been in close touch with the Commonwealth Secretariat and individual members of the Commonwealth. The right hon. Member will be aware that, following the election, the Commonwealth "Troika" decided upon the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Councils of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the leaders of countries bordering Zimbabwe since the elections in that country last month; and what the results of those talks were. [48785]

Mr. Straw: Ministers and officials continue to be in close touch with key countries in the region and with other international partners about the situation in Zimbabwe.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list those individuals who have had sanctions imposed on them by the European Union and the United States as a result of political violence and intimidation in Zimbabwe; [48790]

(2) if he will list the occasions on which those individuals against whom targeted sanction have been imposed by the European Union have visited the EU since the 2000 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe, broken down by *(a)* country visited and *(b)* the date of those visits; [48788]

(3) if he will list the individuals who have had applications to visit the European Union turned down by member states and of the EU since the Union imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe. [48791]

Mr. Straw: On 18 February 2002 the European Union imposed a travel ban (and assets freeze) on the following 20 senior members of the Government of Zimbabwe:

President Robert Gabriel Mugabe
Cabinet Secretary Charles Utete
Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa
Home Affairs Minister John Nkomo
Security Minister Nicholas Goche
Youth Minister Elliot Manyika
Information Minister Jonathan Moyo
Information Minister's Permanent Secretary and Spokesman George Charamba
Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa
Agricultural Minister Joseph Made
Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo
Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge
Senior Secretary MFA Willard Chiwewe
General Vitalis Zvinavashe (CDS)
Lieutenant General Constantine Chiwenga (army)
Air Marshal Perence Shiri (air force)
Commissioner Augustine Chihuri (police)
Brigadier Elisha Muzonzini (intelligence)
Prisons chief Paradzai Zimondi
Defence Minister Sidney Sekeramayi.

None of the above mentioned Zimbabweans have attempted to visit the European Union since imposition of the travel ban on 18 February.

We have no access to records of other EU member states. All were entitled to visit the UK prior to 18 February, as Zimbabweans are not required to obtain visas to travel to the UK. No consolidated record will be available for any such visits.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning *(a)* food shortages, *(b)* politically motivated murders, *(c)* suppression of the media and *(d)* political intimidation and oppression in Zimbabwe since the elections. [48787]

Mr. Straw: We and the Department for International Development receive regular reports from a variety of governmental, non-governmental, media and other sources.

(a) Food shortages—UNDP's Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery Programme is providing supplementary feeding to 558,000 people in Zimbabwe. In addition, the Department for International Development is providing supplementary feeding to 300,000 people.

(b) Politically motivated murders—at least 10 opposition supporters, mostly election monitors, are reported to have been killed since the election and many more to have been injured.

(c) Media suppression—the Access to Information Act requires Zimbabwean journalists to be licensed by the Zimbabwean Government, and effectively bans foreign journalists. A report for the *Daily Telegraph* (a Zimbabwean national) was detained, and subsequently released, over the Easter weekend.

(c) Political intimidation and oppression—see (b) and (c) above.

Civil Servants

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W, on civil servants, if he will list the type of information held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's manpower system, whether it provides information on the type of school that staff attended; and what steps his Department takes to ensure that its stated objective of reflecting the diversity of British society is monitored and implemented. [48698]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's manpower system holds data on personal details, which include marital status, gender, date of birth, number of children, home address, next of kin. Other data held include entry and leaving details, promotion details, staff whereabouts and history, previous Foreign and Commonwealth Office service, appraisal history, skills details, language details, qualification details, employment details and training course details. Historical information on the type of school staff attended is held only in some cases, hence the data are incomplete. The recruitment section monitors ethnicity, gender and disability statistics at each stage of the recruitment process. Since 1995, the recruitment section records have identified the type of school attended for those candidates at policy and operational entry points who successfully gain entrance to the diplomatic service. Before 1995, recruitment data on the type of school were collected only on policy entrants. These figures are published annually in the departmental report. A copy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diversity strategy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the non-diplomatic service appointments he has made since 7 June 2001. [46226]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 210W.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has made nine appointments to FCO non-departmental public bodies since 7 June 2001. As well as those included in my answer of 4 December 2001, three appointments have been made to Wilton Park Academic Council (the new appointment of Mr. David Heath MP, and the reappointment of Lady Suzanne Warner and Mr. Nik Gowing).

There have also been a number of non-diplomatic service appointments made by several departments within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, records of which are not held centrally. These would include members of home civil service staff, 225 having taken up their appointment through open competition, 14 through transfer from other Government Departments; and five reinstated staff.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the companies from which his Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43406]

Mr. MacShane: Detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it is FCO policy to buy timber and wood products from sustainable and legal sources.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Egypt

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase the provision of overseas aid to Egypt; and if she will make a statement. [48778]

Clare Short: We have no plans to increase direct development assistance to Egypt. The country already receives high levels of assistance from the EC of which the UK contribution was £17.5 million in 1999. Our bilateral allocations to Egypt are £4 million and £3.5 million in 2002–03 and 2003–04 respectively. New commitments will be focused on improving the effectiveness of EC assistance.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much overseas aid has been provided by her Department to Egypt in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [48777]

Clare Short: Since 1997 my Department has provided the following amounts of direct assistance to Egypt:

	£000
1996–97	6,229
1997–98	7,246
1998–99	4,947
1999–2000	3,546
2000–01	2,661

We also provide significant indirect assistance via multilateral institutions in particular the EC. In 1999 our share of the EC programme was £17.5 million

India

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Andhra Pradesh Government on ensuring that the impact on food security for the population of Andhra Pradesh of strategies developed under the Government's Vision 2020 strategy is taken into account; and if she will make a statement. [48764]

Clare Short: Enhanced livelihood security for the poor is one of the five priorities for DFID support for Andhra Pradesh. We are in on-going dialogue with the Departments of the Government of Andhra Pradesh responsible for policy in the areas of agriculture production and productivity of natural resources. We are providing £45.4 million for the Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project which seeks to help 1.5 million people, directly or indirectly, by reducing poverty and vulnerability to drought through land rehabilitation, productive and sustainable farming methods, social mobilisation, employment and non-land based income generation. All these elements have an important contribution to make in enhancing the food security of the poor.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Andhra Pradesh Government regarding the consolidation of farms and the impact of the reduction in number of farms on the population of Andhra Pradesh; and if she will make a statement. [48765]

Clare Short: Improving the livelihoods of people in rural areas is a major theme of our dialogue with the Government of Andhra Pradesh. There has been no discussion of any reduction in the number of farms in the state.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Andhra Pradesh Government on ensuring that the poorest citizens of Andhra Pradesh benefit from the strategies developed under the Government's Vision 2020 strategy; and if she will make a statement. [48767]

Clare Short: Our partnership with the Government of Andhra Pradesh is entirely focused on the reduction of poverty. As part of our on-going dialogue, DFID representatives participate in discussions of the Government's Poverty Eradication Mission, which the Chief Minister chairs. The Government are establishing a Technical Support Unit in the Mission, in order to strengthen capacity for social and poverty analysis and monitoring. We are currently discussing with the Government possible ways of supporting the Technical Support Unit.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Andhra Pradesh Government on ensuring that the environmental impact of strategies developed under the Government's Vision 2020 strategy are taken into account; and if she will make a statement. [48763]

Clare Short: Vision 2020 is a draft document, which was published by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1999 setting out a series of goals, including the eradication of poverty in the state in 20 years. In 2000, we initiated a discussion with the Government of Andhra Pradesh and others, including civil society, about how best to deploy our resources so that they contributed most effectively to poverty reduction in the state. This resulted in a DFID strategy paper for Andhra Pradesh, which sets out our approach to assisting in the elimination of poverty in the state by working towards five priorities. A copy of the strategy in the Library of both Houses.

Improved human development outcomes are one of the five priorities for DFID support for Andhra Pradesh. We are in on-going dialogue with the Departments of the Government of Andhra Pradesh responsible for policies affecting the environment about the linkages between environment and poverty. The Government of India are currently considering a proposal from the Government of Andhra Pradesh for DFID to provide support for additional strategic environmental assessment of Vision 2020.

Palestine

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment has been made of the recent damage to the water supply pipelines in *(a)* Ramallah, *(b)* Qalqilya, *(c)* Bethlehem, *(d)* Tulkarm and *(e)* Nablus; [48800]

(2) what assessment has been made of the damage to the emergency water and sanitation programme in the West Bank by recent Israeli action; and what is the *(a)* estimated cost of this damage and *(b)* estimated number of beneficiaries affected. [48773]

Clare Short: Water is a critical issue with the WBGS, and since the Intifada began, the international community has collaborated with the Palestinian institutions to help address both urgent short term needs and the longer term institutional and physical infrastructure.

Water and sanitation, along with other basic services, has been dramatically affected by the recent escalation of violence. The international community, together with the Palestinian authorities, is gathering data on areas where there is no direct access to water supplies. But it has not yet been possible to make a comprehensive assessment of the damage incurred. Access to many areas is still denied.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations have

been made to the Israeli Government to allow entry of relief consignments and facilitate their transport into the Occupied Territories. [48793]

Clare Short: The Government has called for an immediate and full Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian towns, which would facilitate human relief access, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1402.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much UK aid to Israel and the Palestinian territories has been obstructed by *(a)* Israel and *(b)* Palestinians during the recent violence in the Middle East; [48967]

(2) what guidance she issues to UK air workers in Israel and the occupied territories; [48971]

(3) what representations she has made to the Government of Israel regarding the obstruction of humanitarian aid to Palestinians; [48969]

(4) to what extent the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians have increased during the recent violence between Israel and the Palestinians; and if she intends to change her aid policy to Palestinian territories; [48965]

(5) if she will make a statement on her assessment of the security of UK aid workers in each country in the Middle East; [48973]

(6) when she last had discussions with the Palestinian Authority regarding the humanitarian consequences of terrorist attacks on Israel; and when she next intends to do so; [48968]

(7) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of UK aid to the occupied territories; and how she intends to increase the effectiveness of her Department's spending in the occupied territories; [48972]

(8) what assurances she has received from the Government of Israel regarding the safety of UK aid workers in the occupied territories; [48970]

(9) if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation within Palestinian refugee camps; what assistance her Department provides to the refugee camps; and if she intends to increase aid to the refugee camps; [48966]

(10) if she has made an assessment of the water shortage problems in the Palestinian refugee camps. [48974]

Clare Short: There are approximately three million Palestinians living in the West Bank Gaza Strip, nearly half of whom are registered refugees. Following three consecutive years of rising real per capita income from 1997 to 2000, the Palestinian economy has been hit hard by the conflict. Surveys have barely been able to keep up with the level of damage inflicted on the Palestinian economy since the start of the Intifada in 2000. Damage to infrastructure, loss of life and strict closure activities has led to a dramatic decline in economic activity, particularly as Palestinians have been denied access to their jobs over the Israeli border. During 2001, it is estimated that GNI had declined by 12–15 per cent., unemployment risen by up to 50 per cent., and the numbers of people living below of the poverty (US$2 a day) increased to 50 per cent..

The damage inflicted during the recent escalation of violence, in terms of destruction of infrastructure (including basic services), damage to private property and government buildings will take some time to quantify. But it has further desecrated livelihoods, disrupted the delivery of water and sanitation, health and education services, and undermined the institutions of government.

We are working with others to try to determine the full extent of the damage and the humanitarian consequences. But international efforts remain hampered by restricted access. It is clear that there will be no improvements in the situation without an end to violence and a return to negotiations.

I have kept our programme of development assistance under close review. The long-term goal remains unchanged—the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, which can co-exist peacefully with Israel. The strategy also remains valid: to provide help for immediate and emergency needs while at the same time working for longer-term sustainable and institutional development.

The economic and social decline over the past 18 months has required a review of the balance between longer-term goals and urgent needs. We have sought to provide emergency assistance in ways that can contribute to sustainable development. As soon as possible we will work for a rapid assessment of the current situation and set priorities for action so that all agencies can respond in a co-ordinated and effective manner.

DFID is committed to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) in meeting the needs of Palestinian refugees. We have steadily increased our financial and technical support to UNRWA, from £6 million in 1997 to £35 million in 2001, in response to the rising needs. I am in contact with Commissioner General Peter Hansen about the impact of the Israeli Defence Force incursions to many UNRWA camps, and what additional support is required for urgent actions. We have provided £5 million for the 2002 Emergency Appeal and will consider urgently what further support we can give, on top of our planned contribution for this year to UNRWA's core activities.

It is hard to quantify the impact of violence on UK development assistance. Closures and violence have adversely affected all programmes. It has proved difficult for international staff to travel to the region. In addition, closures and violence have hindered the movement of project staff. Prior to the recent incursions, we were confident that projects would meet their goals, albeit in a longer time period. We will need to look afresh at the impact on our programmes of recent intense incursions.

The UK does not provide any development assistance to Israel.

The Government has serious concerns for the safety of civilians and the access of medical, humanitarian and consular aid. We have made clear to Israel at the highest level that we expect them to ensure that medical and humanitarian organisations and Consular staff have uninterrupted access to those in need. The Foreign Secretary stressed these concerns to Israeli Foreign Minister Peres in a telephone call on 10 April.

The Government has repeatedly called on the Palestinian authority to take determined action to prevent terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens.

We have called on both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1402, including the establishment of a meaningful ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from palestinian towns and the implementation of the Tenet plan and Mitchell recommendations, with the aim of resuming negotiations on a political settlement.

We have tried and trusted mechanisms in place to provide security requirements for UK aid workers. DFID currently employs three people in the Consulate General in Jerusalem, and one secondee to the local EC office. UK and other nationals are also contracted under DFID-funded projects.

Those who work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are aware they are operating in an unstable environment. All who travel to the area are fully briefed on the security situation and travel restrictions. UK nationals based permanently in the WBGS appear on the Consulate General Register, and the Consulate General is in regular contact, especially in times of crisis.

There are no aid-funded workers in Israel.

We judge that the risks posed to aid personnel in other Middle Eastern countries—Jordan, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq in DFID's context—are less acute. However, we, and the Foreign Office, continue to monitor the safety of people in the region closely.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Amy Gehring

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department has received a similar letter to that received from the Police about Amy Gehring in the last 12 months. [45857]

Mr. Timms: The police report any conviction, except for minor road traffic offences, of a teacher (including a former teacher or a student teacher), or ancillary worker in a school or further education institution, to my officials. They also report any conviction of a proprietor of an independent school or a youth worker.

The police write to the Department about a range of issues relating to individuals connected with schools. We do not record these reports centrally in a way that allows us to compare them to the report received in respect of Amy Gehring.

Graduate Unemployment

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the rate of unemployment of newly graduated students has been for each of the last 10 years. [46335]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available information, which shows the unemployment rates for newly qualified graduates six months after graduation, is shown in the table. Information for students graduating in 2001 will be available in June 2002. As at spring 2001, the unemployment rate for all graduates in the population, at 2.4 per cent., was around half that for the workforce as a whole, at 4.6 per cent.

Destinations of full-time first degree students from higher education institutions in England

Year of graduation	*Total graduates with known destination*	*of which, those who were unemployed[1]:*	
		Numbers	*Percentage*
1990	83,340	7,280	8.7
1991	87,380	11,070	12.7
1992	96,660	13,750	14.2
1993	108,360	14,040	13.0
1994	121,390	12,870	10.6
1995	136,450	12,510	9.2
1996	145,930	11,780	8.1
1997	146,490	10,140	6.9
1998	147,890	8,570	5.8
1999	152,400	8,430	5.5
2000(2)	145,540	7,680	5.4

1. Based on the employment position of graduates six months after graduation.
2. Covers UK domiciled and EU students only; figures for previous years cover UK domiciled, EU and other overseas students.

Selective Schools

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of selective schools by category are located *(a)* within five, *(b)* five to 10, *(c)* 10 to 15 and *(d)* more than 15 kilometres from settlements with under 3,000 people. [46508]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

School Spending

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what expenditure in real terms per pupil was in *(a)* maintained secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools in each local education authority each year between 1979 and 1989. [47044]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held in this form by the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Some information is provided in the CIPFA 'Handbook of Education unit costs' for the years from 1984–85.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average spend per pupil has been in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each year since 1995 in (i) England, (ii) York, (iii) the highest spending local education authority and (iv) the lowest spending local education authority in England. [46767]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the following tables:

£

	England		*York*	
	Pre primary/ primary	*Secondary*	*Pre primary/ primary*	*Secondary*
1995–96	1,920	2,610	—	—
1996–97	1,910	2,590	1,710	2,450
1997–98	1,860	2,530	1,730	2,520
1998–99	1,960	2,550	1,840	2,570
1999–2000	2,070	2,640	1,840	2,480

Highest spending authority

	Authority	£
Pre primary/primary		
1995–96	Lambeth	3,000
1996–97	Westminster	2,980
1997–98	Lambeth	3,040
1998–99	Lambeth	3,040
1999–2000	Lambeth	3,110
Secondary		
1995–96	Lambeth	4,400
1996–97	Kensington and Chelsea	3,780
1997–98	Brent	4,070
1998–99	Brent	4,210
1999–2000	Tower Hamlets	3,830

Lowest spending authority

	Authority	£
Pre primary/primary		
1995–96	St. Helens	1,620
1996–97	Hartlepool	1,570
1997–98	Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees	1,540
1998–99	Darlington, Cambridgeshire	1,660
1999–2000	Peterborough	1,620
Secondary		
1995–96	Bromley	2,110
1996–97	Bromley	1,700
1997–98	Bradford	1,720
1998–99	Bradford	1,760
1999–2000	Barnsley	2,270

Notes:
1. The tables exclude City of London, Isles of Scilly, and Rutland.
2. York was formed as part of LEA reorganisation in 1996–97, previously it was part of North Yorkshire.
3. NIE per pupil in real terms (2000–01 prices using GDP deflators published by Treasury 20 December 2001).
4. All figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

Adult Education

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been made available to education authorities in inner London boroughs to promote services for adult education in the last three years. [48681]

Mr. Timms: 2001–02 is the latest year for which specific funding figures on adult education are available: the LSC made available £17.8 million in grant to inner London education authorities in that year. Prior to this, it was for each authority to decide how much of its education SSA it wished to spend to promote services for adult education: total education SSA for the inner London authorities was £1,187 million for 1999–2000 and £1,248 million for 2000–01. 'Adult Education' is interpreted as the local education authority secured adult education sector.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Starter Homes Initiative

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2022, *Official Report*, column 979W, if he will publish a list of the organisations and local authorities which have or are due to receive funding under the Starter Homes Initiative. [49888]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Sally Keeble) to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 484W-88W.

Rough Sleeping

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reduce the incidence of rough sleeping in rural settlements with populations under 3,000; and if he will make a statement. [46454]

Ms Keeble: Recorded levels of rough sleeping in small rural settlements are not high. On 3 December 2001 the Prime Minister announced that the Rough Sleepers Unit had achieved its target of reducing rough sleeping by at least two-thirds by 2002.

The latest published rough sleeping figures for England show that all local authority areas containing rural settlements with populations under 3,000 returned either a count of less than 10 rough sleepers or an estimate of 0–10.

On 13 March the DTLR launched "More than a roof", the Government's new approach to tackling homelessness, which has sustaining the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping as one of its key objectives.

Many former rough sleepers have now moved into shelters, hostels and their own homes as part of their move to an independent lifestyle, but many still need help to rebuild their lives away from the streets. It is also vital that we continue to prevent those vulnerable to rough sleeping from hitting the streets in the first place and that those still on the streets receive the help they need to come inside.

The DTLR will invest over £30 million during 2002–03 to support local strategies around the country to ensure the two thirds reduction is sustained—the same level of revenue funding that led to the Rough Sleepers Unit meeting its target.

The new Homelessness Act will also bring about radical change in the way that central and local government, and all other partners, work together to tackle homelessness in all parts of the country including rural areas. For the first time ever, local authorities will be required to carry out a review and develop a strategy for their area that prevents homelessness and provides solutions for people who are, or who may become, homeless.

Planning

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the last three years, how many developments have been referred for his determination, pursuant to the arrangements set out in Part IV of the memorandum attached to DOE circular 18/84; and in respect of these referrals, how many he has decided *(a)*, pursuant to written representations and *(b)* following a non-statutory public inquiry. [48938]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not maintain a central record of these cases and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how often in the last three years, and for what purpose, his Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments). [48947]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on Friday 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1590–591W.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what matters he takes into consideration when deciding whether to rely on written representations or to institute a non-statutory public inquiry when determining a referral to his Department, pursuant to the arrangements set out in Part IV of the memorandum attached to DOE circular 18/84; [48937]

(2) when instituting a non-statutory public inquiry, pursuant to the arrangements set out in Part IV of the memorandum attached to DOE circular 18/84, what format he would expect such an inquiry to take; and if he would expect providers of local services and members of the local community to be able to give evidence. [48936]

Ms Keeble: DOE circular 18/84 makes it clear that the method of written representations will be suitable for most cases. But where there is evidence of interest by other parties the dispute may be resolved by either a meeting of the representatives of the local planning authority and the developing Department or through a non-statutory public local inquiry. Planning inquiries for cases decided by the Secretary of State follow the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000. But an inquiry held under the arrangements set out in DOE circular 18/84 is non-statutory and so it is not bound by these rules. However, it is expected that any such inquiry would follow the spirit of these rules so far as practicable and that interested parties would be given an opportunity to express their views.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rules govern meetings between Ministers and hon. Members on planning issues awaiting decision. [48784]

Ms Keeble: Such meetings are covered by Guidance On Propriety Issues In The Handling Of Planning Casework In DTLR . A copy of the guidance is available on the Department's website [www.planning.dtlr.gov.uk/gpihpc].

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying proposals to reform the planning system. [49489]

Ms Keeble: The reasons underlying the proposals for reform of the planning system are set out in chapter two of the Planning Green Paper: 'Planning: Delivering a fundamental change'. A separate consultation document concerning the planning system in Wales has been issued by the National Assembly.

Affordable Houses (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much turnover new town land in Lancashire has been allowed for affordable houses in the last five years; and if he will list the sites. [47427]

Ms Keeble: Over the last five years approximately six hectares of New Town Land in Lancashire has been released for development of affordable houses. The sites are:

(i) Cottam Hall, Preston

(ii) Eastway, Fulwood

(iii) Railway Road, Skelmersdale.

Boundary Commission for Wales

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Boundary Commission for Wales will report its results. [45903]

Dr. Whitehead: The Commission anticipate that they will commence their next general review and a review of Assembly electoral regions in December 2002. They are obliged by statute to submit their report by 15 December 2006, but hope to do so before the end of 2004.

Trial Lane Rental

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the predicated annual income generated by the trial lane rental schemes is. [49874]

Ms Keeble: The Government is not yet in a position to calculate accurately the amount likely to be raised by the lane rental pilot schemes in Camden and Middlesbrough. However, we have appointed consultants—Halcrow—to monitor the pilots and they will be reporting to us in due course on the effect of the schemes in reducing disruption which utility street works cause to road users as well as the charges paid by utility companies.

Local Authorities (Joint Working)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress since the issue of draft guidance in December 2000 on powers to enable joint working and pooling of budgets between local authorities and other public agencies. [47266]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Following consultation with local authorities on draft guidance on the well being power provided under Part 1, Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Government published final guidance in March 2001. Copies are available from the DTLR website.

The Department also published on 29 March 2001 a Consultation Paper, "Working with Others to Achieve Best Value: A Consultation Paper on Changes to the Legal Framework to Facilitate Partnership Working". The proposed Section 16 powers complement the provisions in the 2000 Act, extend the approaches available to other local authority functions, and go further in some areas of activity. We expect to lay the Orders before Parliament later in the year.

Council Tax

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those local authorities imposing an increase in council tax for a Band D property in excess of 10 per cent. in financial years *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2001–02. [48735]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 9848W, on the New Deal for Young People, what information he collates on the subsequent destinations of people who were employed by his Department under the scheme. [50338]

Dr. Whitehead: Records are not kept of whether New Deal staff take up employment on leaving this Department.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department in the last 12 months; and what plans he has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [47954]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has made four such payments totalling £535,215.54 to individuals in the past 12 months.

There are no statutory limits to the level of payments that can be made. Payments are based on the merits of individual cases.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many times Ministers in his Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47105]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, on 11 April 2002, ref. (47100).

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47135]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Westmoreland and Lonsdale (Tim Collins) on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 572W. Details of special adviser travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible.

User Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new steps his Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47304]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The executive agencies of DTLR regularly consult their customers and representative bodies on customer service issues. In many cases the overall results are published in their annual reports. The outcomes are used to inform service developments. The methods and timing of consultation are designed to fit the nature of individual services and are kept under review.

External Consultants

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each of the past five years. [46035]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department's consultancy spend is as follows:

	£
2000–01	98,700,000
2001–02	119,022,000

These figures include spend by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Figures for the previous three years can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Multi-Modal Studies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when and where the recent DTLR Multi-Modal Study infrastructure charging seminar took place; and who attended it. [49462]

Mr. Byers: The seminar was held on 1 February in the conference hall at Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1. It was attended by officials from DTLR, the Government Offices for the Regions and the Highways Agency and by consultants working on each of the multi-modal studies.

Airport Security

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase security at UK airports. [45902]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the attacks on 11 September, heightened aviation security measures were immediately introduced at all UK airports and for all airlines operating from the UK. Security requirements remain at an enhanced level.

An additional package of action was announced by the Secretary of State on 28 March, following the review of airside security carried out as a result of the recent

robberies at Heathrow. Measures include enhancements to current access control systems, extensions to the use of counter terrorist checks and criminal record checks for airport staff, and improvement of CCTV systems at airports.

Open Skies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards an Open Skies agreement with the US. [49873]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government would like to liberalise the UK-US aviation market in a way that would allow UK airlines to be able to compete with US airlines on fair terms. We are reviewing the policy options for achieving that objective.

Airports (Slot Allocation)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on European airport slot allocation. [49818]

Mr. Jamieson: Slot allocation is governed by European Regulation 95/93. The Commission issued a proposal to amend this regulation in June 2001. This proposal is being carefully considered following consultation with the UK aviation industry. The UK's objective is to ensure the most efficient use of scarce airport infrastructure.

Seamen

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates he has made of the effect of the tonnage tax on employment of UK seamen. [48847]

Mr. Jamieson: It is too early for meaningful estimates to be made. However, to date 50 groups of companies have been approved by the Inland Revenue for entry into tonnage tax. These 50 groups, and eight more, have received approval from the DTLR of their training commitments. This equates to about 509 officer training places.

We believe that recent changes we have made to the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme, together with the tonnage tax training commitments, will lead to a significant increase in seafarer recruitment.

Overstay Charges (Utility Services)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which Department receives the overstay charges from utility services for any work not completed within the agreed period under Section 74A of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. [49875]

Ms Keeble: Where a highway authority chooses to impose overstay charges on utility companies, under section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, the authority can keep the moneys received to meet the cost of operating the charging scheme and can spend any surplus on developing policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport facilities and services to, from and within their area. The proceeds are not retained by central Government.

Section 74A of the 1991 Act covers a separate system, under which undertakers carrying out works have to pay a daily charge from the outset of works, or "lane rental". Pilots schemes testing these powers are currently under way in Middlesbrough and the London borough of Camden. Again, the highway authority is permitted to retain the proceeds of the charging scheme.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many responses to the consultation on abandoned cars were received; how many were *(a)* supportive of and *(b)* against reducing the notice period for removal; when he expects to bring forward proposals for reform; and if he will make a statement. [48746]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 10 April a package of measures that the Government had taken to deal with the problem of abandoned vehicles. New regulations came into effect on 9 April to reduce the notice periods after which abandoned vehicles could be removed and disposed of. It is now possible where vehicles of no value have been abandoned on the highway for a local authority to remove and dispose of them on the termination of a 24 hour notice. In addition, measures were announced to promote joint working between local authorities and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

My right hon. Friend also announced his intention to reform the vehicle registration system to ensure that, in future, all vehicles can be traced to the correct keeper.

The Government's consultation on abandoned cars issued in October 2001 attracted 361 responses from organisations and individuals. Over half of the respondents were local authorities. A full report has been placed in the Libraries of the House, giving a breakdown of responses and a full list of respondents.

In general respondents supported the Government's proposals. 115 respondents expressed support for the proposals as a whole, 155 expressed a general support for immediate measures including the reduction of notice periods, with 46 expressly supporting the reduction of notice periods. There was very little opposition to the proposals.

Private Hire Vehicles

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress of the implementation of the Private Hire Vehicle Registration (London) Act 1998. [49263]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the regulation of private hire vehicles in London has been passed to the Mayor. The Public Carriage Office undertakes the licensing function as part of Transport for London.

Road Use

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated

number of vehicle kilometres travelled is in each of the last five years by *(a)* lorries, *(b)* cars and *(c)* all vehicles. [49701]

Mr. Byers: The information is published in Transport Statistics Bulletin 02(5)—Traffic in Great Britain: Q4 2001 (Table 2), a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Interactive Speed Signs

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will approve interactive speed signs for general use by highways authorities. [48792]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department commissioned trials over several years to establish the effectiveness and suitability of vehicle activated signs and the results are being collated into a report to be published during the summer.

Motoring Charges

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Ten Year Transport Plan estimates will be raised in *(a)* congestion/road charging schemes and *(b)* work place parking charge schemes over the period of the plan. [49464]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 791W.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that the provisions of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 concerning regional passenger services are put into effect. [49959]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Act 2000 repealed the part of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 concerning regional passenger services and, as of 2001, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has a duty under S206(4) of the Transport Act 2000 to formulate a strategy for British passenger services through the Channel Tunnel.

In the year 2000 the British Railways Board reviewed its plan for international regional services as it was obliged to do under Section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987. This review is available on its website at www.brb.gov.uk and concludes that Regional Eurostar services would be heavily loss making and that there are no economic, environmental or social grounds for providing a subsidy.

The SRA have said that later this year they will publish a strategy relating to services in various parts of Great Britain for facilitating the carriage of passengers or goods by rail by way of the Channel Tunnel.

CLG

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what costs have been incurred to date by the CLG team; [46963]

(2) what budget has been provided to the CLG team for the period up to 30 July. [46964]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA has approved a budget for the CLG bid to the end of July 2002 of £11,163,327. Costs incurred to the end of February 2002 were £1,203,697.

Station Platforms

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposals to extend platforms at Stonehouse, Gloucestershire station. [39437]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* I am not aware of any current proposals to extend these platforms. Any future proposals would be for Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority to consider.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place a copy of the railway administrators' six month progress report in the Library. [49458]

Mr. Byers: Although this is not a Government document, the administrator has agreed to a copy of his six month statement of proposals and progress report being placed in the Libraries of the House.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Government have spent on Railtrack administration; and if he will break down the costs by the main heads of expenditure. [47518]

Mr. Jamieson: £1.932 billion was drawn down from the Government loan facility and repaid by Railtrack plc in Administration on 25 March. £1.615 billion was used from the Trust Facility to pay pre-Administration trade and finance creditors and £0.317 billion was used from the Working Capital Facility.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information has been provided by the Strategic Rail Authority on the increase in borrowings from their pre-administration level to the £9 billion envisaged by Network Rail. [48185]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for bidders for Railtrack plc to set out their proposed debt finance requirements, based where appropriate on information available from the Administrator and from published sources.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many franchise agreements with train operating companies include provisions for the Government to underwrite any part of the franchise in the event of the regulatory system changing. [46968]

Mr. Byers: All franchise agreements remove the regulatory risk or opportunity arising from a change to track and station access charges, following a regulatory review, so that the franchise operator makes no windfall profit or loss as a result of the change.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for increasing the percentage of the rail network that is electrified. [49709]

Mr. Byers: Rail electrification schemes will be considered where clear practical advantages and/or environmental benefits exist, and value for money can be demonstrated.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the cost of repairs necessary on *(a)* the East Coast and *(b)* the West Coast main lines to Scotland. [48835]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Train Punctuality

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* First Western Trains and *(b)* Wales and West Trains to produce a strategy to improve punctuality. [48602]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has regular meetings with all train operators regarding train performance, at which punctuality and reliability of services are discussed. In the Directions and Guidance published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 11 April, the SRA has been given a primary objective to work with the rail industry to achieve substantial lasting improvements in performance. The Directions and Guidance has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Fares

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much additional funding would be generated if regulated rail fares rise by the retail prices index in the 10-year plan. [47385]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority estimates that a 10 per cent. increase in regulated fares might generate an increase of between 4 and 6 per cent. in fare revenue.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Spending

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by her Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if she will make a statement. [6902]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001. Historic information prior to this date, relating to the merged operations which constitute DEFRA, could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Publicity expenditure is not recorded in the format requested. Our records show a publicity spend for the six months following DEFRA's creation of £1,373,737 and includes the categories in the question.

This expenditure is not exhaustive and excludes foot and mouth disease expenditure and the merged ex-DETR directorates, also non-departmental public bodies and agencies. The recovery of this expenditure would incur a disproportionate cost.

The Government are committed to using only whatever channel is judged to be the most cost-effective way to deliver the publicity necessary to support the implementation of policy. Paid advertising is resorted to only after careful consideration.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken in response to the *(a)* ECE Regional Assessment report on progress made in the implementation of Local Agenda 21, *(b)* conclusions on sustainable development of the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting of May 2001 and *(c)* EU Sustainable Development Strategy of June 2001. [46568]

Mr. Meacher: *(a)* The ECE Regional Assessment report covered the implementation of Agenda 21, not Local Agenda 21. The UK has promoted the conclusions of the report in subsequent discussions in the EU and the UN in preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

(b) The OECD Policy Report on Sustainable Development was endorsed by environment and finance Ministers at the OECD Ministerial Committee Meeting on 17 May 2001. The report outlines a policy framework for better integrating economic, environmental and social objectives, and decoupling economic growth from a range of environmental pressures. In response to the report, my Department has been closely involved in an initiative to develop indicators of sustainable development for use in OECD peer reviews. We have used the report to inform our approach to the external dimension of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and to the OECD's institutional report to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

(c) The Department has supported the implementation of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy through conclusions adopted by the Environment Council on 12 December 2000 and 4 March 2001, and at regular meetings with the European Commission and member states; reviewing the strategy is the responsibility of the European Council at its annual spring meetings.

Rural Public Houses

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the Countryside Agency's 'The Pub's the Hub' campaign; and if she will make a statement. [46453]

Alun Michael: The concept of the pub being "the hub" of the rural community is being promoted by Business in the Community as part of its Rural Action programme launched in July 2001. Rural pubs have great potential to assume a business and community role in the future as

one-stop shops for essential rural services while at the same time helping them to increase their own long term viability.

In December 2001 the Countryside Agency, working with Business in the Community and the British Beer and Pubs Association published "The Pub is the Hub: a Good Practice Guide". This guide provides local case studies of village pub diversification, and a check list for expanding business opportunities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39091]

Ms Hewitt: The table lists the costs of DTI advertising campaigns through the COI for the last four years for which final figures are available. Information regarding the purpose, number of staff involved, and method of evaluation for each campaign is not held centrally, and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

£

	Amount (Ex VAT)
1997–98	
Import Licences	58,111
Export Licences	6,809
Languages For Export	21,546
Queen's Awards	155,743
Firework Safety	73,097
Business Links	1,331,702
IT For All	653,290
Invest In Britain Bureau	21,750
Miscellaneous	182,837
Total	2,504,885
1998–99	
Import Licences	48,776
Export Licences	7,660
Queen's Awards	228,159
Firework Safety	73,863
Working Time Regulations	646,151
Business Links	1,021,352
Carbon Monoxide Campaign	46,261
Trade UK	7,198
IT For All	100,642
Languages For Export	8,404
National Minimum Wage	3,363,882
Total	5,552,348
1999–2000	
Import Licences	58,417
Export Licences	12,699
Export Website Awareness	19,402
National Minimum Wage	377,585
Information Society Initiative	852,375
Miners Compensation	164,768
Queen's Awards	61,512
Metrication	22,213
Carbon Monoxide	71,805
Foresight	63,046
Miscellaneous	18,192
Total	1,722,014

£

	Amount (Ex VAT)
2000–01	
Import Licences	46,195
Export Licences	16,729
National Minimum Wage	4,230,125
Small Business Service	92,233
Distance Selling	17,953
Miners Compensation Ad	142,899
UK Online for Business	1,793,154
Smart Awards	165,226
Paid Annual Leave	3,393,735
Carbon Monoxide	46,885
Small Business Service—Business Link	1,225,070
Trade Partners UK	1,511,218
Miscellaneous	4,887
Total	12,686,309

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list her overseas visits since 7 June 2001. [46222]

Ms Hewitt: As Secretary of State, I have undertaken the following overseas visits since 7 June 2001.

United States of America
Italy
Spain
Qatar
Belgium
South Korea
Japan.

Quarries

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessments she has made of *(a)* the number of operational quarries in the UK (i) now and (ii) 10 years ago and *(b)* the percentage change in full-time quarrying jobs over the last 10 years. [45739]

Mr. Wilson: No special assessments of the quarrying industry have been made in order to determine the number of operational sites and the number of full-time employees. Each year, we conduct a survey of quarrying known as the Annual Minerals Raised Inquiry, which is sent to all quarries having extant planning permission, for the purpose of determining the amount of material being quarried. Over the period 1990 to 2000, the number of such quarries dealing with either stone or sand and gravel declined slightly from around 1,780 to around 1,710. However, over the same period, the number of people present within quarries and covered by the provisions of the Mines and Quarries Acts 1954 and 1969 declined in these quarries by some 40 per cent. from around 31,500 to around 18,000.

British Investment Projects

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what figures she has collated on how many British investment projects there have been into Japan in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01; what their size was; and how many of those projects were (i) engineering and (ii) manufacturing based. [46445]

Nigel Griffiths: There is no requirement on companies to record British direct investment overseas on a project basis and there is no organisation in Japan that records inward investment in the way that Invest.UK does for the UK.

The Office for National Statistics publish figures for the value of UK net investment flows into Japan. Figures detailing flows for 1996 to 2000 are given in the table. The dramatic increase in investment in 1999 and 2000 is probably accounted for by investments by Vodafone and Cable and Wireless.

Year	*£ million*
1996	378
1997	383
1998	14
1999	1,929
2000	1,269

Source:
National Statistics MA4: Overseas Direct Investment

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the result of the investigations undertaken by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate into an accident on Friday 8 February in one of the magnox reactors at Calder Hall in Sellafield. [47037]

Mr. Wilson: The event on 8 February at Calder Hall did not warrant an NII investigation. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Down on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 356–57W for a statement on the event, which noted that defuelling at Calder Hall has been suspended until BNFL reports the outcome of its internal investigation and completes any requirements for remedial action. NII is now monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of BNFL's investigation.

British Nuclear Fuels

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has given the necessary regulatory approval required by British Nuclear Fuels before it can return the faulty MOX fuel it has supplied to Japan; and if she will place a copy of the approval document in the Library. [46911]

Mr. Wilson: HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has informed BNFL that it has no regulatory objections on health and safety grounds to BNFL receiving and storing this fuel at its Sellafield site. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House of its unconditional acknowledgement of BNFL's safety documentation, the formal means by which this was done.

Small Businesses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the number of businesses in the United Kingdom which employ fewer than 200 people; and what proportion of all businesses in the United Kingdom they represent. [49485]

Nigel Griffiths: In 2000 there were approximately 3.7 million businesses in the UK that employed fewer than 200 employees. This was equivalent to 99.8 per cent. of all UK businesses in 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the percentage of the private sector work force which is employed by companies with *(a)* fewer than 200 employees and *(b)* fewer than 100 employees. [49488]

Nigel Griffiths: In 2000 there were approximately 22 million people employed in the private sector or public corporations. Of these 48.5 per cent. were in businesses with fewer than 100 employees. 53.5 per cent. were employed by businesses with fewer than 200 employees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the share of national output produced by companies with *(a)* fewer than 200 employees and *(b)* fewer than 100 employees. [49487]

Nigel Griffiths: National output, or GDP, data is not collected by size of business. Two proxies for this measure are employment share and turnover share, which are collected by size of business. The table shows the figures for businesses with fewer than 200 and 100 employees:

	UK per cent.	
Employees	*Employment share*	*Turnover share*
0–99	48.5	38.7
0–199	53.5	44.5

Source:
SME Statistics in the UK 2000

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the number of sole trader businesses in the United Kingdom; and what proportion of all businesses in the United Kingdom they represent. [49479]

Nigel Griffiths: In 2000 there were approximately 2.6 million businesses in the UK that were classified as having no employees. This figure includes sole proprietorships, partnerships comprising only the self-employed owner-manager(s) and companies comprising only an employee director. These 2.6 million equate to 69.6 per cent. of all UK businesses.

Electricity Industry

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will bring forward legislation to establish British electricity trading and transmission arrangements, as recommended by Ofgem. [50641]

Ms Hewitt: I have been working closely with colleagues in the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive. We have concluded that the time is now right to join the separate markets in Scotland and England and Wales together to create a GB electricity market. The Government will bring forward legislation to achieve this when parliamentary time allows.

Minimum Wage

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the national minimum wage. [49988]

Ms Hewitt: The Government said last year, following recommendations from the Low Pay Commission, that it would consider the economic circumstances at the time before deciding whether to increase the main and development rates of the minimum wage by 10 pence/hour in October 2002, to £4.20 and £3.60 respectively.

The Government have considered the latest evidence across the overall economy and in the key sectors most affected by the minimum wage. We have concluded that conditions in the autumn of 2002 can be expected to support increases of 10 pence/hour and will therefore make regulations implementing these increases later this year. We have placed a short paper on this subject in the Libraries of the House.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps have been taken to ensure that practical measures directed at the arms industry are in place for the enforcement of Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [46296]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 applies to the arms industry in the same way as it applies in other fields. Under these provisions, United Kingdom nationals and United Kingdom-registered corporate bodies are liable to prosecution in the United Kingdom for offences of bribery and corruption committed overseas. The provisions will be enforced by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and (in appropriate cases) by the Serious Fraud Office.

UK Online

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what criteria were used in selecting Loudcloud to host the UK online website; and if she will make a statement; [43210]

(2) how many *(a)* companies and *(b)* UK companies were invited to tender for the contract to host the UK online website; [43211]

(3) what discussions took place with the Prime Minister's Office regarding the choice of companies invited to tender for the contract to run the UK online website. [43212]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

No discussions took place with the Prime Minister's Office regarding the choice of company selected to run the UK online website.

Negotiations between the Office of the e-Envoy and BT Syntegra on renewal of the UK online contract broke down in autumn 2001. OeE received legal advice that—given the need to maintain continuity of service—the only option was to contract directly for hosting services with BT's proposed sub-contractor, Loudcloud UK, a UK company. Doing so was fully compliant with EC procurement rules.

Prescription Medicines (Internet Trading)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's monitoring of dot.com chemists and their supply of prescription medicines. [42724]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Medicines Control Agency do not routinely monitor 'dot com' pharmacies. However, their Enforcement Group investigate any illegal activity of which they are made aware, including the supply of prescription medicines via the internet.

WALES

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34293]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The external costs of the former Welsh Office were £568,000 in 1998–99 and £55,000 in the first quarter of 1999–2000.

Since it came into existence in July 1999, the Wales Office has not separately distinguished legal costs.

Accountancy Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by his Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34984]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999, my Department has had no contracts with any of these accountancy firms.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42108]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department was created in July 1999 and has entered no contracts with these accountancy firms.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36165]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not readily available. However, my Department does not have the sort of executive responsibilities which would generally require advertising or public relations expenditure. It has no agencies or non-departmental public bodies.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37543]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The permanent civil servants in my Department are all secondees from elsewhere and so when they leave the Wales Office it is to return to their home Departments.

The Wales Office does not have any agencies.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37437]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department came into existence in July 1999.

During 2001, 26 per cent. of letters took more than one month for a response; 1 per cent. of letters took longer than three months for a response.

Figures for 2000 and for July—December 1999 were held on a different basis and cannot be analysed in the way requested.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44946]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Fifteen working days in each case.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 960W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37901]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Following its creation in July 1999, the Wales Office has redecorated and refurbished its London offices. It is not possible to accurately separate the cost of the work carried out on Ministers' offices from that carried out on other parts of the building.

Ministerial offices in Cardiff are part of the National Assembly for Wales building in Cardiff Bay and the Wales Office meets a proportionate share of the whole cost of maintaining that building.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39099]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department was created in July 1999. It does not have any service-delivery responsibilities of the type which ordinarily require advertising or publicity campaigns.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39086]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is no record of my Department entering into equipment leases since its creation in July 1999.

Communications Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39909]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999 the Wales Office has not budgeted separately for these functions. That approach reflects the small size of the Department and the fact that expenditure on all these items will be modest or, in some cases, zero.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40442]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office is committed to ensuring that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel commensurate with meeting their operational needs. Hence, official rail journeys undertaken by Wales Office staff are in line with the guidance and principles set out in Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code and the departmental staff handbook.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff, and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40981]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department was created in July 1999 and information on running costs have been given in annual Department reports (Cm 4620 and Cm 5121 available in the Library). Private office costs are not separately identified.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41059]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Hotel costs are not identified separately from other expenditure on travel and subsistence.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41073]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42572]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department does not discriminate on grounds of age within the working-age band.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42482]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The cost of the Department of the Parental Leave Directive is none to date.

The Wales Office is committed to helping its staff achieve a better balance between their home and work lives, including statutory entitlement to parental leave.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42472]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has only been in existence since July 1999. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 296W.

Election Expenses

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the returns of election expenses for the 1999 elections to the National Assembly for Wales. [45293]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No. Responsibility for making available for inspection returns of election expenses in respect of these elections rested partly with individual returning officers and partly with the Assembly itself.

Equal Opportunities

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved; [46496]

(2) what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997; [46497]

(3) if he will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [46498]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 26 March 2002]*: The Government are fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity. In 1998, we included an obligation in the Government of Wales Act requiring the National Assembly for Wales to have due regard to the principle of equality of opportunity for all the people of Wales.

Most of the executive responsibilities of the former Welsh Office transferred to the Assembly in July 1999. Since then, I have not identified a need to conduct gender impact assessments nor to establish baselines for policy appraisal in respect of any of my remaining responsibilities.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the women's organisations which have been consulted over proposed legislation by his Department during *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [46499]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 26 March 2002]*: My Department has direct responsibility only for legislative provisions which relate specifically to Wales.

Detailed information about consultees is not collated centrally. However, available records indicate that the Wales Assembly for Women and Welsh Women's Aid have been consulted on a number of proposals.

In the 2001–02 session, the Wales Assembly for Women responded to consultation on proposals for the Education Bill. Unless the respondent asked for confidentiality, all responses were placed in the National Assembly for Wales library, where they can be made available on request.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49134]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Overtime is paid only when there is no viable alternative and when the individual staff member is content to work additional hours. Levels of pay for overtime are in accordance with National Assembly for Wales guidelines.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49146]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Advice on answering written parliamentary questions is prepared by the most appropriate official in each case. Approximately 25 staff spend some part of their time doing work of this kind.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50558]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999 my Department has not entered any private finance initiative contracts.

Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50557]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department was created in July 1999 and has no non-departmental public bodies.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Lord Chancellor's Private Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1176W, if she will provide a full breakdown of the main items comprising the increase in the running cost of the Lord Chancellor's private offices between April 1998 and April 2001. [45121]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The increase in expenditure since 1998 is the result of the increasing workload of the Department and the appointment of two additional Ministers. The main increase was for the additional staffing costs of the offices.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44858]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department spends approximately £125,000 per annum on child care support. About £115,000 is used to provide subsidised nursery places for 40 staff mainly in London and the surrounding regions, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Grimsby, plus a further £10,000 on subsidised playschemes during school holidays. Approximately 120 children of members of staff used the playschemes during 2001–02.

Asylum Seekers (Legal Advice)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the impact of the provision of quality legal advice to asylum seekers prior to an initial decision on their application, the efficiency and quality of those decisions and the number of subsequent appeals; what assessment she has made of the potential costs and savings of ensuring quality legal advice is available prior to initial decisions; and if she will make a statement. [46015]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" (CM 5387) published in February 2002 states at paragraph 4.36:

> "While access to legal advice is not a pre-requisite to initial decision-making, and should not hold up the decision-making process, the Government is committed to ensuring access to quality legal advice at that, and all later stages, for all asylum seekers whether or not they are in the Accommodation Centre".

The Home Office is currently undertaking a 12-month study entitled "An Evaluation of Access to Early Legal Advice and Representation in the Asylum Determination Process". The aim of the project is to assess the implications of providing early legal advice and representation for the asylum determination process. It will provide systematic and objective information on the implications of providing such advice for the speed, quality and sustainability of asylum decision making. It is hoped a final report will be available internally in November 2002 with a view to publishing as soon as possible thereafter.

It is therefore too early to calculate, with any degree of accuracy, the potential costs and savings that access to early legal advice can bring.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47167]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my right hon. friend to the central answer given by the Cabinet Office dated 10 April 2002.

Underspends

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in her Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47806]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Estimated outturn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget report on 17 April.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the measurable criteria are for the PSA target to respect the rights of defendants and to treat them fairly; and if he expects the target [illegible] specified on page 16 of the 2001 departmental report to be met by March. [47231]

Mr. Wills: Our target outturn is to achieve 100 per cent. improvement across a range of measures. An interdepartmental/agency working group has agreed that these targets are:

> 98 per cent. of prisons by March 2002 to have a Legal Services Officer so as to ensure that all prisoners receive information about legal services on reception and know who can assist them with applications for public funding;
>
> 50 per cent. of magistrates courts to have full access to a comprehensive courts-based bail information scheme by March 2002, rising to 80 per cent. by March 2003;
>
> 80 per cent. of prisons holding remand prisoners to have a bail information scheme by March 2002, rising to 90 per cent. by March 2003;
>
> 90 per cent. of people in police stations requesting the service of a duty solicitor to receive the service within 45 minutes by March 2002.

Information about progress on these targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47115]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1999 this Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible.

Possession Proceedings

Ms Oona King: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of possession proceedings for rent arrears in local authority and RSL accommodation related to tenants who have had their housing benefit reduced as a result of non-dependent deductions in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [48552]

Mr. Wills: Figures concerning possession applications brought by landlords are not collected in the manner of breakdown requested above, nor by reason for application. The figures could only be provided at a disproportionate cost to the Department.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies receive paid leave to undertake union duties; how many days they are allocated; and what has been the cost to public funds in each of the last four years. [36196]

Angela Eagle: The Employment Protection Act 1975 gave trade union officials a statutory right to reasonable paid time off from employment to carry out trade union duties. In the Civil Service, since April 1996, Departments and agencies have been given the freedom to set their own levels of facility time and make other facilities available to their trade union accredited representatives.

In accordance with the Departmental Facilities Agreement between the Home Office and recognised trade unions 57 union representatives in the Home Office and its agencies receive up to 100 per cent. paid leave to undertake union duties. A further 66 accredited representatives are allocated 25 days a year to spend on union duties. Related costs in 2001–02 are expected to amount to approximately £3,237,000. Information about costs in previous years is not available.

The Department values the constructive working relationships with the trade unions which provide an efficient means of involving staff at all levels in shaping and delivering our aims.

Operation Helios

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the complaints by members of the public in relation to the conduct of officers involved in Operation Helios have been referred voluntarily to the Police Complaints Authority; [39361]

(2) if the Police Complaints Authority has asked for a referral so that it can supervise complaints made against police officers in Operation Helios. [39362]

Mr. Denham: No complaints made against officers involved in Operation Helios have been referred by the Metropolitan police service to the Police Complaints Authority for supervision. The Authority has not formally asked for a referral. However, the Authority has suggested to the Metropolitan police that it might be appropriate for any complaint accepted by the police in relation to this investigation to be referred voluntarily.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39130]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office has implemented two European Community directives during the period specified.

European Community directive 95–46 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data was implemented by the Data Protection Act 1998.

European Community directive 2000–8 on the manufacture and placing on the market of certain substances used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was implemented by SI 2001 No. 3683.

The Home Office also has responsibility for the following European Community measures which have been formally adopted but which have not required any specific implementation.

Council decision establishing a European Refugee Fund for the financing of projects relating to conditions for reception of displaced persons; integration for recognised refugees and others with stable and lasting forms of international protection; and voluntary repatriation for persons who have applied for asylum or some other form of international protection and been refused. Formally adopted on 28 September 2000.

Council regulation concerning the establishment of "EURODAC" for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of the Dublin Convention. Formally adopted on 11 December 2000.

Council decision on the conclusion of an agreement between the European Community and Republic of Iceland and Kingdom of Norway concerning the criteria and mechanisms for establishing the state responsible for examining a request for asylum lodged in a member state or Iceland or Norway. Formally adopted on 15 March 2001.

Council directive on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance between member states in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof. Formally adopted on 20 July 2001.

Additionally, a number of measures have been adopted by the Council relating to Title IV matters on which the United Kingdom has not exercised its right to opt in to the adoption of the measure. The United Kingdom is therefore not bound by them.

The Home Office does not hold information concerning the cost to public funds of each instrument. This information could be assembled only at disproportionate cost. The costs of the European Refugee Fund come from the Community budget.

Where a proposal is likely to impose significant costs on business, charities or voluntary organisations, a Regulatory Impact Assessment is produced. Copies of these are placed in the Library.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42444]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 269W.

Knife Crime

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to tackle knife crime. [43420]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to ensuring that violent offenders are punished effectively. Severe penalties are available to the courts to deal with offenders who carry knives. For instance, any person who has an article with a blade or point in a public place or on school premises can be sent to prison for up to two years. It is also an offence for any person to have an offensive weapon in a public place or on school premises, or for any person to sell knives to people under 16.

The police give high priority to action against knife crime. For example, the Metropolitan police are using an intelligence-led approach in exercising their powers to stop and search people who they believe may be carrying knives, and are working with door staff to tackle the problem at licensed premises. Largely as a result of these initiatives, the Metropolitan police have arrested and charged 17.8 per cent. more people for carrying knives and offensive weapons over the year to February 2002 than in the previous year.

Criminal Damage

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded offences of criminal damage there were in *(a)* each police force area in each year since 1997 and *(b)* each crime disorder reduction partnership area in each year since their establishment. [43977]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crimes of criminal damage are not collected at Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership level.

The requested figures for the criminal damage recorded crime offence group are given in the table. There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which was estimated to have increased the total number of criminal damage offences recorded over England and Wales as a whole by 5 per cent. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Recorded crime—offences of criminal damage by police force area since 1997[1]

Police force	*1997*	*1998–99*[2]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	20,396	20,605	20,519	22,479
Bedfordshire	8,025	7,893	8,048	7,892
Cambridgeshire	9,250	11,925	12,110	13,197
Cheshire	11,205	11,596	12,627	13,078
Cleveland	11,274	10,681	10,812	10,684
Cumbria	8,047	8,405	8,943	8,922
Derbyshire	13,387	14,316	15,207	14,997
Devon and Cornwall	15,232	17,722	18,490	18,284
Dorset	8,245	8,303	8,408	9,419
Durham	10,518	11,122	10,654	10,375
Essex[3]	18,845	18,834	21,766	24,673
Gloucestershire	6,158	6,570	7,990	9,087
Greater Manchester	68,100	67,052	75,201	77,154
Hampshire	26,429	25,100	28,125	28,714
Hertfordshire[3]	9,831	10,177	11,560	13,839
Humberside	20,177	21,486	20,739	20,910
Kent	24,047	23,049	24,806	27,947
Lancashire	26,767	21,360	22,776	25,445
Leicestershire	14,034	15,143	16,889	16,664
Lincolnshire	7,145	7,728	8,391	9,078
City of London	287	297	409	260
Merseyside	23,677	27,465	30,822	30,593
Metropolitan Police District[3]	140,516	136,870	151,590	144,231
Norfolk	9,782	10,393	10,978	11,481
Northamptonshire	11,595	11,771	11,736	11,448
Northumbria	35,314	31,634	30,436	29,775
North Yorkshire	8,537	8,372	8,617	9,167
Nottinghamshire	28,165	23,953	23,692	23,187
South Yorkshire	23,568	24,198	25,305	24,173
Staffordshire	16,940	15,668	18,442	21,655
Suffolk	7,835	7,898	9,547	10,150
Surrey[3]	6,557	7,576	8,602	12,318
Sussex	23,945	23,828	26,361	27,219
Thames Valley	25,584	26,006	28,630	29,719
Warwickshire	6,362	6,888	7,439	7,290
West Mercia	14,965	15,346	17,410	16,817
West Midlands	49,120	50,407	61,422	57,459
West Yorkshire	46,446	49,239	48,106	49,568
Wiltshire	5,722	6,644	7,151	7,452
Dyfed-Powys	4,497	4,497	4,417	4,572
Gwent	9,947	11,690	12,253	11,221
North Wales	11,238	9,652	10,102	12,182
South Wales	29,331	30,227	28,154	25,313
England and Wales	877,042	879,586	945,682	960,087

[1] 1997 is the calendar year, with the other years ending in March.
[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.
[3] There was a boundary change on 1 April 2000 in which parts of the Metropolitan Police area were transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, so that these police force areas followed county boundaries thereafter.

Public Transport (Assaults)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce plans for mandatory bans from using public transport to those convicted of violence while using public transport systems. [43956]

Mr. Denham: Powers are already available to individual transport operators and the criminal justice system to ban those convicted of violence while using public transport systems from using public transport. Transport operators can take action in respect of preventing violent individuals from using the transport

system by taking out civil injunctions. Football Banning Orders against individuals can also be applied for through the Crown Prosecution Service. Under proposals in the Police Reform Bill, the British Transport police will be able to apply directly to the courts for Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in order for them to deal more effectively with particular problems of anti-social behaviour. It is also proposed to give criminal courts powers to place restrictions through ASBOs on the actions of offenders imprisoned for anti-social behaviour related offences once they are back in the community.

Police Retention

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on ill health retirement from the police service; what the consistent approach to it will involve; and what measures he will introduce to increase officer retention. [44027]

Mr. Denham: The recently published White Paper "Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform", reaffirmed the Government's view that one of the priorities for the police service is to manage ill-health retirement effectively. The Police Negotiating Board are considering ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health. This should enable forces to reduce the level of ill-health retirement and match the performance of the best quartile of forces by 2005. The measures under consideration include the Police Negotiating Board issuing joint guidance to police authorities and senior management to ensure that wherever possible officers continue in employment where they are capable of performing sufficient duties to make their retention operationally justifiable.

In the White Paper the Government also announced that they will establish a national occupational health strategy for the police service, which should assist forces to manage cases of ill health more effectively at the outset.

Confiscated Asset Fund

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance the Confiscated Asset Fund in Wales. [44048]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: While contributions to the Confiscated Assets Fund (CAF) from Welsh courts were relatively low, a number of bids to the fund from organisations in Wales were successful (see table). The new Recovered Assets Fund, which has replaced CAF, and other measures, including the Proceeds of Crime Bill now under consideration by Parliament, will enable more criminal assets to be seized and recycled back into the community.

Project	*Amount (£)*
Counselling in 12 pharmacies spread evenly throughout Dyfed Powys	54,000
Production of a leaflet in five key languages for use throughout Wales	50,000
Helping to fund a part-time creative therapy worker in West Glamorgan	81,086
Developing a treatment service for young heroin users in Gwent	77,000
Total	262,086

Drivers (Mobile Phones)

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers about the use of hand held mobile phones when driving. [44610]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers confirmed last year that they remain satisfied with existing legislation, which allows for the successful prosecution of those whose use of a mobile phone may contribute to a driving offence. This is a matter that we keep under review.

Conviction Rates

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the conviction rate was per police force area in each year since 1997. [44461]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The available information for 1997 to 2000 is contained in the table and relates to the proportion of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for all offences who were found guilty at all courts, by police force area.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Conviction rates[1] for all offences, by police force area, England and Wales

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	73	71	71	73
Bedfordshire	73	74	73	74
Cambridgeshire	79	80	78	80
Cheshire	81	81	79	80
Cleveland	73	72	72	75
Cumbria	81	81	80	81
Derbyshire	76	76	77	78
Devon and Cornwall	73	73	75	76
Dorset	73	77	77	75
Durham	72	73	73	74
Essex	80	80	81	78
Gloucestershire	74	75	73	74
Greater Manchester	76	77	76	77
Hampshire	78	79	77	78
Hertfordshire	75	74	76	74
Humberside	78	79	80	79
Kent	81	81	78	77
Lancashire	70	71	72	71
Leicestershire	75	75	76	76
Lincolnshire	77	77	79	79
London, City of	74	67	70	80
Merseyside	76	76	76	73
Metropolitan police	75	78	77	76
Norfolk	92	92	91	83
Northamptonshire	71	70	71	72
Northumbria	74	74	74	76
North Yorkshire	78	78	75	76
Nottinghamshire	74	74	73	75
South Yorkshire	74	75	77	78
Staffordshire	75	78	78	74
Suffolk	77	78	77	74
Surrey	75	79	79	75
Sussex	72	73	73	73
Thames Valley	72	72	71	71
Warwickshire	76	76	80	81
West Mercia	75	75	75	76
West Midlands	69	69	66	66

Conviction rates[1] for all offences, by police force area, England and Wales

	1997	1998	1999	2000
West Yorkshire	70	70	70	68
Wiltshire	84	77	78	75
Dyfed Powys	73	75	73	73
Gwent	78	80	80	78
North Wales	74	78	78	79
South Wales	72	72	72	72
England and Wales	75	75	75	75

[1] Defendants found guilty of all offences at all courts as a percentage of persons proceeded against for all offences at magistrates courts, as notified to the Home Office.

Cyclists

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cyclists have been prosecuted for failure to observe traffic signals in the last 12 months for which data are available. [44369]

Mr. Denham: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales for 2000 is shown in the table. It relates to offences by pedal cyclists for failing to obey school crossing patrols and neglecting traffic directions and signs, including traffic lights.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Number of pedal cyclists proceeded against[1] for offences connected with failing to obey traffic signals, England and Wales 2000[2]

Offence description	Statute	Proceeded against
Pedal cyclist failing to obey school crossing patrol	Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Sec 28(3)	6
Pedal cyclist: Neglect of traffic directions and signs (including traffic light signals)	Road Traffic Act 1988 Sec 35 and 36	52

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what London allowance is paid to police officers employed in the Metropolitan police force. [44630]

Mr. Denham: In addition to any housing allowance entitlement, an officer who joined the Metropolitan police force prior to 1 September 1994 is entitled to a London allowance of £1,011 plus London weighting of £1,773.

An officer who joined the Metropolitan police force after 1 September 1994 and who is not in receipt of housing allowance, receives an enhanced London allowance of £4,338 plus London weighting of £1,773.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many extra Metropolitan police officers will be on duty each day during the period 1 to 4 June; and if he will make a statement; [44569]

(2) what safety precautions are being taken by the Metropolitan police force during the Queen's Golden Jubilee weekend; what the anticipated cost is; and if he will make a statement. [44568]

Mr. Denham: For security reasons it would be inappropriate to disclose in advance of the event the planned number of officers who will be on duty or the projected cost of safety and security operations.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the number of police officers on duty for each day between 1 and 4 June will depend on circumstances and be commensurate with the need to provide appropriate security, crowd management and public reassurance, with sufficient capacity to deal with unexpected incidents.

The operation will be run in partnership with other London police forces (City of London police, British Transport police and Royal Parks constabulary).

People Trafficking

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of trafficking in people were identified in each year since 1997; and what enforcement action was taken *(a)* against the victims of trafficking and *(b)* against the organisers and beneficiaries of trafficking. [44709]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Forming an accurate estimate of the levels of trafficking in people is problematic due to the hidden nature of the act. There is currently no accurate, reliable data in existence with the United Kingdom or the European Union. A Home Office research study "Stopping Traffic" published in 2000, indicated that the number of women and children trafficked into the United Kingdom for the purposes of sexual exploitation was likely to be in the range of 140 to 1,400 per annum.

As there is at present no specific offence of trafficking, the police and other law enforcement agencies are not able to say how many organisers and beneficiaries of trafficking have been investigated, arrested or prosecuted. However, we are introducing a new stopgap offence of trafficking for prostitution in the forthcoming Nationality Immigration and Asylum Bill, which will carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment. We will follow the stopgap offence with further legislation to cover those being trafficked for both labour and sexual exploitation. These offences will go wider than is possible in the immigration legislation and will cover people who are trafficked within the United Kingdom, as well as those who are brought here from abroad. The Government's aim is to tackle the organised criminal groups who are behind the trafficking, not the victims of this heinous trade.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy towards trafficking in people is; and what assistance he offers to those tricked into *(a)* prostitution and *(b)* domestic slavery. [44707]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Department has set out its strategy on trafficking in the recently published White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", comprising our plans on legislation, enforcement, international co-operation and prevention and support for victims. Trafficking of people involves arranging their movement for the purposes of exploitation. The exploitation may take the form of bonded labour or servitude, or commercial sexual exploitation. It is often accompanied by violence, or threats of violence, against the victim, or their family. Trafficking is often associated with illegal immigration but does not necessarily involve crossing a frontier. Our strategy takes account of those who are trafficked into and throughout the United Kingdom, as well as those trafficked within the country.

We recognise the need to offer the victims of trafficking particular support to help them escape their circumstances, and facilitate them to assist law enforcement to tackle organised criminal gangs behind the trafficking. We will make special arrangements for their protection and support. Where victims are not entitled to remain in the United Kingdom, we will consider whether it is appropriate to allow them to stay here. If they wish to return home, we will work with the voluntary sector to help them do so, provide initial counselling and ensure they have suitable accommodation to return to and to help them reintegrate in to their own community. The White Paper also sets out our intention to develop a best practice "toolkit" on victims of trafficking, which will act as a guide for immigration officers, police and others potentially dealing with victims of this heinous crime.

"Mein Kampf"

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to prohibit the sale of Arabic editions of Mein Kampf; and if he will make a statement. [44795]

Angela Eagle: No. The text of "Mein Kampf" in English translation has been freely available in the United Kingdom for many years. It has served as a means of understanding the background to a particular period in European history and the terrible crimes that were committed by the Nazis. However, if anyone believes that there is anything in this particular translation that falls foul of the law, they should of course report the matter to the police.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Independent Police Complaints Commission will be funded; how many staff it will employ; and if he will make a statement. [44963]

Mr. Denham: As an executive non-departmental public body, the Independent Police Complaints Commission will be funded through grant in aid from the Home Office.

Current estimates are that the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) will employ around 160 people.

Cannabis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cases in the last 30 years of police officers being disciplined owing to a previous partner having smoked cannabis his Department has records of. [45078]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

European Crime Convention

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 492W, on the European Crime Convention, if he will make a statement on the outcome of consideration as to the practical implications for banks. [44793]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The practical implications for banks of the 2001 Protocol to the 2000 European Union Mutual Legal Assistance Convention (which the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) has referred to as the European Crime Convention) are very similar to the existing provisions on customer information in the Terrorism Act 2000 and the provisions on customer information orders and account monitoring orders contained in the draft Proceeds of Crime Bill. The Government's current view is that the mechanism to be used to obtain information in response to requests for these orders made under the Protocol will resemble that used to obtain similar types of information under the Terrorism Act and the relevant provisions of the draft Proceeds of Crime Bill. Accordingly, the costs per order are expected to be comparable to those identified by the Regulatory Impact Assessment conducted for that Bill. A separate Regulatory Impact Assessment for this Protocol will be carried out.

The key difference between the measures in the Terrorism Act and the Proceeds of Crime Bill and the Protocol is scope. The Protocol covers a wider range of serious crimes. Banks will therefore be expected to provide information in relation to slightly different types of criminal investigation.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he made of the implications of the existence of *(a)* a landfill site adjacent to and *(b)* a foot and mouth disease burial site on Throckmorton airfield when listing the airfield as a potential site for an asylum accommodation centre. [45559]

Angela Eagle: In making final decisions on preferred sites, we will take all the relevant factors into account including those to which the hon. Member refers. These assessments have not yet been made.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means the processes of the Criminal Cases Review Commission are subject to continuous improvement. [45573]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Much of the commission's routine managerial effort is directed to continuous improvement of its processes. The Commission has an internal advisory Process Improvement Group (PIG) that is convened by the chairman whenever particular facets of the commission's processes require special review.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the seven topics for special review that the Criminal Cases Review Commission's Process Improvement Group was convened to discuss during 2000–01. [45565]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The seven topics that were listed for special review were:

Review cases;
Plan operations;
Manage finances;
Provide expert staff;
Provide Information Technology;
Provide physical facilities; and
Manage communications.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission plans to encourage prospective applicants to seek legal advice; and how it will measure its progress. [45580]

Mr. Keith Bradley: When corresponding with applicants, the Commission encourages applicants to seek legal advice. It has a list of legal representatives that it will provide without recommendation. It carries out a six monthly survey of the level of active legal representation, and gathers data on legal representation as submitted by applicants.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* what improvements are planned at the Criminal Cases Review Commission to increase the rate at which case accumulation will be reduced and *(b)* how this will be measured. [45566]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The case accumulation at Stage 1 is already negligible. The accumulation at Stage 2 screen will be minimised by 31 March 2002, or soon afterwards. The accumulation at Stages 2–3 will be progressively minimised during the period to 31 March 2005. The measures will include the numbers of cases in each tray and under review at each stage.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission encourages its staff to improve their formal qualifications; and how this is measured. [45584]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Commission encourages all staff to improve their formal qualifications. Training needs and opportunities for staff are discussed at regular personal development reviews. The Commission's personnel systems maintain information on the achievement of formal qualifications.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission determines which cases justify the formal appointment of an external investigating officer. [45579]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is a statutory provision of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 that a committee of at least three or more Commission members determines whether or not a formal appointment of an external investigating officer should be made.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what aspects of *(a)* a legal background, *(b)* the criminal justice system, and *(c)* the skills for effective casework, the Criminal Cases Review Commission has identified as appropriate for acquisition by its staff during training. [45582]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Commission continuously develops an integrated training programme, beginning from induction, and progressing through acquisition of the appropriate knowledge base and practical skills. For Commission members, case review managers and other case working staff, the emphasis is on legal background and other aspects of the criminal justice system, and the development of the skills necessary to carry out effective casework.

The training schedule that the Commission develops includes:

Unsafe convictions;
New evidence;
Fair trials;
Sentencing;
Legal incompetence;
Disclosure;
Misconduct by investigators and witnesses;
Guilty pleas and
Identification procedures.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission determines what constitutes a real possibility that a conviction, finding, verdict or sentence will not be upheld in court. [45567]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is a statutory provision of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 that any decision that a real possibility exists that a conviction, finding, verdict or sentence would not be upheld at appeal must be made by a committee of at least three Commission members. The Commission will generally be looking for arguments not raised, or evidence not adduced, in the proceedings that led to the conviction, verdict or finding.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the measures for casework best practice incorporated in the Criminal Cases Review Commission's training programme. [45583]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Commission develops continuously an integrated training programme, beginning from induction, and progressing through acquisition of the appropriate knowledge base and practical skills. For example, for Commission members, case review managers and other caseworking staff, the emphasis is on legal background and other aspects of the criminal justice system, and development of the skills necessary to carry out effective casework. The training schedule includes: unsafe convictions; new evidence; fair trials; sentencing; legal incompetence; disclosure; misconduct by investigators and witnesses; guilty pleas and identification procedures.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission determines if its policies are being optimised along its three dimensions of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy. [45575]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Commission distinguishes between effectiveness (achieving high output standards), efficiency (maximising output from its human and

physical resources) and economy (minimising the cost of those resources), and recognises that its processes must be optimised along all three dimensions. The Commission's annual business plan sets process goals along these dimensions, which should approach optimality.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and their dependants are supported by *(a)* NASS, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* the mainstream welfare benefits system. [45773]

Angela Eagle: As at the end of December 2001, 65,630 asylum seekers (including dependants) were supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

From the grant claims sent to the Home Office by local authorities, as at September 2001, 25,370 single adult asylum seekers and 14,310 families were supported by local authorities. Figures including dependants are not available.

As at November 2001, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were supporting 12,000 asylum seekers. Figures including dependants are not available.

This is the latest available information on supported asylum seekers.

Figures for NASS supported asylum seekers and local authority supported asylum seekers are rounded to the nearest 10. Figures for DWP supported asylum seekers are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Yarl's Wood Detention Centre

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees were held in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre in each of the last 12 months; what the average time of detention was; and how many were subsequently removed from Britain. [48623]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Yarl's Wood Removal Centre opened in November 2001. Internal management information, which has not been quality-assured, records that there were 112 detainees at Yarl's Wood at the end of November 2001; 252 detainees at the end of December 2001 and 308 detainees at the end of January 2002. There were 385 detainees at Yarl's Wood on 14 February 2002.

Information about the average time of detention and subsequent removals is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by an examination of individual case files.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36816]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* There have been no visits undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries at departmental expense in the last four years.

Campsfield House

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timetable had been decided for the closure of Campsfield House at 7 February; and whether the timetable for closure of Campsfield House has since been changed. [46663]

Angela Eagle: The intention is to close Campsfield House when places can be transferred to the new removal centres that are expected to be in operation by spring 2003. This timetable was announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1040, and remains unchanged.

DNA Samples

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of the ruling which allows the police to retain DNA samples from suspects later released without charge. [48256]

Mr. Denham: The requirement for the police to destroy fingerprint and DNA samples taken from suspects later released was amended by Article 82 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 which allows the police discretion to retain these samples. DNA provides an important tool in the fight against serious crime and in particular offences of violence against the person. The Government are pleased that the Court has upheld its view that the law strikes a fair balance between the interests of the individual, the victims of crime and society as a whole. The court's decision will allow the police to continue to make best use of this important scientific technology in the fight against crime.

Correspondence

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate expects to reply to the letters of 6 January, 28 January and 3 March from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston regarding the case of Mr. Rynier Jacobus Greyling. [47883]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A reply was sent to my hon. Friend by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on 15 March 2002.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 421W, on rail travel, if staff below Band B2 are permitted to travel first class; and if line management approval is required beforehand to do so. [50546]

Mr. Leslie: Rail travel on official business for staff below B2 is at standard class. First class travel is permitted only if there is a requirement to accompany either a civil servant who is entitled to travel first class, or someone who is not a civil servant who is travelling first class. All first class travel by staff below B2 level must be approved in advance.

TREASURY

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39088]

Ruth Kelly: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45074]

Ruth Kelly: Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. Central records are not maintained of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 has been relied on or of the cost to public funds of cases which include a human rights aspect. However, we have recorded two cases which have been brought against the Treasury.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45395]

Ruth Kelly: We publish a wide range of material designed to inform members of the public about our activities. Information including advice on the Treasury's Values and Code of Conduct, how to obtain information under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and how to complain about the department are published on our public website.

Private Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 700W, on private sponsorship, if he will list the conferences and seminars that HM Treasury and its associated departments have organised since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [46610]

Ruth Kelly: Records are not maintained centrally. The information required may be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Wanless Report

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent studies he has conducted into alternative health care systems other than those contained in the interim Wanless report; and if he will publish them. [R] [47963]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the House on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 135:

> "[Mr. Wanless] will also publish a study commissioned by his review on international health care systems, considering health systems in individual countries around the world."

Banks (Excessive Charging)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the new regulations relating to excessive charging by banks in England and Wales to Northern Ireland. [48853]

Ruth Kelly: The Government accepted in full the conclusions of the Competition Commission report into the supply of banking services to SMEs in the UK and have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to seek undertakings from the eight main clearing banks to implement the remedies suggested. The majority of those remedies will apply through the UK and are designed to improve competition in this market. In addition the Competition Commission found evidence of excess profits for the four largest clearing banks in England and Wales, but not in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Consequently, their recommendation that banks should be required to offer interest or free banking to SMEs will apply only in England and Wales.

Retirement Income

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he will take to reform the law on annuities and income in retirement. [48898]

Ruth Kelly: For some time the Government have actively encouraged innovation in the annuity market to improve benefits for customers. A consultation document, "Modernising Annuities", was issued on 5 February. It was intended to stimulate discussion on how the annuity market could be encouraged to become more flexible and competitive. The consultation period ran until 5 April. The Government are now considering the responses carefully before deciding how to proceed.

Finance Capital

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last set out policies for substantial reform of finance capital; and if he will make a statement. [48877]

Ruth Kelly: The pre-Budget report (Cm 5318), published in November 2001, sets out a range of measures designed to improve both the supply of, and access to, finance capital. The forthcoming Budget will provide an up-date on these measures.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49135]

Ruth Kelly: Overtime payments are made to staff where appropriate. Sufficient staff have been recruited to fill all complemented posts in the Treasury, and the Department has a number of alternative working policies in place such as flexible working hours, part-time working and compressed hours, as well as working at home. These are available to all staff by agreement with their line managers.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mark Tami: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many families he estimates are eligible for

(a) working families tax credit and *(b)* children's tax credit in (i) Alyn and Deeside and (ii) Delyn that are not claiming it; [48918]

(2) how many families in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Delyn are claiming (i) working families tax credit and (ii) children's tax credit. [48920]

Dawn Primarolo: For the numbers claiming the working families' tax credit (WFTC), I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W. Information about the children's tax credit (CTC), or about the numbers eligible for WFTC, is not available by constituency. However, the number of families who are eligible for the CTC in Wales is estimated to be 225,000.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to put on-line the registration of births, marriages and deaths. [50531]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Ms Joan Walley, dated 15 April 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning what plans there are to put on-line the registration of births, marriages and deaths. (50531)

The Government's proposals for modernising civil registration in England and Wales are contained in the White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change" published on 22 January 2002, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers have been detected paying less than national minimum wage in the last three months; and what action has been taken. [45041]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have detected 471 non-compliant employers in the last three months, with the total amount of wages arrears identified being £2,734,000.

In the same period, 25 enforcement notices and eight penalty notices have been served on employers. There have been four cases taken by the Inland Revenue to employment tribunal on behalf of workers, with a successful outcome in each instance.

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have been held with the multi-lateral creditors regarding multi-lateral debt relief for Afghanistan. [48769]

Mr. Boateng: No discussions have been held so far.

Child Care Tax Credit

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the eligibility for the child care tax credit. [45034]

Dawn Primarolo: The eligibility criteria for the child care tax credit are kept under constant review.

Pensions

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average impact on the Exchequer over the course of the last 10 years of each tranche of one thousand persons contracting into SERPS/state second pension from a personal or occupational pension. [44682]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The information is in the table:

£ million

Year	*Amount*
1991–92	0.6
1992–93	0.6
1993–94	0.6
1994–95	0.5
1995–96	0.6
1996–67	0.6
1997–98	0.6
1998–99	0.6
1999–2000	0.6
2000–01	0.5

Note:
The figures show the increase in national insurance contributions that would result from 1,000 people rejoining SERPS in each of the last 10 years. They have been calculated on the assumption that their arrangements are broadly representative of all people contracted out, in terms of age, earnings and type of contracted-out arrangement.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49591]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 2002 departmental reports will be published in spring 2002. The dates will be announced shortly.

Small Businesses (Taxation)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was paid in direct and indirect taxation by companies with *(a)* fewer than 200 employees and *(b)* fewer than 100 employees in each of the last 10 years. [49486]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Public-Private Partnership with Siemens Business Services for the Department of National Savings by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49503]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Public Private Partnership with Siemens Business Services (SBS) delivers full operational service to National Savings and Investments (NS&I) and its customers.

The cost of delivery of the operational service from SBS is at least £157 million less than the public sector comparator, assuming the contract runs for its 15 year life.

The finances were clearly set out in the contract. NS&I expenditure on this contract remains as originally negotiated and reported to the PAC.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50278]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Comprehensive records of refinanced PFI contracts are not held centrally. No Treasury PFI projects have been refinanced.

PRIME MINISTER

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what new initiatives his office has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its public service agreement targets. [47188]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 12 April 2002.

Appointments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if hon. Members have been appointed to task forces and other ad hoc advisory bodies created by the Government since 1997. [49729]

The Prime Minister: Individuals are invited to join task forces and reviews solely on the basis of the knowledge, experience and expertise they are able to bring.

Governments have always taken advice from a number of sources—internal and external. There is nothing to prevent hon. Members being appointed to task forces and other ad hoc advisory groups.

Summary date are recorded and published for each task force and ad hoc group in the Cabinet Office's publication "Taskforces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews". This was last published in October 2001 and copies are available in the House Library. The publication sets out the composition, gives numbers of people by category of appointment, and gives the name of the chairperson. A category in this report shows ministerial membership but no specific data on hon. Members' membership of these groups is held.

Steel Tariffs

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of the United States policy on steel imports were discussed in his meetings with President Bush on 6 to 7 April in Texas. [49264]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) in the House on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 17.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with President Bush during his recent visit about the possible exemption of British steel products from US tariffs; and if he will make a statement. [48930]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) in the House on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 17.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister whether he discussed Israel's nuclear weapon capability in his meetings with President Bush on 6 - 7 April. [49481]

The Prime Minister: I outlined the issues I discussed with President Bush in my statement to the House on Wednesday 10 April.

Kyoto Protocol

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has raised the United States opposition to the Kyoto Protocol on climate change during meetings and other communications he has had with *(a)* the United States President and *(b)* the United States Vice President since 11 September 2001. [49495]

The Prime Minister: I and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister have raised the US position on climate change and the Kyoto Protocol with President Bush and Vice President Cheney respectively on a number of occasions since 11 September 2001.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister when he established a Cabinet Committee on Sustainable Development; who its members are; and if he will make a statement. [48894]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward) on 7 March, *Official Report*, column 486W.

Texas Visit

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those persons who accompanied him on his recent trip to Texas other than Ministers, civil servants, journalists and special advisers; and in each case, specify whose costs were met in whole or part from public funds. [48955]

The Prime Minister: I was joined in Texas by members of my family who had been invited by the President and Mrs. Bush. Their participation on the visit was at no additional cost to the taxpayer.

Lord Levy

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he was informed of the commercial arrangements between Lord Levy and Westfield. [48985]

The Prime Minister: This is a personal matter for Lord Levy. I am satisfied that there is no conflict of interest.

Overseas Charitable Donations

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister which foreign Heads of State and Government have informed Her Majesty's Government of personal donations to UK charities following visits to the United Kingdom and discussions with the Prime Minister since 1997. [48768]

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any donations. There is no central record maintained of such donations.

Gifts in Kind

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will include in the Ministerial Code of Conduct a requirement for Ministers to publish the value of gifts in kind provided by overseas Governments. [48771]

The Prime Minister: All gifts are handled in accordance with the requirements of paragraphs 136 to 139 of the Ministerial Code.

Hospitality

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister which foreign Heads of State have accepted free travel and accommodation within the United Kingdom from the UK Government since May 1997. [48776]

The Prime Minister: It has been the policy of successive Governments to provide hospitality for official visits by Foreign Heads of State who come as guests of Her Majesty's Government.

Travel and Accommodation Allowances

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will refer the subject of travel and accommodation allowances for the Prime Minister to the *(a)* Senior Salaries Review Board and *(b)* Committee on Standards in Public Life. [48775]

The Prime Minister: No. All travel by Ministers is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers.

New Zealand

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister what assurances he has given to the Prime Minister of New Zealand about the length of time that young citizens of that country can work in the UK before returning home. [49298]

The Prime Minister: Under the current terms of the working holidaymaker scheme young Commonwealth nationals may spend up to two years in the united Kingdom and are able to engage in work incidental to the holiday for up to approximately half their stay. The scheme is currently being reviewed.

I have assured the Prime Minister of New Zealand that any reform of the scheme will not erode its benefits to those coming from New Zealand.

The Government fully appreciates the important contribution that working holidaymakers make in the United Kingdom, and is committed to maintaining the benefits of the scheme for New Zealand citizens, as well as citizens of other Commonwealth countries.

Special Advisers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure members of the House of Lords who *(a)* hold ministerial office and *(b)* are employed as special advisers agree to give evidence to select committees of the House. [49886]

The Prime Minister: All civil servants, including special advisers, are accountable to Ministers for their decisions and actions. Ministers are accountable to Parliament. It is therefore for individual Ministers to decide who provides evidence on their behalf to select committees. These decisions are taken on a case-by-case basis.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement about the rules which apply to the pursuit of outside interests by special advisers and the accountability thereof; [49885]

(2) if he will review the rules relating to the allowable financial interests of specialist advisers. [49274]

The Prime Minister: The Model Contract for Special Advisers, which incorporates the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, sets out the terms and conditions of employment for special advisers. Special advisers are also covered by the requirements of their employing Department's Staff Handbook, which includes the handling of financial interests and outside employment.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if his policy permits the employment of special advisers who have non-domicile tax status. [49276]

The Prime Minister: The employment restrictions on the recruitment of civil servants, including special advisers, are set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

Egypt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what was the value of hospitality provided to him by the Egyptian Government on his recent visit to Egypt; what charities in Egypt were the recipients of his charitable donations; and what was the value of those donations. [49275]

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister what the value was of the facilities provided to him and his family by the Egyptian Government in December 2001, broken down by *(a)* cost of hotel accommodation, *(b)* cost of travel and *(c)* cost of exclusive access to tourist sites. [48770]

The Prime Minister: The position is as I made clear in the Register of Members' Interests.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what factors led him to conclude that it was appropriate to accept free tickets for the internal aeroplane flight he made from Cairo to Sharm-el-Sheikh. [49277]

The Prime Minister: For security reasons, the Egyptian Government identified the appropriate accommodation and internal aeroplane travel during my family holiday in Egypt. This is in line with the requirements of 'Travel by Ministers' which makes it clear that for some Ministers, security factors may make special arrangements necessary.

I made charitable donations to a charity chosen by the Egyptian Government equating to the cost.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if the provision of free travel and accommodation by the Egyptian President to the UK Prime Minister is a reciprocal arrangement. [48782]

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he sought advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before accepting the offer of travel and accommodation from the Egyptian Government. [48774]

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister whether his Chief of Staff arranged the travel and accommodation details of his visit to Egypt in December 2001. [48781]

The Prime Minister: No.

HEALTH

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the radiotherapy waiting times are for patients categorised as *(a)* Group 1, *(b)* Group 2, *(c)* Group 3, *(d)* Group 4 and *(e)* Group 5 for each UK health authority; and what the comparative figures were for 1997. [37907]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally. The NHS Cancer Plan set out maximum waiting time targets for first cancer treatment which will come into effect over the next few years. Arrangements to monitor these targets are currently being put in place and will cover radiotherapy where this is the first treatment.

From December 2001, there is one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for children's, testicular and acute leukaemia. By 2005, there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers.

NHS Decentralisation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy towards the advancement of mutual solutions to allow further decentralisation of decision-making and operations within the NHS. [39387]

Mr. Hutton: A structural and cultural reform of the national health service is currently taking place with the aim of shifting the balance of power towards frontline organisations, and within organisations to patients and staff. From 1 April 2002, primary care trusts, local organisations run by clinicians and local people, are responsible for improving health, securing services and integrating health and social care locally. By 2004, these organisations will receive 75 per cent. of the NHS budget to enable them to do so effectively, which constitutes considerable devolution in the running of the NHS. As responsibility is devolved to the frontline, the Department will develop new ways of working and step back from operational issues.

A package of earned autonomy freedoms and the potential to achieve foundation status will also become available for the best performing primary care and NHS trusts. This will be another way in which the Government devolves decision-making and operational management in the NHS.

Medical Records

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems are in place to ensure medical records are not falsified. [39371]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The Department is fully committed to the principles of patient privacy and confidentiality, and to ensuring that medical records are handled in a secure manner and are not falsified.

Caldicott Guardians appointed within NHS organisations have the responsibility for overseeing the handling of confidential patient information within their own organisations. This work includes responsibility for ensuring that procedures and systems are in place to control access to patient information, and that medical records are capable of being robustly audited.

In the case of GP's, their Terms of Service state that they shall be responsible for keeping adequate records of the illnesses and treatment of their patients and forward such records to the health authority on request. Health authorities are able to audit GP practices by Post Payment Verification and the General Medical Council is able to bring to account any GP that does not keep clear, accurate and contemporaneous records.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what savings for the NHS *(a)* have been achieved and *(b)* are projected to be achieved from the establishment of NHS Professionals; and how (i) has the money been re-directed and (ii) will the money be re-directed; [39674]

(2) pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 699, if he will make a statement on the value of money improvements achieved by NHS Professionals in London, indicating how much money *(a)* has been saved and *(b)* is projected to be saved. [39781]

Mr. Hutton: Estimates of detailed cost savings have not been completed.

NHS Professionals charges a management fee to recoup operating costs currently set at a maximum of 7.5 per cent. This compares favourably with that of commercial agencies as highlighted in the Audit Commission report 'Brief Encounters—Getting the Best from Temporary Nursing Staff'. This report indicated wide variations in the commission rates charged by agencies with an averaging charge of 20.5 per cent.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts will be permitted to contract with commercial nurses' agencies to administer temporary staffing services to the specification laid out for NHS Professionals. [41725]

Mr. Hutton: Health Service Circular 2001–02 highlights the aim that NHS Professionals will be used by all NHS organisations as the primary supplier of all temporary staffing requirements for the NHS with, as and when necessary, contracts agreed with commercial agencies to meet any surplus demand. The circular also encourages NHS organisations to review their arrangements for accessing supplementary staff and skills, and to work with their Regional Offices to agree an implementation plan for NHS Professionals across their local health economy.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated in accident and emergency departments of St. George's hospital, Tooting in the last 12 months. [40520]

Mr. Hutton: In the latest financial year 2000–01, St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust had a total 79,013 accident and emergency attendances, 75,813 being first attendances.

From 2001–02, the information is available on a quarterly basis and is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Paediatrics

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many transfers of ventilated children between intensive care units took place in each quarter of the last five years for which figures are available. [41479]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Transfers of critically ill children in ventilated and stable condition are arranged between local hospitals and paediatric intensive care centres, and more rarely between centres, to access specialist interventions which cannot be provided in every location, and in order to obtain the best achievable outcome for the child.

Variant-CJD

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to contact patients who may have been exposed to v-CJD through *(a)* surgical instruments or *(b)* blood transfusions. [41805]

Yvette Cooper: We are awaiting the results of the CJD Incidents Panel consultation before finalising any decisions regarding contacting patients about their possible exposure to v-CJD via surgical instruments.

Folic Acid

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to implement the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy report of January 2000 on flour fortification with folic acid. [43866]

Yvette Cooper: A consultation document on whether or not to fortify wheat flour with folic acid was issued in July 2000 jointly by the Health Departments and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). This was based on the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (2000) conclusion that fortification of wheat flour with folic acid would help reduce the number of births affected by neural tube defects.

The consultation responses have been analysed and the summary of responses posted on the Department's website. The majority of respondents were in favour of fortification although this was not overwhelming (59 per cent.). The most common concerns were over the potential risks of fortification and the possible restriction of consumer choice.

The complexity of the analysis and the need for additional work led to a longer timescale than anticipated. The Health Departments and the FSA held a joint stakeholders meeting on 18 March 2002 to discuss the issue and help inform policy. The policy options will be considered by the FSA Board as well as Health Ministers.

Genetics

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the licensing and vetting procedures are for new genetic tests to be sold directly to the public; [44758]

(2) what mechanisms have been put into place to ensure that claims made by manufacturers of currently licensed genetic tests have scientific and medical validity; [44762]

(3) what the procedures are for approving and regulating genetic testing services. [44763]

Yvette Cooper: The "in vitro" diagnostic medical device (IVD) regulations (SI2000 No. 1315) ensure that IVDs that have a specific medical purpose meet relevant essential safety, quality and performance requirements before being placed on the market with a CE mark. The regulations came into force on 7 June 2000 with a transition period until December 2003. During this time, manufacturers may choose on which basis to place their device on the market. The regulations require that manufacturers of IVDs bearing the CE mark must be able to demonstrate that the device will achieve the manufacturer's claimed performance.

The Department has published two voluntary codes of practice and guidance for genetic tests being sold directly to the public. These set out broad requirements in areas such as: peer-reviewed evidence of value, accreditation and quality assurance in testing laboratories, consent, confidentiality, sample and information storage, and customer information. Under the "Code of Practice and Guidance on Human Genetic Testing Services Supplied Direct to the Public" (September 1997) suppliers notify the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) of their proposed service and HGC publishes a statement of conformance with the Code. In addition, those supplying genetic paternity testing services are expected to comply with the Code of Practice and Guidance on Genetic Paternity Testing Services" (March 2001). All Government and public bodies commissioning paternity testing services are expected, so far as is practical, to ensure that those supplying services comply with this code.

Ministers have asked HGC to conduct a review of the provision of genetic tests offered directly to the public, and to report by the end of the year.

Accreditation for UK laboratories providing diagnostic testing for patients is voluntary. It is mostly overseen by Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd. (CPA). CPA standards are compatible with international standards (ISO). Laboratories registered with CPA are subject to on-site peer inspection to ensure compliance with these standards.

Laboratory accreditation is now part of the quality standards compiled by the Genetics Commissioning Advisory Group (GenCAG) and endorsed by the Joint Medical Genetics Committee of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Pathologists and the British Society for Human Genetics. Commissioners and NHS trusts purchasing genetic testing services are recommended to purchase from accredited laboratories.

NHS Commissioners may evaluate new service developments before agreeing to fund them. As part of the national NHS genetic testing network, consideration is being given to mechanisms to evaluate genetic tests before being considered for NHS funding. There is further scope for evaluation through the Health Technology Assessment programme which produces research information on the clinical and cost-effectiveness and broader impact of health technologies including diagnostic techniques.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on *(a)* access to counselling and advice services, *(b)* procedures for gaining informed consent and *(c)* protection of personal genetic information where genetic testing is being undertaken. [44759]

Yvette Cooper: Patients may seek advice from their General Practitioner, other health care workers or NHS Direct. Specialist NHS services for genetics are concentrated in Regional Genetic Centres (RGCs), to which patients may be referred as appropriate. Those receiving genetic tests as part of NHS clinical genetic services normally receive counselling and advice before and, where appropriate, after testing.

The Government response to the 3rd Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology 1994–5, stated that: 'The Government agrees with the Committee.. that people who seek diagnosis of a genetic condition of late onset, i.e in adult life, should be given adequate information about the medical and social implications of the findings and offered sufficient counselling, in advance of any testing, and subsequently if the result of a test is positive'.

The Secretary of State announced in January 2002 how part of the £30 million investment in genetics would be used to pump-prime additional capacity within existing genetics services. This will enable more people concerned about familial disease to receive advice, testing and counselling.

Patients have a fundamental legal and ethical right to determine what happens to their own bodies. Valid consent to treatment is therefore central to all forms of healthcare, from providing personal care to undertaking major surgery. Patients may indicate consent non-verbally (for example by presenting their arm for their pulse to be taken), orally, or in writing. For the consent to be valid, the patient must: be competent to take the particular decision; have received sufficient information to take it; and not be acting under duress.

The Department has issued guidance on consent, and this should be consulted for advice on the current law and good practice requirements in seeking consent. This includes what to do when a patient lacks the capacity to give consent to an intervention. The relevant documents are available at "www.doh.gov.uk/consent". Health professionals should also be aware of any guidance on consent issued by their own regulatory bodies.

Genetic information, like most other patient information, is held in confidence by health professionals and is also subject to the requirements of Data Protection legislation. This means that, unless exceptional circumstances apply, individuals should be informed about how the information will be used and that the information should only be disclosed to a third party with the consent of the person to whom it refers.

The Department published a national confidentiality strategy for the NHS "("Building the Information Core: Protecting & Using Patient Information: A Strategy for the NHS")" in December 2001. The development of systems and processes to record and respect patient preferences including objections to disclosures is a key element of the strategy. In addition, the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) has been considering issues associated with the storage, protection and use of personal genetic information and will be reporting to Ministers later this spring.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the planned Green Paper on genetics. [44760]

Yvette Cooper: We plan to publish our Green Paper on genetics later this year.

Children's Diet

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures his Department has taken to combat obesity in children; [45002]

(2) what initiatives his Department has taken to encourage children to eat healthy food. [45001]

Yvette Cooper: We are committed to tackling the rising trend in childhood obesity and action to encourage children to eat a balanced diet. We have put in place major cross-Government programmes of work to improve healthy eating and increase physical activity. This includes:

The National School Fruit Scheme where over 80,000 children in 27 areas and over 500 schools now receive a free piece of fruit each school day. Additional funding of £42 million from the new opportunities fund will enable the scheme to expand to cover over 1 million children from 2002 to 2004. From 2004 all 4 to 6-year-olds will be entitled to a free piece of fruit each school day.

We already have a National Healthy School Programme, a joint initiative between the Department and the Department for Education and Skills, which has as one of its themes healthy eating. Schools are encouraged to provide, promote and monitor healthier food at lunch and break times and in any breakfast clubs. This will be complemented by the food in schools programme.

which aims to bring together under one umbrella all food-related initiatives in schools and after school clubs to improve health and learning.

Work to ensure that children have opportunities to participate in a wide range of physical and sporting activities. The Government's White Paper "Schools—achieving success" gave a commitment that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality physical education (PE) and school sport a week, within and outside the curriculum. Significant funding is also being provided to enhance PE and sports facilities in schools including £541 million from the new opportunities fund for a PE and Sports Programme.

Anaesthetic Services

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant anaesthetists are in post; and what was the figure in 1997. [45111]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants within the anaesthetics specialty (headcount)—England

At 30 September	*Consultants*
1997	2,760
2001	3,550

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

The number of consultant anaesthetists has increased by 29 per cent. since 1997.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45069]

Ms Blears: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied upon. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases which we consider may be of particular significance to this Department. We have recorded 22 cases to date.

We do not collect information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44951]

Ms Blears: The Department's target times for replying to correspondence from hon. Members and members of the public is 20 days, this is the Service First Target set by the Cabinet Office.

UVB Machines

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many UVB machines there are in NHS hospitals in England and Wales; and how many are immobilised because of lack of trained staff. [45703]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to decide what services to provide for their populations including those who require treatment with UVB machines.

The Action On Dermatology (AOD) programme aims to identify, develop and share best practice in the organisation and delivery of services, with particular emphasis on improving access and reducing waiting times. Local services are helped to identify their constraints and to find effective solutions by developing new methods of organisation and clinical practice. A key element is the involvement of the clinical professions in identifying good practice and in encouraging its widespread adoption. Change in clinical practice is most effective when it is owned by clinicians themselves.

Brain Disorders

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken *(a)* to improve the treatment of brain disorders and *(b)* increase the number of neurologists in the UK. [45278]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Long-term Conditions (NSF) will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease, brain and spinal injury, as well as some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition.

We are investing in extra training places in neurology. We have announced an increase of up to 15 specialist registrars in neurology for 2002–04. This will mean that by 2009 there will be an additional 140 trained specialists available to take up consultant posts in neurology.

Radiographers

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recruitment targets exist for therapy radiographers; how he intends they should be achieved; and by when. [45950]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not have a target specifically for therapy radiographers. They are included within the NHS Plan target for 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals by 2004, which will be met by improving recruitment and retention, encouraging return to practice, increasing number of students completing training and international recruitment.

Between 1997 and 2001 the number of therapeutic radiographers employed in the NHS has increased by 130 (9 per cent.) and the number of training places available for students has increased by 29 (21 per cent.).

Respiratory Specialists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the recommended number of hospital respiratory specialist physicians is *(a)* per head of population and *(b)* per NHS trust; [45742]

(2) how many hospital respiratory specialist physicians posts are unfilled, broken down by NHS trust; [45744]

(3) how many hospital respiratory specialist physicians are in post, broken down by *(a)* coverage per head of the population and *(b)* NHS trust. [45743]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not set quotas for the numbers of hospital respiratory specialist physicians per head of population or by individual NHS Trust. We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the NHS's new multi-disciplinary workforce planning processes. These look at the national requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

As at September 2001 (latest figures available), there were 1.9 respiratory specialist physicians, consultants and doctors in training, per 100,000 of the population (England). Numbers of respiratory specialist physicians by NHS Trust are shown in the table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Respiratory Medicine is not one of the specific specialties included in the NHS Vacancy Survey 2001 and information about the number of unfilled respiratory specialist physicians posts is not available centrally.

NHS Efficiency Gains

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efficiency and other value for money gains were achieved in the NHS as a percentage of health authority unified allocations, in each year since April 1999, and for the latest year for which figures are available. [45720]

Mr. Hutton: Allocations to Health Authorities are based on an overall assessment of the resources required to cover inflationary pressures and deliver national targets. Allocations to Health authorities in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were made net of 3 per cent. efficiency savings, and in 2001–02 allocations were made net of 2 per cent. efficiency savings. This means that health authorities needed to achieve the efficiency target to fully fund delivery of national targets and inflation.

Emergency Re-admissions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the emergency re-admission figures for Q2 2001–02 broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [45772]

Mr. Hutton: The figures for Quarter 2 2001–02 emergency re-admissions of patients aged 75 and over have been placed in the Library.

Muscular Dystrophy

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on research into a cure for Duschenne Muscular Dystrophy in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [45787]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC supports a major project on the molecular analysis of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy at the MRC Functional Genetics Unit in Oxford and the expenditure on this is about £440,000 a year.

The MRC expenditure figure on all types of Muscular Dystrophy for the last five years is an estimated £3.7 million. It is not possible to extract Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy spending specifically from this total as so much of the work is basic in nature and could apply to all forms of the disease.

The Department provides support funding for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that take place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to instruct the National Radiological Protection Board to carry out research into illnesses caused by exposure to depleted uranium. [43654]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Department has no plans to ask the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) to carry out research specifically into illnesses possibly caused by exposure to depleted uranium. However, NRPB does undertake research that is relevant to the assessment of the risks to health from such exposures. In particular NRPB has carried out extensive research into the distribution of uranium in body organs, its retention and excretion, following inhalation of a wide range of uranium compounds. It has also developed computer models that enable the concentration of uranium in the various organs and resulting radiation doses to be calculated. Depleted uranium is mildly radioactive, and NRPB's research programme on the effects of ionising radiation in general is therefore relevant to assessment of the radiological risks from exposure to depleted uranium.

Food Supplements

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the Government have made of the cost to British business of the Directive on food supplements. [45515]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency, which has been responsible for negotiating this Directive on the Government's behalf, has consulted widely on its likely impact. There would be labelling costs falling on manufacturers of all food supplements, but these would be substantially offset by a two-year transitional period. Any additional impact of future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and maximum limits cannot yet be assessed.

Blood Tests

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many blood tests in each of the last five years for which figures are available *(a)* were sent to laboratories for tests and *(b)* were misplaced before the patient received the results. [46576]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of community pharmacists *(a)* in post and *(b)* vacancies, broken down by (i) health authority and (ii) region in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [45641]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* Information on the number of community pharmacists in post and vacancies is not held centrally.

University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for which the Chief Executive of the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust remained in post after the publication of the CHI report and the zero rating of Walsgrave hospital. [46822]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* All Trusts were assessed on their performance during 2000–01 against a set of key targets that are the most significant factors in determining their overall performance rating for the year. Those Trusts that indicated the poorest levels of performance against the key targets were awarded a rating of zero stars.

In September 2001, twelve NHS Trusts, including the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, were classed as 'zero stars' under the new performance ratings system. In line with national guidance on monitoring ongoing performance, as the Chief Executive had been in post for longer than 18 months, the Trust were given 3 months notice to improve the performance of the Trust to a satisfactory level.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the link between women taking the contraceptive pill or on hormone replacement therapy and their likelihood of suffering a deep vein thrombosis; and what measures are being taken to advise and make aware these vulnerable groups of the dangers of DVT and how to lower the risk of suffering from it. [46830]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A very small increase in the risk of developing deep vein thrombosis (DVT) for women who take oral contraceptives (OCs) or hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has been recognised for many years. Accordingly, OCs and HRT are contraindicated in women who have a personal or family history of DVT and who are therefore most at risk.

In 1995 several new studies suggested that a slightly increased risk of DVT was associated with newer OCs (the so-called third generation pills that contain desogestrel or gestodene as progestogen) compared to older ones (so-called second generation pills that contain levonorgestrel as progestogen). This issue was considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) in 1995, 1996 and 2001 and by the Medicines Commission in 1998 as more data became available. They have advised that for every 100,000 women who use OCs for a year, 10–20 more cases of DVT may be expected to occur relative to healthy non-users. This increase in risk is less than the risk of DVT associated with pregnancy (an extra 55 cases of DVT for every 100,000 pregnancies).

Warnings about the risk of DVT in women who take OCs have been in the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPCs) for health professionals and the patient information leaflet (PIL) for women for many years. These warnings were updated with respect to the increased risk of DVT in women who use third, as opposed to second, generation pills in early 1999 and were included in the BNF (British National Formulary). In 2001, product information for all combined oral contraceptives was further updated to inform women and their health professionals that their risk of DVT is greatest in the first year they ever use an OC. Comprehensive information about the risk of DVT with use of oral contraceptives was provided to health professionals and women in a Dear Doctor letter in 1995, in an article in the Medicine Control Agency's (MCA) safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 1999 and on the MCA's website in 2001.

With respect to HRT, evidence suggesting an increased risk for DVT was considered by CSM in 1996. They advised that an additional 10–20 women may experience a DVT out of every 100,000 women who use HRT compared with healthy non-HRT users of a similar age. The SPCs and PILs for HRT products and the BNF were updated in line with this advice in 1998. Health professionals were informed of the risk of DVT in association with use of HRT in an article in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" which contained a pull-out sheet with information specifically for women.

In addition to targeted information, every pack of oral contraceptives and HRT contains a PIL for women. These clearly inform women that they should not use OCs or HRT if they have a personal or family history of DVT. They also inform women of their additional risk of DVT compared with non-users. PILs for the second and third generation OCs describe what DVT is and how it is caused, its potential severity and possible outcome. They also list the symptoms of DVT and advise women to stop taking their pills immediately and seek medical help in the event of their occurrence. In addition, they advise women to stop taking their pills prior to periods of prolonged immobilisation, especially surgery and to re-start only when fully re-mobilised. Any woman wishing to take OCs is encouraged to discuss the risks of DVT with her doctor and, provided she understands and accepts those risks, to jointly choose the treatment that is best suited to her in light of her individual medical history.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England have been diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis in *(a)* each of the last six years and *(b)* 2002 to the latest available date. [46743]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information shown in the table is the number of admissions to national health service hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was Deep Vein Thrombosis.

Year	Finished consultant episode
1995–96	19,598
1996–97	20,736
1997–98	22,551
1998–99	24,871
1999/2000	25155
2000/01	24,903

Notes:

Admissions are defined as the first period of patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. Admissions do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Figures are only given for NHS hospital in-patient admissions; there are no figures available for patients diagnosed or treated elsewhere. The figures are the latest available.

The figures for 1995–96 to 1999–2000 are grossed for both coverage and invalid/unknown clinical data, but the figure for 2000–01 have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. it is ungrossed).

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) code used: 180.2.

BCG Inoculation

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of BCG inoculation take-up is in each regional health authority. [47538]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about the numbers of children receiving BCG vaccinations by regional office area is contained in table 8 of the statistical bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health Website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

MRSA Superbug

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to combat cases of the MRSA superbug. [47540]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We require all acute Trusts to collect data on MRSA blood stream infections and the early results of this new surveillance system have recently been published. These data provide a baseline against which future performance and action can be measured.

Initiatives that will contribute to controlling MRSA include:

The Commission for Health Improvement's monitoring of compliance of the national infection control standard for acute Trusts during their routine clinical governance reviews.

The development of workshops to help implement the guidelines on the prevention and control of hospital acquired infection published in January 2001.

Work is also under way on a manual for the control of healthcare associated infections and a tool kit to assist Trusts in assessing their infection control staffing needs.

Guidelines for community infection control are being developed as part of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence programme.

A comprehensive study to describe the pattern of provision of infection control in the community is under way, plus a review of the role of CIC nurses. This review will clarify their skills, education and training requirements and identify best practice.

Action plans for healthcare acquired infections and antimicrobial resistance that build on the above initiatives will be produced later this year.

Food Standards Agency

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sick bags were sent to food establishments by the Food Standards Agency as part of their promotional campaign. [47475]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1026W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which sort of food establishments the Food Standards Agency sent sick bags as part of their promotional campaign. [47476]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Food hygiene material including sick bags were sent to restaurant and catering establishments registered on local authority premises databases. These included: restaurants, take-aways/cafés, stalls at public events, roadside eateries, recreational clubs, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, catering outlets for special events and catering outlets supplying delicatessen and patisserie counters at retailers.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the latest PSA target to promote independence by reducing nationally the per capita rate of growth in emergency admissions of people aged over 75 to an annual average of 2 per cent. up to 2002–03 will be met. [47287]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The public service agreement target is for a reduction in the growth of the emergency admissions rate for people aged 75, comparing performance in 2003–04 with performance in 2000–01. However, we set a specific target, as part of the planning and priorities guidance, for 2001–02 of growth not exceeding 2 per cent.

Quarter 3 estimates suggest the 2001–02 target will be met: predictions are suggesting a reduction in the per capita rate of 0.5 per cent.

Psychiatry Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many old-age in-patient psychiatry beds there have been in each of the past five years. [47832]

Jacqui Smith: Information on beds designated as "Mental illness—elderly" is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds in mental illness—elderly wards, England, 2000–01—1996–97

	Number
2000–01	13,151
1999–2000	13,385
1998–99	14,279
1997–98	14,791
1996–97	15,599

Source:
KH03—Bed availability and occupancy.

The reduction in hospital beds for people with mental illness reflects the policy of re-providing long stay hospital accommodation with community based provision.

Liquid Cytology Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new liquid cytology units there have been since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47012]

Yvette Cooper: Three new liquid based cytology (LBC) units have been installed in national health service trusts in England since the publication of the NHS Plan. The units are at Newcastle Royal Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust, Norfolk and Norwich Hospitals NHS Trust and North Bristol Hospitals NHS Trust.

The installation of LBC units is part of a pilot set up in April 2001 to evaluate the effects, costs and practical implications of introducing LBC into the NHS cervical screening programme alongside human papilloma virus testing. The evaluation report is due in autumn 2002, and will inform an appraisal of LBC by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Subject to the outcome of the evaluation and appraisal, full roll-out will follow.

Food Poisoning

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been of the Food Standards Agency promotional campaign against food poisoning. [47477]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A budget of around £4 million was spent on all aspects of the agency's food hygiene campaign for the financial year 2001–02, including radio and television advertising. This included the extensive preparatory work needed to ensure that it was properly constructed and targeted, as well as the materials themselves.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging Scans

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times were, broken down by regional health authority, for an MRI scan in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [48011]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We do not collect waiting times for an MRI scan. The Government acknowledges the importance of diagnostic procedures, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and is encouraging hospitals to streamline their services so that tests are carried out, and a diagnosis made, as quickly as possible. The length of time that a patient may have to wait for any scan is dependent on their clinical condition. Emergency cases need to be seen immediately. Other cases will be carried out as quickly as possible, however this is dependent on the clinical priority of all the remaining patients waiting to be scanned. To increase the capacity of diagnostic services, funding has been made available for the provision of new and replacement scanners. By 2004, approximately 100 MRI scanners and 200 CT scanners will be provided through central purchasing programmes. In addition to this, workforce initiatives are underway that aim to improve recruitment and retention of staff.

Relocation

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47981]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* None.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48350]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has purchased eight TV licenses in the last year, at a total cost of £872, in respect of premises occupied by the Department itself.

Flu Jabs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people and what percentage of patients aged over 65 had the flu jab this winter. [47549]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Final monitoring figures at the end of the influenza campaign showed that 5.1 million people aged 65 and over received the influenza vaccine this winter, which represents 68 per cent. of those in this age group.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing homes were located *(a)* within five, *(b)* five to 10, *(c)* 10 to 15 and *(d)* more than 15 kilometres from settlements with under 3,000 people in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [46506]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 April 2002

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government Finance

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to relieve people of paying council tax when in hospital; and if he will make a statement. [50492]

Dr. Whitehead: A person is required to pay council tax on their sole or main residence. When a person enters hospital for treatment on a short term basis, their sole or main residence remains the property where they resided prior to entering hospital. Where a person enters hospital on a long-term basis and there is no intention of their returning to their original residence, the hospital becomes in effect their main residence and their home is exempt from the council tax. We have no plans to change this.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the change this year in the level of business rates in each London borough. [48869]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the amount of business rates that each London borough (and the City) estimates that it will collect in 2002–03 compared with estimates made at the corresponding time last year for 2001–02.

	Net business rate yield for 2002–02[1] *(£ million)*	*Net business rate yield for 2002–03*[1] *(£ million)*	*Change in net business rate yield between 2001–02 and 2002–03*[2] *(£ million)*	*Change in net business rate yield between 2001–02 and 2002–03 (Percentage)*
Inner London				
City of London	471.7	531.3	59.6	12.6
Camden	190.2	211.0	20.8	10.9
Greenwich	47.5	44.9	−2.6	−5.4
Hackney	46.5	47.0	0.5	1.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	84.5	96.8	12.4	14.6
Islington	99.1	107.5	8.3	8.4
Kensington and Chelsea	130.6	140.4	9.7	7.4
Lambeth	64.0	67.9	3.9	6.1
Lewisham	37.6	36.3	−1.2	−3.3
Southwark	90.4	90.1	−0.2	−0.3
Tower Hamlets	119.1	138.1	19.0	15.9
Wandsworth	61.1	62.2	1.1	1.8
Westminster	788.1	875.0	86.9	11.0
Total for Inner London	2,230.3	2,448.6	218.2	9.8
Outer London				
Barking and Dagenham	43.3	41.7	−1.8	−4.0
Barnet	73.2	74.3	1.1	1.5
Bexley	46.1	47.9	1.8	3.8
Brent	66.9	67.2	0.4	0.6
Bromley	65.7	65.9	0.2	0.3
Croydon	86.2	89.7	3.4	4.0
Ealing	85.8	89.7	4.0	4.6
Enfield	65.3	65.6	0.2	0.4
Haringey	42.8	43.7	0.9	2.2
Harrow	44.2	43.7	−0.5	−1.2
Havering	47.3	47.7	0.4	0.9
Hillingdon	231.8	246.0	14.2	6.1
Hounslow	102.4	108.2	5.8	5.7
Kingston-upon-Thames	54.4	56.8	2.4	4.4
Merton	49.4	50.2	0.8	1.7
Newham	53.0	54.4	1.4	2.6
Redbridge	39.9	39.1	−0.8	−2.0
Richmond-upon-Thames	48.6	50.5	1.9	4.0
Sutton	37.8	37.0	−0.8	−2.0
Waltham Forest	37.8	36.2	−1.6	−4.2
Total for Outer London	1,322.0	1,355.5	33.5	2.5

[1] Net of transitional, mandatory and discretionary rate reliefs.

[2] The business rate multiplier increased from 43.0p in 2001–02 to 43.7p in 2002–03. This increase was in line with changes in Retail Price Index, as required by legislation.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for each of the last five years the SSA settlements for all local authorities and the percentage change from the previous year, showing those authorities with the highest percentage increase year on year and those with the lowest increases. [49739]

Dr. Whitehead: Tables showing the SSA settlements for all local authorities, together with the percentage changes against the SSA figures for the previous year, adjusted for changes in the functions and funding of authorities, where appropriate, for 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Postal Ballots

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans have been made for the conduct of all-postal ballots in the 2002 local elections in the event of industrial action disrupting the postal service. [48749]

Dr. Whitehead: Councils have been in close contact with their local postal service representatives about the postal voting arrangements for the local elections. It is understood that no official industrial action is planned for the period of the elections. In the event of disruption to the postal service, Consignia is prepared to give priority to the delivery of voting material. Councils also have a range of contingency measures in place. These can include the use of commercial postal delivery firms and hand delivery arrangements. They can also set up ballot paper collection points and allow collection and delivery at council offices.

Planning

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the final version of the Planning Policy Guidance Note 17. [49942]

Ms Keeble: I hope to be able to publish this shortly. As I indicated to last year's Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, this will not be before the publication of report of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force.

Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what priority he intends to give to reducing the number of empty homes in his guidance to local authorities under the Homelessness Act 2002. [48729]

Ms Keeble: As I said on 12 July 2001 at the first sitting of the Homelessness Bill in the Commons, the statutory guidance on the homelessness provisions in the Homelessness Act 2002 will urge local housing authorities to include a review of empty properties within their district as part of the homelessness review that will inform their homelessness strategy.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment was made of congestion levels in each region when determining house-building targets; and what influence this had on the final targets; [50518]

(2) what the estimated environmental cost is to each local authority arising from meeting the house-building targets. [50519]

Mr. Byers: This Government do not set house building targets.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new money has been made available to help combat homelessness following the publication of the report 'More than a roof'. [50527]

Mr. Byers: The DTLR has allocated £125 million to the Homelessness Directorate for 2002–03 to tackle homelessness. This is made up of the Rough Sleepers Unit existing baseline of £30 million, the remainder being found from DTLR's End Year Flexibility and savings on other existing budgets.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 667W, what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the change in the numbers of successful cash incentive scheme grant applications by local authority tenants between 1997–98 and 2000–01. [48714]

Ms Keeble: We have not conducted a detailed assessment of the change in the number of successful applications. However, there was a significant reduction when separate ring-fenced funding was phased out in 1999–2000 (even though total housing capital funding was increased substantially). At that stage a number of authorities cut back or discontinued the scheme.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on *(a)* establishing a cash incentive scheme and *(b)* the types and size of local authority property that should be prioritised for release under the cash incentive scheme. [48710]

Ms Keeble: Guidance on the operation of cash incentive schemes is issued by the Department from time to time, most recently in February 2000. Decisions about targeting the scheme on particular types and sizes of properties are for authorities to take, in the light of local circumstances.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the maximum grants available are for housing association tenants of *(a)* bedsits, *(b)* one-bedroom properties, *(c)* two-bedroom properties, *(d)* three-bedroom properties, *(e)* four-bedroom properties and *(f)* properties with five or more bedrooms under the Tenants Incentive scheme; [48718]

(2) what factors determine the relationship between the rate of maximum discount available to housing association tenants under the Right to Acquire scheme and the rate of maximum grant available under the Tenants Incentive scheme; [48719]

(3) what the maximum discounts available are for housing association tenants of *(a)* bedsits, *(b)* one-bedroom properties, *(c)* two-bedroom properties, *(d)* three-bedroom properties, *(e)* four-bedroom properties and *(f)* properties with five or more bedrooms under the Right to Acquire scheme. [48717]

Ms Keeble: The Right to Acquire scheme gives eligible tenants of registered social landlords the right to purchase their rented home with the help of a discount. The discount generally varies from £9,000 up to a maximum of £16,000, irrespective of the size of the property, and depends on the local authority area in which the dwelling is situated.

The Tenants Incentive Scheme was discontinued on 31 March 1998. It provided a cash payment, equivalent to the right to acquire discount, funded by the Housing Corporation to help existing tenants vacate their housing association property and purchase their own home.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 978W, on housing, if he will place in the Library copies of the research programmes that have been carried out into the cash incentive scheme. [48712]

Ms Keeble: Copies of the three research reports, are available from the Libraries of the House. (Cash Incentive Report 1989–1990, 1991–1994, 1994–1997).

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 668W, on right to buy, if he will make an assessment of the impact of increasing the maximum cash incentive scheme grant available in London to a level *(a)* equal to the maximum right to buy discount available in London and *(b)* 25 per cent. higher than the maximum right to buy discount in London. [48713]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to carry out any further research/analysis on the impact of the cash incentive scheme in the immediate future.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 22 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 357W, if he will publish his assessment of Birmingham city council's application for a place on the housing transfer programme. [49823]

Ms Keeble: The assessment of Birmingham city council's application for a place on the housing transfer programme is internal advice to the Secretary of State and as such it would be inappropriate to make it publicly available.

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average weekly rent level is for *(a)* housing association and *(b)* local housing company tenants in those local authority areas where housing has been transferred from the council under large-scale voluntary transfer. [48874]

Ms Keeble: In answer to part *(a)*, the average weekly rent levels for housing association tenants in local authorities where all housing had been transferred from the council as at 31 March 2001 were as shown in the following table:

£

Local authority	*Average weekly rent*
Allerdale	43.64
Basingstoke and Deane	63.09
Bath and North East Somerset	45.38
Bedford	59.07
Bexley	63.58
Blackburn with Darwen	50.51
Boston	39.49
Breckland	49.66
Broadland	53.72
Bromley	65.76
Burnley	44.51
Calderdale	38.97
Chester	41.49
Chichester	55.25
Chiltern	59.73
Christchurch	58.47
Congleton	43.45
Cotswold	61.29
Coventry	42.97
East Cambridgeshire	50.71
East Dorset	54.23
East Hampshire	62.18
East Lindsey	43.56
East Northamptonshire	47.39
East Staffordshire	39.78
Eastleigh	63.16
Eden	53.57
Elmbridge	60.04
Epsom and Ewell	58.71
Fylde	39.70
Hambleton	42.17
Hart	60.48
Hastings	55.37
Havant	59.85
Hertsmere	56.26
Horsham	63.15
Huntingdonshire	51.97
Isle of Wight	62.56
Kennet	56.22
Kerrier	48.96
Lichfield	49.59
Maldon	61.93
Malvern Hills	53.60
Mendip	47.50
Mid Sussex	70.30
Newcastle-under-Lyme	36.57
North Devon	49.87
North Dorset	58.15
North Wiltshire	55.97
Penwith	52.52
Restormel	49.62
Richmond upon Thames	64.44
Rother	62.79
Rushmoor	60.93
Ryedale	50.16
Sevenoaks	61.88
South Bucks	63.58
South Hams	55.41
South Oxfordshire	60.79
South Ribble	47.74
South Shropshire	51.45
South Somerset	49.62
South Staffordshire	46.03
Spelthorne	67.84
Staffordshire Moorlands	42.24
Stratford-on-Avon	47.49

£

Local authority	Average weekly rent
Suffolk Coastal	47.57
Sunderland	45.58
Surrey Heath	57.35
Swale	65.20
Tameside	46.36
Telford and Wrekin	48.16
Test Valley	52.07
Tewkesbury	50.91
Tonbridge and Malling	58.79
Torbay	51.90
Tunbridge Wells	65.48
Tynedale	42.33
Vale of White Horse	52.19
West Berkshire	59.55
West Devon	49.22
West Dorset	53.69
West Lindsey	41.60
West Oxfordshire	52.11
West Somerset	58.46
West Wiltshire	54.99
Weymouth and Portland	48.65
Windsor and Maidenhead	68.03
Worthing	54.60
Wychavon	49.03
Wyre	47.03
Wyre Forest	43.74

In addition, average weekly rents paid by housing association tenants in local authorities where only some housing had been transferred from the council as at 31 March 2001 were as follows:

£

Local authority	Average weekly rent
Cherwell	55.96
Enfield	64.06
Manchester	47.89
Mid Bedfordshire	52.27
Thanet	57.50
Tower Hamlets	60.54
Walsall	49.19

It should further be noted that since 31 March 2001, full transfer of council stock to housing associations has taken place in Erewash, Reigate and Banstead, East Hertfordshire, Chelmsford, Derbyshire Dales, Shrewsbury and Atcham and the rest of Mid-Bedfordshire.

In response to part *(b)*, the term "local housing company tenants" has been interpreted as meaning the new "arms-length management companies". These have only recently been established and information on rent levels is not yet available.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information his Department has collated on those local authorities in London who add an additional premium to the cash incentive scheme grant to those tenants who purchase a property on the open market within the same borough. [48711]

Ms Keeble: Information on this matter is not collated centrally.

Television Services

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the terms of reference are for the review of planning regulations relating to satellite dish installations referred to in the Government's Broadband Strategy; when the review began; and when it will report; [49963]

(2) what assessment has been made of the impact of the inconsistency between planning regulations for satellite dishes and planning regulations for terrestrial television aerials on the availability of digital satellite television and broadband satellite services in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* areas where digital terrestrial television services are unavailable; [49965]

(3) what input the review of planning regulations relating to satellite dish installations will seek from *(a)* devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and *(b)* regional development agencies. [49964]

Ms Keeble: The Government gave a commitment in the UK Online Annual report 2001 to review the planning regulations for satellite terminals to determine how current rules restricting a residential property to a single antenna could be relaxed, while continuing to minimise the environmental/visual impact of residential satellite terminals. The Digital Television Action Plan endorsed by Government and by the digital television stakeholders also promises a review of the impact of planning regulations on the deployment of aerials and dishes, with an initial report due by June 2002. My officials are currently discussing the issues with those of other Government Departments prior to discussions with relevant external stakeholders and then a wider public consultation on possible changes to the planning regulations that apply to England. Planning arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for the devolved administrations but we shall keep them in touch with discussions in England.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 84W, regarding equipment leasing arrangements, what the total cost has been of equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in the last four years. [50328]

Dr. Whitehead: This answer can only be given at a disproportionate cost, as it is not held centrally by the Department.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49129]

Dr. Whitehead: Overtime payments are allowable only when there is exceptional pressure of work and alternative members of staff cannot be utilised for the tasks or where business needs dictate.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on plans to integrate the Air Traffic Control systems of EU countries. [49688]

Mr. Spellar: Negotiations on the European Commission's Single Sky proposals are under way. This project is designed to enhance Europe's airspace capacity, improve safety and achieve a greater degree of interoperability between the various suppliers of air traffic services in EU states. It does not require the integration of service providers, but focuses on more collective management of the European air traffic management system.

In the long-term, closer integration between Europe's air traffic service providers seems likely, particularly given the need to enhance efficiency so that future air traffic levels can be accommodated safely.

Ports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the financial impact of state funding and subsidies for European ports on the competitive position of UK ports and port operators. [49836]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not made specific estimates, but the European Commission included a report on public financing and charging in European ports in its Communication on Ports, published in February 2001. In discussions on its proposed Directive on Market Access to Port Services, we have urged the Commission to take a further look at these issues.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposals for European port services. [49819]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK supports the broad principles of liberalisation and competition in port services underpinning the proposed Directive on Market Access to Port Services but we are very keen that it should be realistic and proportionate. It must recognise the diversity of the industry and the competition that already exists. A Transport Council working group is considering the Commission's proposed Directive. We are engaging fully in these negotiations in a constructive manner.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 946W, on European Union ports, what response he has had from the Commission to these representations. [49835]

Mr. Jamieson: We are awaiting a response from the Commission.

Humber Pilotage Service

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the new Humber pilotage service. [50670]

Mr. Jamieson: A new pilotage service was introduced on the Humber on 12 December 2001 when the former pilots went on strike. My Department has closely monitored the new arrangements and I am placing in the Library a copy of a detailed report of that work. A copy will also be placed as soon as practicable on the Department's website.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the cost of publicity and educational material published by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [49068]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of publicity and educational material published by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 is:

Year	*£*
2000–01	621,293.03
2001–02	1,000,006.15

These figures include the cost of exhibition stands and publicity trailers as well as publications and promotional items.

Traffic Calming

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will carry out an evaluation of the respective effectiveness and net cost of *(a)* road humps and *(b)* speed cameras as a means of reducing traffic speed levels. [49261]

Mr. Jamieson: A review of traffic calming schemes in 20 mph zones undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory in 1996 (TRL Report 215, "Review of Traffic Calming Schemes in 20 mph zones") showed an average vehicle speed reduction of 9.3 mph in the zones. A cost benefit analysis of speed and traffic light cameras, also published in 1996, showed that speeds were reduced by an average of 4.2 mph at camera sites.

Monitoring of the first year of a trial of the netting off funding system for safety cameras has shown average speeds at camera sites reducing by 5.6 mph. In the case of road humps they are usually incorporated with other measures in traffic calming schemes, so their net costs have not been separately evaluated. However, the value of the benefits exceed the costs by a factor of five to one in the case of speed safety cameras.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of levels of pollution and difference in noise levels as a result of road humps and traffic-calming measures which involve narrowing of the highway and the construction of an uneven road surface. [49260]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of assessments have carried out examining changes in noise resulting from traffic calming measures, particularly resulting from different types of road hump. Results from these were published in Traffic Advisory Leaflets 6/96 "Traffic Calming: Traffic and Vehicle Noise" and 10/00 "Road humps: discomfort, noise and ground-borne vibration". Changes in vehicle

emissions and air quality relating to traffic calming measures have also been the subject of departmental research (see Traffic Advisory Leaflet 4/96 "Traffic Management and Emissions"), some of which is still on-going.

Lorries

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated number of lorries on the roads was in each of the last five years. [49700]

Mr. Byers: The latest available figures for 1996 to 2000, based on DVLA records of the number of heavy goods vehicles registered, are:

	Number
1996	430,000
1997	426,000
1998	427,000
1999	424,000
2000	422,000

Environmental Assessments

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment of the Government's energy policies has been made with regards to assessing the environmental impact of *(a)* the 10-year plan and *(b)* the SRA plan; [49719]

(2) what assessment has been made as to the environmental costs resulting from *(a)* noise emissions, *(b)* vibration impacts and *(c)* aesthetic impacts caused by (i) road projects as outlined in the 10-year transport plan and (ii) rail projects as given in (1) the SRA plan and (2) the 10-year transport plan; [49450]

(3) what assessment has been made as to the environmental impact of *(a)* the 10-year plan and *(b)* the SRA plan. [49718]

Mr. Byers: An overall environmental assessment of the 10-year plan is set out in "Transport 2010: The Background Analysis", Chapter 4 and Annexes D and E. This is in the Libraries of the House. Individual projects, including those in the SRA Strategic Plan, are subject to environmental assessment, where appropriate, on an on-going basis as part of project development.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the environmental benefits of switching road haulage to rail on the West Coast Main Line. [49702]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority assesses the environmental benefit of the transfer of freight from road to rail using a calculation based on the net number of road lorry miles reduced. This has been applied in informing the current review of the allocation of capacity for passenger and freight trains on the West Coast Main Line.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made as to the environmental costs of the increased processing required to produce ultra low sulphur petrol. [49699]

Mr. Byers: Statutory instrument 1999 No. 3107 incorporated the EU Directive 98/70/EC on the quality of petrol and diesel fuels into UK law. The regulatory impact assessment that assessed the impacts of the actions required to incorporate the directive included an environmental assessment. Copies of the directive, the statutory instrument and the regulatory impact assessment can be found in the Libraries of the House.

Alternative Fuels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library details of the calculation on which the fuel duty rebate levels on *(a)* Cngas, *(b)* Lpgas, *(c)* biodiesels, *(d)* LNG, *(e)* E10 bioethanol blends and *(f)* E85 bioethanol blends is based; [49453]

(2) what level of fuel duty rebate has been granted to the road fuels *(a)* Cngas, *(b)* Lpgas, *(c)* biodiesels, *(d)* LNG, *(e)* E10 bioethanol blends and *(f)* E85 bioethanol blends. [49451]

Mr. Byers: My Department provides grant to the operators of local bus services in the form of fuel duty rebate. Decisions on the rate of grant paid for use of specific types of fuel are taken in the light of the duty levied on the fuel and wider policy considerations. An information pack explaining the fuel duty rebate scheme has been placed in the Library.

Operators of eligible services whose vehicles are gas powered (CNG, LPG, or LNG) receive rebate of all the excise duty, which is currently levied at 9 pence per kilogram.

No operator has so far claimed rebate for use of biodiesel and a rebate rate has not been set in advance of a claim.

E10 and E85 bioethanol blends are used as an additive to, or substitute for, petrol and are classed by the Customs and Excise as fuel substitutes with duty levied at the rate appropriate to the fuel with which they are mixed or substitute for. Any bus operator using petrol which included these blends would therefore receive rebate at the appropriate petrol rate, currently 34.30 per litre.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what Government incentives, in addition to public money, have been introduced to promote the use of *(a)* Cngas, *(b)* Lpgas, *(c)* biodiesels, *(d)* LNG, *(e)* E10 bioethanol blends and *(f)* E85 bioethanol blends; [49698]

(2) what the level of public funding is for the Powershift programme; [49695]

(3) what public money has been made available to encourage the use of *(a)* Cngas, *(b)* Lpgas, *(c)* biodiesels, *(d)* LNG, *(e)* E10 bioethanol blends and *(f)* E85 bioethanol blends in road transport. [49455]

(4) what advertising campaigns have been carried out as part of the Powershift programme; and what level of funding has been associated with them. [49696]

(5) what share of the funding for the Powershift programme is spent on promoting *(a)* Cngas, *(b)* Lpgas, *(c)* biodiesels, *(d)* LNG, *(e)* E10 bioethanol blends and *(f)* E85 bioethanol blends for transport. [49697]

Mr. Byers: The Government has introduced a range of fiscal and other measures to promote the use of cleaner fuels, such as road fuel gases and biofuels, which offer environmental benefits.

The Powershift programme promotes and provides grants towards the cost of purchasing cleaner fuel vehicles running on LPG, natural gas and electricity. No E10 or E85 blends are currently on sale in the UK. The Powershift budget for 2002–03 is £10 million, provided by my Department. This has recently been strengthened by an additional allocation of £1 million from the DTI, aimed at further raising awareness of LPG and increase the availability of good quality LPG vehicle conversions, particularly in rural areas.

The Government's CleanUp programme, complements Powershift, promotes and provides grants towards the conversion of existing vehicles to run on cleaner fuels including LPG and natural gas, and the fitting of emission abatement equipment. Its budget for 2002–03 is £10 million, of which around £8.5 million is likely to relate to clean fuel conversions. Additionally, the CleanUp programme will manage a further £7.5 million in 2002–03, as part of the Road Haulage Modernisation Fund announced by the Chancellor in the 2001 Budget and of which around £5.8 million will be for grants.

As announced in Budget 2001, the rate of fuel duty for road fuel gasses (natural gas and LPG) is at the low rate of 9 pence per kilogramme, and the Government indicated that there were would be no real terms duty increases until 2004 at the earliest. It was also announced that a new duty rate would be applied to biodiesel from Budget 2002, subject to European Union approval, 20 pence per litre below the rate for ultra low sulphur diesel.

The Government's Green Fuels Challenge is designed to stimulate the development of further alternative fuels. Proposals covering hydrogen, methanol and bio-gas will enjoy a period of zero fuel duty, subject to EU state aids clearance.. A second round of pilot project will be announced shortly after Budget 2002 inviting bids for a wider range of fuels.

The Powershift programme has a comprehensive marketing strategy to raise awareness of LPG and other alternative fuels. This includes advertising campaigns, regional workshops and articles run in environmental magazines. Over the last financial year the programme has run two advertising campaigns, the first targeted corporate fleet operators of vehicles under 3.5 tonnes and the second targeted at public sector fleets. The expenditure for these campaigns was £55,000.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many grants have been awarded under the Powershift Programme in each year since it was introduced; [49042]

(2) how much has been paid out in grants under the Powershift Programme in each year since it was introduced; [49303]

(3) how many LPG refuelling points there are in the UK; and how many sites there were in *(a)* April 2001 and *(b)* April 2000. [49302]

Mr. Jamieson: The table shows the total amount paid and the number of grants made together with the number of vehicles supported under the Powershift programme since it started.

Years	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Total*
Number of grants	69	127	392	1172	1177	2937
Number of vehicles supported	378	748	2,262	4,545	4,940	14,110
Amount of grant paid	£1.043m	£1.461m	£3.352m	£6.040m	£5.595m	£17.491m

The latest figures from the LP Gas Association confirm that there are currently 1,106 LPG refuelling points in the UK, at the end of March 2001 there were 700 and at the end of March 2000 there were 365.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of road transport fuel is gas based. [49454]

Mr. Byers: 65,778 tonnes of road fuels gases were sold in 2001. For comparison approximately 37 million tonnes of petrol and diesel were sold in the UK in 2000.

Railtrack

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on supporting a bid for Railtrack plc in administration which has not been subject to due diligence. [47993]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The extent of due diligence undertaken by any bidder for Railtrack plc is a matter for them. It is for the Administrator to determine the appropriate arrangements for access to the company. Network Rail, and any other potential bidders would need to address the issues set out in the guidelines issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the bid from Network Rail for Railtrack Plc was received by the administrator. [47988]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* This is a matter for the Administrator.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answers of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 956W, refs. 45677 and 45678, on Railtrack, if the 10-year plan budget assumes a 2 per cent. annual reduction in real terms of Railtrack's overall income, including track access charges and network grants, for Control Period 2. [49838]

Mr. Jamieson: No. The £33.5 billion of public sector funding for rail in the 10-year plan takes account of Railtrack's regulated income in Control Period 2 as

outlined in the Regulator's October 2000 periodic review and the April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the dates on which he or officials from his Department have met representatives of Railtrack shareholders since 8 October 2001. [49790]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with his French counterparts regarding the security of the channel tunnel rail link. [49686]

Mr. Spellar: Both Ministers and the Department are in regular contact with the French Government about security issues at the channel tunnel.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken since November 2001 with regard to *(a)* his French ministerial counterpart and *(b)* the European Commissioner for Transport on (i) the disruption to rail freight facilities through the channel tunnel and (ii) the suspension of rail freight services through the channel tunnel. [R] [49034]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on Tuesday 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 957W.

Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average journey length made by road hauliers to collect freight from the rail system to transfer it to its destination in the last 12 months. [49715]

Mr. Byers: The average journey length made by road hauliers to collect freight from the rail system during 2000 was 53 kilometres. This is the latest figure available.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the average journey length made by road hauliers to take freight to transfer onto the railway system in the last 12 months. [49714]

Mr. Byers: The average journey length made by road hauliers to transfer freight onto the railway system in 2000 was 74 kilometres. This is the latest figure available.

Public Transport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on European discussions about liberalisation of public transport, as discussed at the Barcelona Summit. [49816]

Mr. Spellar: The Barcelona European Council conclusions called for the adoption by December 2002 of the Regulation on public service contracts. This proposal is intended to stimulate more efficient and attractive public transport through the use of regulated competition and other measures and to promote legal certainty for authorities and operators. Several Council working groups have already taken place, and further meetings are scheduled. The Commission gave a progress report on the proposal to the Transport Council on 26 March 2002. Ministers have also discussed the draft Regulation during a number of bilaterals with their European counterparts. The European Parliament has yet to schedule a date for further debate on the proposal.

The European Council in Barcelona also called on the Council to pursue work on the second railways package. The Commission's second railways package, published on 23 January, includes a proposal to complete liberalisation of the rail freight market by extending it to all domestic traffic including cabotage. The package also envisages further liberalisation of the passenger market, on which the Commission expects to bring forward specific proposals as part of its programme for the next five years. There was an initial Ministerial discussion of the package at the March Transport Council, but so far no further discussions have been scheduled.

Trans European Networks

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy on the Trans European Networks. [49820]

Mr. Spellar: The Government supports the development of the European transport network. On 3 October 2001, the European Commission adopted proposals to amend the guidelines which govern the development of the network. An Explanatory Memorandum (12597) on the proposals was submitted to Parliament on 2 November 2001. Following a formal public consultation exercise, the Government remains very concerned about the Commission's proposal to add six new priority transport projects to the list at Annex III to the guidelines.

On 3 January 2002 the Commission adopted a proposal to amend the Regulation which lays down general rules for Community financing of the trans-European networks. An Explanatory Memorandum (15111) on that proposal was submitted to Parliament on 31 January. The Memorandum makes clear that the Government does not support the Commission's proposal to increase the maximum level of EU support for certain transport projects from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of total investment costs.

10-year Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 961W, ref 45348, on which of these projects *(a)* the high-level feasibility stage has been completed and *(b)* the detailed development work has begun. [49822]

Mr. Jamieson: Significant elements of all of the schemes listed as commitments on page 49 of the SRA's Strategic Plan are currently being implemented or are at a detailed stage of development. Of the schemes listed as priorities by 2010 the table sets out their status.

Project	*Status*
Committed outputs from the Chiltern, South Central and South West replacements	Chiltern—being implemented South Central—High level feasibility stage South West—Detailed development stage
Thameslink 2000	Detailed development stage
East Coast Main Line upgrade, including improvements at Kings Cross	High level feasibility stage
Freight Strategy	Various projects at different stages of development. Details are in the SRA strategic plan
Midland Mainline franchise extension	Implemented
TransPennine refranchising	Subject of a commercial competition
New trains and platform extensions to reduce overcrowding in South-east England	Several projects at different stages of development.
East London Line extension	Detailed development stage. Implementation of northern extension has started
London—West Anglia modernisation	High level feasibility stage
RPP schemes	Comprises several projects at different stages of development

The schemes listed for further development are all at the pre-feasibility or initial study stage.

Railways

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information on the division of investment in rail projects between train operators, rolling stock leasing companies and infrastructure investment under the 10-year transport plan will be given to private investors. [R] [49028]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on estimated private sector investment in rail, in total and by type, has been set out in the 10-year Plan and the SRA Strategic Plan.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many former regional railways franchises have received funding from the SRA in addition to their original franchise deals; and if he will make a statement on the nature and extent of this funding. [49725]

Mr. Byers: Details are, or will be, provided in the relevant annual reports of the Strategic Rail Authority and the franchising director. Copies of reports already published have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rights Network Rail has to draw upon the proposed £9 billion bridging loan from the SRA. [49870]

Mr. Jamieson: The Network Rail proposal, if successful, would involve a subordinated standby credit facility from the SRA to enable Network Rail to raise up to £9 billion bridging finance from private sector lenders to release Railtrack from administration as soon as possible. This would be refinanced through the capital markets on a longer term, securitised basis later in the year. The SRA credit facility would only be called upon (as a loan) to enable Network Rail to repay the bridging loans in the extremely unlikely event of Network Rail being unable to access the capital markets for these longer term loans.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the underwriting of the debt of Network Rail by means of potential emergency loans from the Strategic Rail Authority and his estimate of the maximum potential liability to the taxpayer. [47957]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Network Rail proposal, if successful, would involve a subordinated standby credit facility from the SRA to enable Network Rail to raise bridging finance—to release Railtrack from administration as soon as possible—and to provide a longer term backstop loan facility, which would only be used by the company in specified circumstances as a last resort.

The size of the credit facility is subject to negotiation, but would be expected to reduce over time as knowledge of the asset condition and cost causation improves. Once negotiations are completed, details of any credit facility that created a contingent liability would be notified formally to Parliament in accordance with established procedures.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees the Government provide for debt raised by Network Rail. [47514]

Mr. Spellar: The Network Rail proposal, if successful, would involve a subordinated standby credit facility from the SRA to enable Network Rail to raise bridging finance—to release Railtrack from administration as soon as possible—and to provide a longer term back stop loan facility, which would only be used by the company in specified circumstances as a last resort.

The size of the credit facility is subject to negotiation, but would be expected to reduce over time as knowledge of the asset condition and cost causation improves. Once negotiations are completed, details of any credit facility that created a contingent liability would be notified formally to Parliament in accordance with established procedures.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of the rail network is electrified. [49707]

Mr. Byers: I understand that just over one third of the rail network is currently equipped with electrification.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans there are to increase integration of rail networks on a European level; and if he will make a statement. [49687]

Mr. Spellar: The Commission published its second railway package on 23 January. This includes formal proposals to complete liberalisation of the European rail freight market, on safety, interoperability, the creation of a European Rail Agency and Community accession to the COTIF convention (the convention concerning international carriage by rail).

The Government share the Com[illegible]'s objective of enhancing the role of railways in our tr[illegible]system through greater efficiency and higher quality service[illegible] therefore welcomes publication of the package. We will be consulting widely on the package before reaching a formal position on the proposals and in particular will be concerned to ensure they do not impose unreasonable costs.

DEFENCE

Reservists

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether reservists will continue to be called out for operations in the Balkans and the region of Iraq. [50671]

Dr. Moonie: Two call-out orders have been made to enable reservists to continue to be called out into service to support operations in those regions. The first, made under section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996, authorised the call out of members of the reserve forces to support operations in the region of Iraq. Its purpose is to continue the practice started in 1992 of calling out reservists, primarily specialists, to support the no-fly zone operations over north and south Iraq. At present 10 reservists are serving in the region. The second order was made under section 56 of the Act to allow reservists to be called into service to support operations in former Yugoslavia. Since 1995, when NATO operations commenced in former Yugoslavia, the reserve forces have provided some 10 per cent. of the total UK manpower in theatre. NATO's on-going study to find efficiencies for troop contributing nations will not be agreed or implemented in time to mitigate the present need. Both orders are effective until 31 March 2003.

Performance Targets

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Pay and Personnel Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [50672]

Dr. Moonie: The chief executive of the Pay and Personnel Agency is responsible for providing civilian pay, pensions and personnel information services for the Ministry of Defence as defined in the agency framework document. The agency will be set the following key performance targets for 2002–03:

Key Target 1

By March 2003 increase from 70 per cent. to 100 per cent. the proportion of PPA services available through the Customer Service Centre; increase from 8 to 15 the number of most important customer forms available on-line; and enable an effective single portal for civilian staff matters.

Key Target 2

Implement the new pensions project by October 2002.

Key Target 3

Improve customer satisfaction from 76 per cent. to 85 per cent. in 2002–03 and 90 per cent. in 2004–05.

Key Target 4

Increase from 55 per cent. to 85 per cent. by March 2003 and 100 per cent. by March 2004 the proportion of the agency covered by a single ISO certificate.

Key Target 5

Reduce the cost of Service Level Agreement tasks compared to 1997–98 by 25 per cent.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Quinquennial Review of the Meteorological Office will take place. [50673]

Dr. Moonie: The Quinquennial Review of the Met Office will begin this month. The aim of the review is to examine how the Met Office has performed since its launch as a Trading Fund within the Ministry of Defence and to recommend whether, and if so what, measures should be taken in order to reinforce the office's delivery of cost-effective services to its customers and to ensure that full use is made of its scientific and human assets.

The review will proceed in two phases, in the first of which a number of "framework" issues will be examined, including whether the Met Office is best placed as a Trading Fund within the MOD to exploit its full potential and whether existing governance arrangements require adjustment. The report of this first phase of the review is expected in July.

In the second phase, the review will address, in the light of the answers to the "framework" issues examined in the first phase, a number of questions concerned with the operating efficiency of the Met Office, including the development of a more appropriate relationship between the office and its public sector customers, the scope for developing more commercial business opportunities, the potential for greater national and international co-operation in both meteorology and environmental services generally, and the scope for further streamlining of business processes both within the Met Office and between the office and its customers. The report of this second phase of the review is expected in October.

The review will be carried out by a small team, which will consult closely with the Met Office management and other stakeholders, including the office's customers. The MOD is interested also to hear the views of other organisations or individuals who would like to make a contribution to the review. Those wishing to do so should send their contributions to:

The Met Office QQR Team
The Met Office
London Road
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 2SZ.

Frigates

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 34W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire

(Mr. Gray), on which dates the Type 23s and Type 22s will be refitted with the 114mm Mark VIII Mod 1 gun. [49750]

Mr. Ingram: The 4.5 inch (114mm) Mark VIII Mod 1 gun has already been fitted to the Type 22 Batch 3 Frigate, HMS Cumberland and to the Type 23 Frigates, HMS Norfolk and HMS Iron Duke. HMS Marlborough and HMS Monmouth, both Type 23 Frigates, will be fitted with the updated gun during their current upkeep periods. It is currently planned that the remaining Type 22 Batch 3 and Type 23 Frigates will be fitted with the gun at a rate of two to three per year, during programmed maintenance and repair periods.

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have received compensation from the Ministry of Defence for injuries inflicted by unexploded ordnance; and how much that compensation has totalled in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [49993]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not record separately those cases brought against the Department for injuries inflicted by unexploded ordnance. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of *(a)* how many people are expected to receive compensation from the Ministry of Defence for injuries inflicted by unexploded ordnance in Kenya and *(b)* how much that compensation will total; and if he will make a statement. [49992]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has received 173 claims for compensation from tribespeople allegedly injured as a result of unexploded ordnance in Kenya. The solicitor acting for the tribespeople has intimated that about 100 further claims would be submitted. These claims will be considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. It would be prejudicial at this stage of the legal proceedings to announce the Ministry of Defence's estimate of the number of claimants expected to receive compensation and the total level of such awards.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims have been received by the War Pensions Agency from service personnel who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down for compensation arising out of these experiments since 19 February 2001. [43442]

Dr. Moonie: Between 19 February 2001 and 31 March 2002, 41 claims for war pensions have been received from Porton Down service volunteers.

SA80

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems have been experienced with the modified version of the SA80. [46864]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The modified SA80 is attracting excellent reports from units. Minor issues, common to any modification programme, have been identified and dealt with.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he plans to take if the Defence Aviation Repair Agency fails to meet its targets in the financial year 2001–02. [47882]

Mr. Ingram: In preparation for the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) achieving trading fund status on 1 April 2001, the agency's business plans and financial targets were subject to rigorous scrutiny by Ministry of Defence and Treasury officials.

The targets set for DARA in 2001–02 have been based on the business requirements of the agency's MOD customers and also on its abilities in winning new business from external commercial markets. I continuously assess and review DARA's performance against a number of key performance indicators (KPIs). These key targets were established following consultation with both the Treasury and National Audit Office.

The targets cover:

Key performance indicator	*Description*
1. Quality	To equal baseline performance against a financial year 2000–01 benchmark (based on fault reports)
2. Return on capital employed	To achieve a 6 per cent. return on capital employed (ROCE)
3. Reduction in unit production price	To achieve a 2 per cent. reduction in unit production price
4. Increase in order intake	To achieve a 100 per cent. increase in order intake from financial year 2000–01 baseline
5. Increase in commercial revenue	To achieve a 15 per cent. increase in commercial revenue from financial year 2000–01 baseline

At the last ministerial advisory board, the assessment presented to me indicated that most of the targets for 2001–02 were likely to be met or exceeded. It is too soon, however, to be able to provide accurate details or figures until later this year, once the end of year results are collated.The targets set for 2002–03 are now in the process of being agreed with DARA.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what (1) estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Defence Fixed Telecommunications Service for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49566]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Hazardous Stores Information Project for the Ministry of Defence by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49666]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for RAF Lossiemouth (FQ), by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49574]

(4) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency Fire Training, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49558]

(5) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Tidworth Water and Sewerage for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49570]

(6) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the German White Fleet for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49562]

(7) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49568]

(8) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Central Scotland FQ for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49560]

(9) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Yeovilton (Family Quarters) for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49572]

(10) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Attack Helicopter Training, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49556]

(11) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Hawk Simulator, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49564]

(12) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Medium Support Helicopter Air Crew Training Facility, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49567]

(13) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Training Administration and Financial Management Information System for the Ministry of Defence by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49667]

(14) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Joint Services Command and Staff College, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49575]

(15) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Flying Training for University Air Squadrons and Air Experience Flights, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49559]

(16) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for RAF Fylingdales (Power), by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49571]

(17) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for RAF Cosford/Shawbury, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49555]

(18) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Helicopter Flying School, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49563]

(19) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for RAF Lyneham Sewerage for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49569]

(20) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the RAF White Fleet for the Ministry of Defence, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49561]

(21) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for RAF Mail, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49573]

(22) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Tornado SR4 Simulator, by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49557]

(23) what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Army Mail (IT), by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49565]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Soldiers (Trade Unions)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of European Union law on the right of soldiers to join a trades union; and if he will make a statement. [49730]

Mr. Ingram: Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides for a right to peaceful assembly and association, including the right to form a trade union. The Article does allow for the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of those rights by

members of the armed forces. No restrictions are placed upon Service personnel attending meetings of civilian trade unions, professional associations, or courses of instruction run by the same that are intended to enhance trade skills and professional knowledge. However, as the armed forces must be seen to maintain a position of political neutrality, personnel may not participate in any form of political activity organised by a civilian trade union or organisation to which they belong.

Refits

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 73W, for what reasons the refits of *(a)* HMS Manchester and *(b)* HMS Liverpool are taking longer than the average periods given; and what enhancements are being provided to each of the five ships presently in refit. [49748]

Mr. Ingram: The average refit period given in my reply to the hon. Member was indicative for the frigate and destroyer Class. The refit periods for ships within a Class will vary depending on individual requirements. HMS Manchester exceeded the average period principally due to work required on her gearbox. In HMS Liverpool's case, an extensive electronics package required an extended trials period.

The five frigates and destroyers currently in refit will receive a number of enhancements at various levels, details of the major ones are given as follows:

HMS Manchester (Type 42 Destroyer)

Water displaced fuel tanks; an electronic package; environmental garbage disposal machines; removal of red lead paint.

HMS Liverpool (Type 42 Destroyer)

Water displaced fuel tanks; an extensive electronic package; environmental garbage disposal machines; removal of red lead paint.

HMS Gloucester (Type 42 Destroyer)

Water displaced fuel tanks; environmental garbage disposal machines; biological sewage treatment plants; Total command support system.

HMS Iron Duke (Type 23 Frigate)

Aviation facilities to allow operation of Merlin helicopter, command support and communications systems upgrade; installation of equipment to purify water discharged from ship to meet marine pollution regulations.

HMS Monmouth (Type 23 Frigate)

Enhancements as per HMS Iron Duke.

Destroyed Argentine Aircraft

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Argentine aircraft were destroyed by British forces in 1982 by *(a)* Sea Dart, *(b)* Sea Wolf, *(c)* Sea Cat, *(d)* Sea Slug, *(e)* Bofors, *(f)* Oerlikon, (h) small arms fire, (i) Blowpipe, (j) Rapier, (k) Harrier, (l) bombing and ground operations, (m) naval gunfire and (n) Stinger. [49757]

Mr. Ingram: The causes of loss in the categories requested are shown in the following table.

Falklands 1982—Argentine aircraft losses

Category	*Number*
Sea Dart	7
Sea Wolf	3
Sea Cat	0
Sea Slug	0
Bofors	1
Oerlikon	0
Small Arms Fire	2
Blowpipe	1
Rapier	1.5
Harrier	26
Bombing and Ground Operations	14
Naval Gunfire	4
Stinger	1
Other	39.5

War Graves (France)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has made to the French authorities about the effect of a third Paris airport on Commonwealth war graves; and if he will make a statement. [49742]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 166W.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of how many British and Commonwealth war graves would have to be relocated if the French authorities proceeded with a new airport at Chaulnes; and which military cemeteries are affected. [49741]

Dr. Moonie: The French Government have a good record for handling civil engineering projects on the battlefields of the Western Front with sensitivity. We have no reason to believe that they will handle this current proposal any differently. In the case of the proposed airport at Chaulnes, no firm plans have been agreed and the perimeter of the site is still to be discussed. However, based on the latest proposals which have been published in the French press, the cemeteries that could be affected are as follows, together with the number of British and Commonwealth graves that may be disturbed as a result.

Cemeteries	*Australian*	*Canadian*	*New Zealand*	*South African*	*United Kingdom*	*Total*
Bouchoir New British	6	214	—	1	542	763
Damery Communal	—	10	—	—	1	11
Folies Communal	—	1	—	—	1	2
Fouquescourt British	49	138	2	—	187	376
Marcourt French National	—	1	—	—	5	6
Meharicourt Communal	6	12	2	—	21	41
Warvillers Churchyard Extension	—	35	—	—	13	48

Sovereign Base Areas Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent visit to the Sovereign Base Areas Cyprus by Lieutenant General Reith. [R] [48739]

Mr. Ingram: Lieutenant General Reith, Chief of Joint Operations, made a routine visit to Cyprus during the period 25–28 February. The trip was part of a series of visits to the three Overseas Commands (British Forces Gibraltar, Falkland Islands and Cyprus), of which he has operational command.

Territorial Army

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army are serving on operations; and in which locations their numbers exceed 50. [49770]

Dr. Moonie: As at 12 April there were 415 members of the Territorial Army serving on operations. The locations where the numbers exceeded 50 were Bosnia, where 174 were serving, and Kosovo, where 155 were serving.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength is of the Territorial Army. [49769]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 March 2002, the strength of the Territorial Army stood at 39,617 personnel of whom 392 are currently mobilised in support of operations.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to disband Territorial Army field hospital units. [49745]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no plans to disband Territorial Army field hospital units.

Golden Jubilee

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the exclusion of retired officers from eligibility for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal; and if he will make a statement. [50019]

Dr. Moonie: A number of hon. Members have written on behalf of constituents who are former members of the armed forces but who have been re-employed as civil servants in a Retired Officer grade. In addition, the Ministry of Defence has received letters from individual Retired Officers and the Retired Officers Association has made representations on behalf of their members. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 568W, to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell).

War Widows' Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons Mrs. M. K. Tushingham, a constituent whose details have been supplied, has been told that she may no longer receive her RAF widows pension via an order book at a post office. [48989]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Pensions under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme are normally paid monthly in arrears. Some 6,700 pensioners (2 per cent. of the total number of Armed Forces pensioners) in receipt of pensions prior to 1981 have retained rights to payment of pensions weekly in advance, historically via a "Payable Order Book" (POB) cashable at post offices. Revised arrangements were introduced from April 2002 to provide the pensioner with a more secure means of payment than the POB system; it is also more cost-effective to the Ministry of Defence and easier to administer.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which RAF widows can receive their war pensions other than into a bank account; [48987]

(2) what arrangements are available for war widows who *(a)* are unable to obtain a bank account and *(b)* do not wish to open a bank account to receive their pensions. [48988]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* War Widows pensions, administered by the Veterans Agency, can be paid into either a bank account or building society, or by cash at the post office.

Staff College, Shrivenham

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training and education the Joint Services Staff College at Shrivenham provides in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. [44746]

Mr. Ingram: The Joint Services Staff College at Shrivenham provides a number of courses that cover peacekeeping and conflict resolution. The courses are:

The Higher Command and Staff course, which trains 30 students per year.

The Advanced Command and Staff course, which trains 420 students per year.

The Royal Navy Junior Division, which trains 200 students per year.

The Army Junior Division, which trains 420 students per year.

The Royal Air Force Junior Division, which trains 440 students per year.

Reserve courses.

Students on all staff courses are issued a range of service and other publications on the subject, and specifically: JWP 3–50 "Peace Support Operations".

Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who conducts the *(a)* customer attitude survey, *(b)* continuous attitude survey and *(c)* Independent Housing Survey; what questions on housing there were in each of the surveys; if he will place a copy of the most recent of each in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [48665]

(2) what percentage of respondents were content with the standard of accommodation allocated to them in the *(a)* customer attitude survey, *(b)* continuous attitude survey and *(c)* Independent Housing Survey; and if he will make a statement. [48666]

Dr. Moonie: The Customer Attitude Survey conducted by QinetiQ for the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) is a comprehensive survey of attitudes relating to Service Family Accommodation. It is wide-ranging and covers many aspects of housing; copies have been placed in the Library of the House. It records 67 per cent. of

service families as "content" with the standard of family accommodation. There is no separate "independent housing survey" questionnaire.

Each of the Services undertakes continuous attitude surveys. These are not specifically related to family housing but are intended to measure morale and to understand the concerns and motivations of their personnel across a spectrum of issues, including conditions of service, training and development and accommodation of all kinds. There are no plans to release them into the public domain.

For the RN, the continuous attitude survey responses of August 2001 indicated that some 58 per cent. were either very satisfied or satisfied, and 22 per cent neutral, with the standard of family accommodation provided. For the RAF, the survey for May and August 2001 indicated that 53 per cent. regarded their accommodation as satisfactory or very satisfactory and 31 per cent. as adequate. The corresponding question in the Army's August 2001 survey did not distinguish between family and single accommodation but showed 42 per cent. satisfied or very satisfied.

SAS and SBS

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to the policy for Return to Mainstream service for personnel in the Special Air Service's and Special Boat Service; and whether he plans to recruit for SAS and SBS other than from serving members of the regular armed forces. [49467]

Mr. Ingram: Non-commissioned personnel who successfully complete United Kingdom Special Forces (UKSF) selection, and continue to maintain appropriate standards, will normally serve the balance of their careers with UKSF. The careers of regular serving officers will be managed in a way which balances service within and outside the UKSF group, to the mutual benefit of the individual, UKSF and the parent service.

Members of UKSF may be returned to their parent corps at any time should they be found unsuitable for further service or should they wish to do so at their own request.

Volunteers for the SBS and SAS, who must have completed two years adult military service, may apply from any part of the regular armed forces, as may reservists serving with one of the UKSF reserve units. Applicants from overseas are also eligible in certain circumstances. There are no plans to expand the recruiting base.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings will be made from the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier force from service. [49760]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1451–52W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). The withdrawal of the Sea Harrier force from service is one part of the new investment strategy for Joint Force harrier. The upgrade of the Harrier GR force will see the enhancement of our expeditionary offensive air capability, in particular from the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers. This is a capability driven initiative and provides for a smooth transition to the Future Joint Combat Aircraft. Savings will occur in not having to provide for modifications to address obsolescence, in streamlined training and basing and personnel efficiencies. Full advantage of this has been taken in construction of the forward programme.

Afghanistan

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which nations have contributed forces to *(a)* Operation Enduring Freedom and *(b)* ISAF; how many troops each of these nations has contributed; and if he will make a statement. [50000]

Mr. Hoon: Operation Enduring Freedom is being co-ordinated by the US Central Command in Tampa, Florida. The latest figures available are from 27 February, when, in addition to the US, there were 68 nations supporting the global war on terrorism, 17 of which had deployed more than 17,000 troops to the US Central Command's area of responsibility.

The list of nations contributing to International Security Assistance Force, with their individual contributions as at 15 April, is in the table.

The long list of nations involved in these offensive and security assistance activities illustrates the breadth of support for the international coalition against terrorism. It is vital that all these nations continue their support to deal with the significant threat which remains from Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and to help the Afghans as they begin the rebuilding of their country.

Nation	*Total*
Austria	74
Bulgaria	32
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	40
Finland	34
France	452
Germany	1,013
Greece	123
Italy	357
Netherlands	220
Norway	22
New Zealand	7
Poland	8
Romania	46
Spain	350
Sweden	40
Turkey	264
United Kingdom	1,327
United States	38
Total	4,452

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what heavy lift aircraft *(a)* have been used in the deployment of British troops for ISAF and *(b)* are being used to deploy 45 Commando to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [49999]

Mr. Hoon: C-17, Tristar and C-130 aircraft have been used to deploy United Kingdom personnel and equipment to Afghanistan. Chartered An-124s have also been used for deploying equipment.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops involved in ISAF will be reallocated to Operation Enduring Freedom; and if he will make a statement. [50001]

Mr. Hoon: None. We have drawn a distinction between those troops involved in security assistance activities in Kabul and those troops who are currently deploying for offensive operations to play their part in the task of rooting out al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants.

Deployments

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are deployed abroad on operations; and where. [46305]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The numbers and locations of armed forces personnel deployed on military tasks overseas, including operations, are shown in the table. The figures do not include personnel preparing for, or recovering from, operations.

Location	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*
Gibraltar	16	62	104
Cyprus	—	2,385	1,184
Balkans	—	3,823	233
Rest of Europe	—	2	252
Falkland Islands	141	402	704
Middle East and Gulf	1,182	38	1,895
Asia and Far East	241	2,724	12
Africa	258	368	8
Caribbean	336	—	—
North America	—	—	15
Other	573	54	2
Total	2,747	9,858	4,409

Notes:

1. The Royal Navy figures are as at 26 March 2002.
2. The Army figures are as at 21 March 2002.
3. The RAF figures are as at 1 March 2002.

In addition, some 1,145 Royal Marines personnel were deployed on military tasks at various overseas locations, including Afghanistan and the Gulf.

HMS Intrepid

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the disposal of HMS Intrepid. [49766]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Intrepid will be disposed of by sale either to the commercial market or to another acceptable Government if one can be found.

Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* strength of pilots is for (i) Tornado F3, (ii) Tornado GR1/4, (iii) Harrier GR7 and (iv) Jaguar. [49771]

Mr. Ingram: The position at 1 April 2002 is set out in the table.

Force	*Established flying posts*[1]	*Strength*
Tornado F3	116	108
Tornado GR1/4	134	122
Harrier GR7	67	63
Jaguar	60	55

[1] Comprises wing commander, squadron leader and junior officer posts on front line squadrons, operational conversion units, operational evaluation units and wing appointments. In addition to the established flying posts on the specified aircraft type, fast jet pilots are required for instructional duties within the RAF's flying training system, overseas exchange posts, the RAF Aerobatic Team and a number of ground duties shared by all General Duties Branches.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for North Essex, of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 562W, if he will list the 19 industry respondees to the DERA PPP consultation process; how many of them were supportive of the PPP and how many opposed; and how many of them were proposing an alternative structure to the PPP. [49997]

Dr. Moonie: The consultation document published in spring 2000 resulted from wide ranging discussions with stakeholders and an initial public consultation exercise. As identified in the previous answer referred to by the hon. Member, 19 industry responses were received from the following companies, trade associations and professional bodies:

GKN

WS Atkins

BAE Systems

Thesauras

Rolls Royce

HVR Consulting Services

Alvis

Raytheon

Society of British Aerospace Companies

UK Industrial Space Committee

Federation of the Electronics Industry

Defence Issues Working Group

Defence Manufacturers Association

Association of Independent Research and Technology Organisations

British Naval Equipment Association

CSSA Defence Group

Foresight Defence

Aerospace and Systems Panel

CBI (two responses).

It is not appropriate to publish details of the individual responses, as they were not provided on the basis that they would be placed in the public domain. The main points have been summarised and are generally supportive, although most requested further information on the process. Consequently the Ministry of Defence has had continuous discussions with industry throughout implementation, including regular meetings with the National Defence Industries Council.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

14. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on discussions held with EU member states over Gibraltar at the Barcelona summit. [45529]

Peter Hain: Barcelona welcomed the relaunch of the Brussels Process, underlined the support for the efforts of the British and Spanish Governments to conclude a comprehensive agreement before the summer; and invited the European Commission to explore ways in which the EU could underpin any agreement reached.

Iraq

15. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration about Iraq. [45530]

Mr. Bradshaw: The most recent discussions on Iraq took place between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Bush in Crawford, Texas. We are putting all our diplomatic energy into securing Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions—but are considering all options to ensure Iraq cannot threaten its people or neighbours. We will proceed patiently and prudently, in consultation with our allies.

27. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent discussions he has had with his partners in the international coalition against terrorism about Iraq. [45542]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary regularly discusses our concerns about Iraq's support for international terrorism with his partners in the international coalition against terrorism.

39. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Iraq. [45554]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to have serious concerns about Iraq's development of weapons of mass destruction. The international community's most pressing demand is that Iraq allow weapons inspectors to return and finish their work. We intend to consider the way forward in a calm, measured, sensible, but firm way.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Iraq's military intentions; and if he will make a statement. [49826]

Mr. Bradshaw: As UN weapons inspectors have not been allowed access to Iraq for three years, we do not have detailed knowledge of the Iraqi Government's military intentions. But we do know that Saddam is continuing his chemical and biological weapons programme and is developing the long-range missiles to deliver them. It is important that we remain vigilant about the threat he poses to the region and the wider world.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Iraq's involvement in international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [49825]

Mr. Bradshaw: Iraq has a long-standing record of support for terrorism; this includes support for Palestinian terrorist groups and the activities against Iran of the Iranian terrorist group, the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq (MeK), as well as the assassination of political opponents.

Zimbabwe

16. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the elections in Zimbabwe and the implications for the new partnership for African development. [45531]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 14 March that Zimbabweans had plainly been denied their fundamental right to choose by whom they are governed. NEPAD can only work on the basis of co-operation between democratic Governments with full international legitimacy.

21. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further discussions he has had with Commonwealth members about the restoration of democracy in Zimbabwe. [45536]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson).

29. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards Zimbabwe remaining within the Commonwealth. [45544]

Mr. MacShane: On 19 March Zimbabwe was suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth for one year. We welcome this.

We shall be discussing Zimbabwe's future status with Commonwealth partners during the coming 12 months.

33. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Zimbabwe. [45548]

Mr. MacShane: What has happened in Zimbabwe is a tragedy, imposed on that once prosperous land by Robert Mugabe. Respect for the rule of law and a return to democratic principles and sensible economic policies are the only way back for Zimbabwe.

20. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on bilateral relations with Zimbabwe of the recent elections in that country; and if he will make a statement. [45535]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 14 March that Zimbabweans had plainly been denied their fundamental right to choose by whom they are governed.

This leaves UK relations with Zimbabwe's Government at their lowest ebb since that country's independence. But we remain committed to stand by the people of Zimbabwe and will continue our programme of humanitarian assistance.

International Terrorism

17. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will

take to instruct the UK mission to the United Nations to work for full compliance by member states with their obligation to file a report on terrorist financing and providing safe havens for terrorists. [45532]

Mr. MacShane: Under the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 States are obliged to submit such reports to the UN's Counter-Terrorism Committee. As of 9 April, 139 of the 189 UN Member States had fulfilled this obligation. As Chair of the Committee, the British Permanent Representative has written twice urging States that have not yet submitted a report to do so.

19. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US on measures to prevent international terrorism. [45534]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have frequent and regular discussions with the US on many aspects of the international campaign against terrorism. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed the campaign with President Bush in Crawford on 7 April.

Delhi Declaration

18. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the Delhi declaration. [45533]

Mr. Bradshaw: The New Delhi Declaration, signed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and the Indian Prime Minister on 6 January 2002, represents a new high-water mark in the strong and vibrant relationship between the UK and India. It identifies many areas of common interest and sets out a road-map for future co-operation, both bilaterally and on the world stage.

The Declaration is already having an impact. Elements of it were discussed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and myself in our meetings with our Indian counterparts in the last two months.

Afghanistan

22. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the contribution of the UK to ensuring political stability in Afghanistan. [45537]

Mr. Bradshaw: Political stability is crucial to long term stability in Afghanistan. The Government fully support the UN-led political process, as set out in the Bonn Agreement. Its aim is to establish a broadly based, representative and democratic government in Afghanistan. The convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga in June is the next step towards this. The UK has given £500,000 to support the Loya Jirga Commission, who are responsible for arranging the Emergency Loya Jirga.

We pledged £200 million of reconstruction assistance in January at the Tokyo Donors Conference on Reconstruction. The UK is currently Lead Nation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is playing an important role supporting the Interim Administration to maintain security in and around Kabul.

25. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the war in Afghanistan. [45540]

Mr. Bradshaw: The campaign in Afghanistan is focused on ridding the country of the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which still pose a significant threat. At the request of the United States we have deployed 45 Commando to assist with this operation. We are committed to ensuring that Afghanistan can no longer offer a haven to terrorists and will remain engaged until we have finished the task.

31. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in the international fight against the drug trade in Afghanistan. [45546]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has taken the lead in coordinating international efforts to implement sustainable drug control in Afghanistan through the creation of alternative legal livelihoods, the reconstruction of infrastructure and the establishment of effective law enforcement and good governance. We have also been working with the Afghan Interim Administration to implement the decree banning opium production issued by Chairman Karzai on 3 April. We have been encouraging other members of the international community to provide similar support.

Sudan

23. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Sudan. [45538]

Mr. MacShane: We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Sudan but believe that 2002 offers a real window of opportunity for peace and that the UK has a major role to play in ensuring that this opportunity is seized. There has been some recent progress, for example in the Nuba mountains where a ceasefire appears to be holding.

Middle East

24. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report progress on peace initiatives in the middle east. [45539]

28. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to promote a peaceful settlement. [45543]

32. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Administration about influencing the progress towards peace in the middle east. [45547]

34. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. [45549]

35. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [45550]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are gravely concerned by the consequences of the escalation in the middle east in recent weeks. The situation could get even worse unless both sides step back, and start talking. This requires real engagement and intervention by the international community.

The priority is implementation of UNSCRs 1402 and 1403, a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities and full co-operation by the parties with General Zinni to implement the Tenet security work-plan and the Mitchell Committee recommendations with the aim of resuming negotiations on a political settlement. US Secretary of State Powell is in the region now on a mission to achieve this. It is crucial that both sides work constructively with Colin Powell. As the Prime Minister said in his statement to the House on 10 April, "Both sides must realise that violence is not, and never will be the answer. The solution to this crisis will never be reached if it is seen purely as a security or military question. There must be a political process."

The UK has played a full part in international efforts to bring the violence to an end and resume negotiations. The Prime Minister discussed the situation in the middle east with President Bush in Crawford, Texas. He has also had talks with European Heads of Government and President Mubarak. The Foreign Secretary has been in constant contact with his European counterparts and the US Secretary of State. He also spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Peres on 11 April. Despite the difficulties we have also maintained close contact with the Palestinian Authority primarily through our Consulate-General in Jerusalem. I spoke to the Palestinian Minister for International Planning and Co-operation, Nabil Sha'ath, on 3 April.

We shall be seeking a UN Security Council Resolution, based on Crown Prince Abdullah's plan, to promote a political process, following US Secretary of State Powell's visit to the region. We stand ready to help with monitoring, of a cease-fire and confidence building measures.

We have grave concerns about the denial of medical and humanitarian assistance to those in need in the Occupied Territories and about the lack of food, electricity and water. I raised our concerns with the Israeli ambassador on 4 April. We have also been disturbed by the reports of the deaths of innocents in the Jenin refugee camp and the conduct of the IDF. The Foreign Secretary raised these issues with the Israeli Foreign Minister on 11 April. We have urged the Government of Israel to ensure respect for international law by its armed forces and investigate thoroughly all allegations of IDF misconduct.

The Government will continue to do all it can to help the parties end the violence and resume talks based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, and the principle of land for peace. Peace between Israel and the Palestinians will only come through a political process which delivers security for Israel within recognised borders, brings an end to occupation, and allows the emergence of a secure and viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian state committed to co-existence with Israel, and recognised and respected by Israel.

British Detainees (Cuba)

26. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation of the British Taliban and al-Qaeda suspects held at Guantanamo Bay. [45541]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain in close touch with the US Government about the British detainees in Guantanamo Bay, their status, the legal procedure to which they might be subject and their welfare.

In response to our approaches, the US Government have given us the assurance that they would treat all UK detainees humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Convention.

EU Enlargement

30. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being provided by the UK to the candidate counties for EU membership. [45545]

Peter Hain: Over the last decade we have contributed £350 million through the "Know How Fund" to provide technical assistance to the central European candidate countries. We now have "Action Plans" with all 13 candidates with a total budget of £1.8 million in the last financial year. The plans bring together the UK's practical assistance to the candidates across a range of activities involving other Whitehall Departments.

Since 1998, the UK has won involvement in over 100 Twinning projects, whereby experts are seconded as long-term Pre-Accession Advisers to candidate countries' ministries. This is the third highest number of any member state. The UK was the first member state to win involvement in projects in all 12 negotiating countries.

36. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the enlargement of the European Union. [45551]

Peter Hain: Enlargement negotiations are progressing steadily and are on course to meet the timetable agreed at Gothenburg and confirmed at Laeken—to end negotiations in 2002 with the best-prepared countries, so that they can take part in the European Parliament elections in 2004.

Currently 10 of the 12 countries in negotiations have opened 29 chapters. Slovenia has closed 26 chapters, Cyprus, Hungary, Estonia, Czech Republic and Lithuania have all closed 24, Slovakia and Latvia have both closed 23, Poland has closed 22 and Malta has closed 21. Bulgaria has opened 27 chapters and closed 14 while Romania has opened 22 and closed nine.

Nice Treaty

37. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent discussions he has had with his EU colleagues on the ratification of the Nice treaty. [45552]

Peter Hain: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs meets his European counterparts regularly. These meetings discuss a range of subjects including the ratification of the treaty of Nice.

The Bill to enable the UK to ratify the treaty of Nice received Royal Assent on 26 February, and the Government will lodge the instrument of ratification in Rome in the coming months.

China (Human Rights)

38. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of China in relation to their record on human rights. [45553]

Mr. MacShane: We regularly raise concerns about the human rights situation in China, including through the six-monthly UK-China Human Rights Dialogue. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised human rights concerns with the Chinese Foreign Minister during his visit to the UK on 16–19 January.

Myanmar

40. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the situation in Myanmar. [45555]

Mr. Bradshaw: In recent weeks there has been an EU Troika delegation visit to Burma and EU action over forced labour in Burma at the International Labour Organisation. The EU is preparing a resolution on Burma for adoption at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Burma will visit Burma 22–24 April.

I remain gravely concerned about the overall situation in Burma. Although there has been some very modest political progress there in the past 16 months, we need to see early evidence of substantive change if confidence in the political process in Burma is to be maintained.

Iran

6. **Mr. Lyons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Administration about Iran. [45521]

Mr. Bradshaw: Iran was among the wide range of issues discussed during my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to Washington on 31 January and 1 February. He also discussed Iran in a telephone conversation with the US Secretary of State in March.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47799]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office estimated out-turn figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Budget Report on 17 April 2002.

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49127]

Mr. Bradshaw: All staff below the Senior Management Structure (equivalent to Senior Civil Service Staff) qualify for overtime or time off in lieu if they are required to work more than their conditioned hours at times of exceptional pressure. We do not encourage staff to work long hours but aim to reward them fairly when they do. All overtime must be approved in advance. Diplomatic Service staff serving overseas are not paid overtime but may be given time off in lieu when they work excessive hours, at management discretion.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49583]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO's 2002 Departmental Report is due to be published in spring 2002. The date will be announced shortly.

Laos

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he is taking to improve the conditions of religious minorities in Laos; and if he will make a statement. [48849]

Mr. Bradshaw: Contacts between British Ministers and officials and their Lao counterparts are limited. But we raise concerns about human rights in Laos, including the conditions of religious minorities, when such meetings take place. When the Lao Deputy Foreign Minister visited the UK in June 2001 the FCO's Asia-Pacific Director told him that the treatment of Lao Christians was a matter of particular concern in the UK. There is no DFID country programme for Laos. But DIFD and the FCO provide some funding aimed at improving the overall quality of life of the Lao people, including religious minorities.

Japan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Japan's capability for building nuclear weapons. [49265]

Mr. Bradshaw: Japan is a designated member of the IAEA Board of Governors and is thus recognised as being one of the nations most advanced in civil nuclear technology and applications. Japan is a member of the treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as a non-nuclear weapon state, and it is thus treaty-bound not to pursue nuclear weapons programmes. Japan's constitution prohibits the development and use of nuclear weapons. It is active in the fields of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

COREPER

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms he uses for providing advanced notice to hon. Members of agenda items for COREPER meetings. [49491]

Peter Hain: Provisional agendas for COREPER meetings are posted on the Council of the European Union website http://register.consilium.eu.int.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50479]

Mr. Mac[illegible]ane: Smart card technology is not in use within the FCO at home or overseas. This is a technology being tracked for potential business benefit within the FCO, and informal discussions have been held with a number of technology companies.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49624]

Dr. Howells: The Department has introduced five bills in the last five years (National Heritage Act 1997, National Lottery Act 1998, Royal Parks (Trading) Act 2000, Television Licences (Disclosure of Information) Act 2000 and the Culture and Recreation Bill introduced in 2001). None of these contained any sunset clauses. Decisions on the future use of such clauses will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be communicated to the House in the usual way.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49579]

Dr. Howells: The departmental report for 2002 will be published by the end of May.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers allowance or other benefits. [49605]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held by the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49115]

Dr. Howells: Overtime in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport can be authorised for staff working in excess of their conditioned hours. This is in line with the Civil Service Management Code. Conditions and rates are published internally and depend on grade and the hours worked.

Yeoman Warders

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to include the Yeoman Warders, extraordinary bodyguard of the Sovereign, in the group eligible for award of the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal; and if she will make a statement. [48759]

Tessa Jowell: The services receiving the commemorative medal are the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and the "999" emergency services. Yeoman Warders of the Tower of London do not fall within these categories and are therefore ineligible for the medal.

Museum of Science and Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received concerning the funding at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. [48736]

Dr. Howells: My Department has recently received representations about funding for an exhibition at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester to showcase the objects used in the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth games in July. I am pleased that my Department has been able to provide financial support to enable this exhibition to take place.

Tourism

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to assist the domestic tourism market to become more competitive. [49693]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to improving the competitiveness of the domestic tourism market through an agenda of modernisation and long-term strategic reform. The Government are working closely with key industry partners to achieve more consistent high standards and better value for money across the tourism industry.

Modernisation and reform will focus on raising the quality of the domestic product; improving skills and training; increasing the quality and quantity of tourism data and research; promoting the development of e-tourism; and providing stronger co-ordination of the promotion and marketing of England's tourist assets.

Baseline funding for English tourism will rise from £10 million in 2001–02 to £12 million this year and campaigns such as "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" will also support our tourism industry during 2002.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to assist the tourism industry in Essex. [49691]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to the modernisation and reform of the tourism industry and this will have a beneficial effect on tourism across the country, including Essex.

The East of England Tourist Board (EETB) received funding of £550,400 in 2001–02 to support tourism in the region. The figure for 2002–03 has yet to be agreed. During 2001–02 the EETB also received additional funding of £425,000 from the East of England Development Agency and £180,000 from the English Tourism Council in response to the foot and mouth outbreak.

Furthermore, Essex county council will be spending £100,000 this year promoting Essex as a tourism destination and has recently collaborated with both the Countryside Agency, and Tastes of Anglia, to provide support for a spring campaign this year. The tourism industry in Essex also benefits from national tourism strategies, such as the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign, aimed at attracting visitors back to the English countryside.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of United Kingdom jobs are dependent on the tourism industry. [49692]

Dr. Howells: The latest figure available for tourism-related industries is 2.1 million (September 2001). This equates to 7 per cent. of all employment in Great Britain. We do not have estimates for UK employment because Northern Ireland do their employment surveys separately.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50307]

Dr. Howells: This information can be found in each non-departmental public body's annual accounts. Copies of which are available from the Library of the House.

European City of Culture 2008

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce Britain's choice for European City of Culture 2008 and if she will make a statement. [50298]

Dr. Howells: It is hoped that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will, in consultation with colleagues and the devolved administrations, make her recommendation to the Prime Minister towards the end of Spring 2003 having considered a report by an independent advisory panel. The Prime Minister will then make a nomination to the European Union. The European Union will ratify the United Kingdom's nomination during 2004.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason members of the PSNI are deployed in Kosovo; and when it is planned to return them to police duties in Northern Ireland. [34859]

Jane Kennedy: The Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO), through the NIO, sought, as part of a UK wide contribution, a commitment by the RUC to the UN Mission in Kosovo. PSNI officers are deployed in Kosovo to assist in the restoration of normality, and law and order, by maintaining civil laws and orders, advising and assisting the Kosovo force in maintenance of public security and order and protecting and promoting human rights.

The current deployment of PSNI officers are due to complete their attachment in either May or November 2002.

There are no plans at present to discontinue PSNI deployments to UN peacekeeping missions.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what proportion of employees of the PSNI were off sick on average on each day in the last month for which figures are available; and how many and what proportion of those were *(a)* absent on self-certification or without authorisation, *(b)* on sick leave of less than a week, *(c)* on sick leave of more than one week and less than one month, *(d)* on sick leave of more than one month and *(e)* on leave as a result of injuries sustained while on duty. [41237]

Jane Kennedy: The following table details the average sickness figures for the month of February 2002 for police officers and civilian support staff of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

February 2002	*Police officers*	*Support staff*
Average total staff	9,445	3,439
Average of total number on sick absence	1,032	258
Average total percentage on sick absence	10.93	7.51
Average number 1–6 days	[1]145	[2]42
Average percentage sick 1–6 days	14.05	16.28
Average number 7–27 days	184	63
Average percentage 7–27 days	17.83	24.42
Average number sick greater than 27 days	703	153
Average percentage sick greater than 27 days	68.12	59.30
Average number sick per injury on duty	318	3
Average percentage sick per injury on duty	30.81	1.16

[1] Includes 85 self certified
[2] Includes 31 self certified

Carryduff Police Station

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many calls were received at Carryduff police station from members of the public in the last three years; and how many responses there were to them over the same period. [37107]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that it is not possible to answer the aspect of how many calls were received as there is a central telephone switchboard in the Greater Belfast area to which members of the public would seek assistance in the first instance, i.e. 02890 650222.

Similarly, emergency telephone calls to the 999 system again go to a central control room. While Carryduff police station does have a number of its own, statistics are not collated as to how many calls are made to it.

The number of incidents receiving a response from Carryduff police station are as follows.

	Number
1999	4,298
2000	4,506
2001	4,494

Child Abuse (Cross-Border Policing)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cross-border policing, with particular reference to child abusers. [43691]

Jane Kennedy: The operational CARE units within the PSNI liaise closely with their counterparts in the Sexual Offences Unit in Dublin and with the various Garda Commanders along the border. The risks posed by sex offenders, when being assessed by the Multi-Agency Sex Offender Risk Management Groups in Northern Ireland, take cognisance of those who have moved from the Republic of Ireland into the NI jurisdiction and indeed invite representation both from the Probation in NI and the Garda. The Intelligence Bureau, PSNI, is working on protocols for information sharing on a variety of subjects including child sex offenders and child abusers.

Last year the PSNI organised a conference in Belfast on the subject of cross-border information and intelligence sharing about sex offenders and child abusers. The conference was attended by representatives of the Department of Justice in the ROI, the Scottish Prison Service, the NI Prison Service, PSNI, and the NIO. The conference provided an opportunity for networking that has continued post conference.

999 Emergency Calls

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what circumstances 999 emergency calls may be diverted to police stations in England, Wales and Scotland; what assessment he has made of the PSNI's response to emergency calls originating in North Belfast on 24 December 2001; and what steps have been taken to ensure year-round response readiness. [41235]

Jane Kennedy: All 999 calls to the police made by the public are initially answered at BT or Cable and Wireless emergency call centres in Great Britain. Those 999 calls for PSNI are passed to Belfast Regional Control or rural control rooms. The PSNI do not pass calls to police stations on the mainland.

With regard to 24 December 2001, which was a normal working day for PSNI, normal policing levels were maintained within North Belfast District Command Unit throughout the whole day. The list of 999 calls received at Belfast Regional Control has been examined and the police response on each occasion was found to be timely and accurate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Staff Numbers

Sandra Gidley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many staff there were in the House of Commons broken down by *(a)* salary grade, *(b)* ethnic background and *(c)* sex in each of the last five years. [47986]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Commission currently employs 1,717 individual members of staff (including part timers). Of these, 1,446—over 84 per cent.—have completed monitoring forms. The tables show the figures for each category of staff, broken down by pay band, ethnic background and sex. The figures are for individual staff in post as at 31 March in each year.

Ethnic monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2002

Pay band	White	Asian/ Other	Black	Not stated
Senior Commons Service	76	—	—	5
A	161	—	—	18
B	251	6	5	39
C	239	13	8	32
D	265	10	19	99
E	38	5	23	11
Refreshment Pay Group	173	25	70	53
Works Pay Group	46	—	5	14

Gender monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2002

Pay band	Male	Female
Senior Commons Service	68	15
A	93	88
B	159	142
C	129	163
D	198	195
E	10	67
Refreshment Pay Group	185	136
Works Pay Group	69	—

Ethnic monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2001

Pay band	White	Asian/ Other	Black	Not stated
Senior Commons Service	78	—	—	2
A	165	—	—	6
B	259	7	—	23
C	247	13	7	26
D	261	12	16	52
E	40	5	19	6
Refreshment Pay Group	180	23	74	48
Works Pay Group	46	—	5	15

Gender monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2001

Pay band	Male	Female
Senior Commons Service	67	15
A	91	82
B	158	135
C	136	157
D	172	169
E	10	60
Refreshment Pay Group	187	138
Works Pay Group	70	—

Ethnic monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2000

Pay band	White	Asian/ Other	Black	Not stated
Senior Commons Service	78	—	—	3
A	169	—	—	7
B	257	8	—	21
C	244	11	7	17
D	252	11	12	54
E	39	—	18	5
Refreshment Pay Group	141	16	60	60
Works Pay Group	48	—	5	16

Gender monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 2000

Pay band	*Male*	*Female*
Senior Commons Service	67	16
A	96	82
B	153	137
C	126	153
D	160	169
E	7	57
Refreshment Pay Group	153	124
Works Pay Group	73	[1]—

Ethnic monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 1999

Pay band	*White*	*Asian/ Other*	*Black*	*Not stated*
Senior Commons Service	80	[1]—	[1]—	3
A	169	[1]—	[1]—	6
B	259	7	[1]—	19
C	243	10	8	20
D	221	8	12	63
E	43	[1]—	17	6
Refreshment Pay Group	144	18	56	72
Works Pay Group	53	5	5	16

Gender monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 1999

Pay band	*Male*	*Female*
Senior Commons Service	69	16
A	91	85
B	152	137
C	120	161
D	147	157
E	11	57
Refreshment Pay Group	159	131
Works Pay Group	79	[1]—

Ethnic monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 1998

Pay band	*White*	*Asian/ Other*	*Black*	*Not stated*
Senior Commons Service	80	[1]—	[1]—	4
A	167	[1]—	[1]—	5
B	249	8	[1]—	20
C	238	9	7	20
D	204	15	11	51
E	50	9	16	13
Refreshment Pay Group	144	6	52	73
Works Pay Group	61	[1]—	6	17

Gender monitoring by pay band as at 31 March 1998

Pay band	*Male*	*Female*
Senior Commons Service	71	15
A	89	84
B	152	128
C	122	152
D	21	132
E	71	60
Refreshment Pay Group	155	129
Works Pay Group	88	[1]—

[1] Indicates numbers of fewer than five in a particular category; in such cases, detailed figures are not given to prevent individuals being readily identified.

Staff Development

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the House of Commons becomes a model employer in providing skills training and retraining for staff; [47636]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that all members of staff's skills and skill needs are professionally assessed on an annual basis. [47637]

Mr. Kirkwood: Until recently, the House had a departmental approach to training, with limited House-wide provision. Following the Braithwaite Report on Management and Services (HC745 of Session 1998–99), and in the context of the plans for House-wide accreditation as an Investor in People, there is now a more structured and planned approach to House-wide staff development. This links training and development priorities to the aims of the House administration and supports managers in their responsibilities for the continuous development and training of their staff.

Departmental training officers meet regularly to discuss priorities and to help develop and maintain the right mix of House-wide training and development. Individual, team and broader training needs for all staff are assessed as part of the annual performance appraisal process, and through House-wide awareness-raising initiatives (for example on equal opportunities). Personal development plans are reviewed and updated regularly.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Government Vehicles

Norman Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many vehicles are owned by the Government; [49300]

(2) what proportion of Government-owned vehicles use *(a)* liquid petroleum gas, *(b)* electricity, *(c)* compressed natural gas, *(d)* diesel, *(e)* unleaded petrol and *(f)* leaded petrol. [49301]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 824W.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he plans to review the operation of regulatory impact assessments. [49066]

Mr. Leslie: The Public Accounts Committee published a report on 12 April 2002 'Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments' on the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General reviewing the regulatory impact assessment process. The Government welcome the Committee of Public Accounts report. It makes some helpful recommendations that echo many of the National Audit Office's findings and the Government will give full consideration to them.

Panel for Regulatory Accountability

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the remit of the Panel for Regulatory Accountability is; who serves on it; and at what intervals it meets. [49065]

Mr. Leslie: The remit of the Ministerial Panel on Regulatory Accountability is to take a strategic overview of the regulatory system; to tackle instances where progress on regulatory reform is blocked; and to call

Ministers to account for new regulation and their performance in addressing the burden of existing regulation.

Ministers serving on the committee are the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (chair), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office. Mr. David Arculus, the chairman of the Better Regulation Task Force, and Mr. William Sargent, chairman of the Small Business Council are also invited to attend. The membership and terms of reference are available in the Library of the House. Details are also published on the Cabinet Office website.

Information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committee business is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Government Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action the Government's e-envoy is taking to ensure that all Government on-line services are accessible through simple touch-screen terminals in strategic locations. [49796]

Mr. Leslie: The concept of delivering public services on multiple platforms is a key part of the Government's strategy. The Office of the e-Envoy is working to spread best practice on the delivery of electronic services through a wide range of channels including the web, digital television, mobile communications, kiosks and touch screen terminals. Best practice guidance on these is being worked up by the Channels Policy Working Group into a channels framework, which will be promulgated throughout the public sector.

The Office of the e-Envoy and the DTI are also working closely with the Post Office in the definition of a potential service whereby UK online content can be provided through kiosks located in post offices, making appropriate services available electronically to those members of the public who prefer to use a convenient terminal.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48364]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office holds a multiple form licence covering its core central London buildings and a concessionary licence covering a large number of televisions located, at the Centre for Management and Policy Studies' Residential Training Centre in Sunningdale (Berkshire) . The cost of these two television licences amounted to £6,867 in 2001–02.

In addition 16 individual television licences are held by other parts of the Cabinet Office at a cost in 2001–02 of £1,717.

WALES

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39063]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50485]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department delivers no services direct to the public and has a staff of less than 50 people. There is thus only limited potential for benefiting from smart card technology.

Legal Costs

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [48605]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The external costs of the former Welsh Office were £568,000 in 1998–99 and £55,000 in the first quarter of 1999–2000.

Since it came into existence in July 1999, the Wales Office has not separately distinguished legal costs.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49620]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Departmental Name Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost was of rebranding his Department following its name change after devolution. [31959]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office spent £2,728 on the design for a logo and associated artwork after its creation as a new Department after devolution.

Jobs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown by industry of *(a)* jobs created and *(b)* job losses in Wales in each of the past five years. [32232]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is no authoritative record of job losses and gains. Labour Force Survey information about changes in overall employment in Wales, by industry over the past five years, is given in the table as follows.

	All industries	Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	Mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply	Manufacturing	Construction	Service industries	Other industries
Change on previous year							
2000	14,000	−3,000	−1,000	−25,000	5,000	20,000	18,000
1999	18,000	−3,000	−1,000	−5,000	6,000	9,000	9,000
1998	2,000	−1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	−23,000	24,000
1997	6,000	4,000	1,000	−11,000	5,000	5,000	1,000
1996	21,000	−5,000	−5,000	−2,000	2,000	31,000	1,000

Source:
Labour Force Survey, four quarter averages. Figures rounded to nearest 1,000.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49589]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 15 April 2002, by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith).

Sidex

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received from other Ministers requests for advice in connection with the attempted acquisition of Sidex by the LNM Group. [37936]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Consistent with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information exemption on internal discussion and advice, which aims to preserve the unbiased nature of civil service advice and, where appropriate, to ensure commercial confidentiality, it would not be appropriate to disclose the information requested.

Meetings

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings he has had with hon. Members in each of the last 12 months. [49325]

Mr. Paul Murphy: As a member of the House of Commons and as a member of the Government, on a typical working day I meet many hon. Members in both formal and informal settings. Due to the large numbers of these meetings and their routine nature, no separate record of them is kept.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39932]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since the establishment of the Wales Office in July 1999. There has been one press secretary, one senior press officer and one assistant information officer employed within my Department.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35019]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999 my Department has spent some £47,000 on external consultants. It has also made use of property management consultants under a contract held by the National Assembly for Wales.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for shipping services for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49554]

(2) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the RA Strategic Partnership for the Radiocommunications Agency by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49548]

(3) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the National Physical Laboratory for the Department of Trade and Industry by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49552]

(4) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Electronic Government through Administrative Re-engineering (ELSAR) for the Department of Trade and Industry by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49551]

(5) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the mining reports and surface drainage system for the Coal Authority by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49549]

(6) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Computer Services for Academic Research (CSAR) for Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49553]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 607–08W.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 117W, regarding the cost of rail travel by Department staff, how many staff undertook the first class rail journeys in 2001. [50326]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI has devolved to local management the authorisation of travel claims for its staff, subject to checking procedures. It does not record detail of the number of staff undertaking first class rail journeys separately from other data recorded when paying travel expenses paid for staff engaged on departmental business. To provide the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50474]

Ms Hewitt: My Department uses smart cards to protect the facilities providing remote access to our corporate computer systems. Some 800 staff currently use smart cards in this way.

My officials discuss options for the use of smart card technology within the Department periodically with relevant companies, especially those providing us with ICT support.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the Questions tabled on 11 March by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford, refs 43210, 43211 and 43212. [50053]

Ms Hewitt: I understand that these questions were answered by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office yesterday.

Galileo Programme

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent the UK is supporting the European Union's Galileo satellite programme broken down by Departments' budgets and purpose of funding; what representations about the programme were made from the US and how they were responded to; and if she will make a statement. [48886]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The UK is supporting the Galileo satellite navigation programme through contributions to the European Space Agency (ESA), which is jointly funding and carrying out the programme with the European Union. For the definition phase (1999–2000) and some early development work (2001) the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has contributed £7.91 million while my Department has contributed £2.45 million. For the development and validation phase (2002–05) which was approved in March by the EU Transport Council, negotiations within ESA over member states' contributions are still progressing. Funds for the programme are also being provided from the budget of the European Communities to which the UK contributes.

The US has expressed concerns about the security implications of Galileo and, in particular, the problems of signal interference and incompatibility, which could arise with its own Global Positioning System (GPS). As we shared these concerns, in our negotiations within the EU we ensured that these were taken into account. The Transport Council decision emphasises the need for Galileo to be interoperable with GPS and that a co-operation agreement between the EU and the US should be negotiated as soon as possible.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46951]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There are three special advisers in my Department. For information about salaries I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47147]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 no special advisers in my Department accompanied Ministers on overseas trips. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. Details of Government Special Adviser travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47109]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Minister costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Regional Development Agencies

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funds have been allocated to regional development agencies; and how those funds will be used. [49857]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agencies' budgets for 2002–03 are as follows:

Regional development agencies' budgets

£000

	Total[1]
One North East	184,738
North-west DA	273,927
Yorkshire Forward	185,920
East Midlands DA	100,947
Advantage West Midlands	191,519
East of England DA	76,057
South-east of England DA	100,130
South-west of England DA	93,540
London DA	285,396
Total	1,492,174

[1] Net of receipts

This funding will be used to support activities in relation to the implementation of the RDAs' regional economic strategies and their statutory purposes which are within their regions to: further economic development and the regeneration of the region; promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness; promote employment; enhance the development and application of skills; and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. From 1 April 2002 the RDA's have a single budget giving them maximum flexibility to meet their regional priorities, within the fiscal framework for public money, removing unnecessary ring fences and unrealistic programme silos which inhibit true integration and innovative cross cutting approaches.

Beagle 2

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding the Government have provided for the Beagle 2 spacecraft; and if she will make a statement on the mission. [48931]

Ms Hewitt: Beagle 2 is the British-led lander that it is planned to deploy from the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiting spacecraft onto the surface of Mars at new year 2004.

The overall cost of Beagle 2, not including the ground segment and instruments, is approximately £40 million, with non UK-Government contributions coming from ESA, private sponsorship and investment by a consortium of UK firms and universities. The contribution of the Government are as follows:

Mars Express: £18 million over the period 1998 to 2005 (Department of Trade and Industry and Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, PPARC).

Beagle 2: The Department of Trade and Industry (including the Office of Science and Technology) has committed up to £18.3 million over the period 2000 to 2003 but this sum may be defrayed by contributions from other partners and investments from the private sector. PPARC has additionally contributed £2.7 million over the period 1998 to 2003 to British universities for the provision of instruments and is currently considering a further contribution of £2.6 million for the ground segment.

TREASURY

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the questionnaire forms sent out to UK businesses by the Office for National Statistics in 2001; [48927]

(2) what estimate he has made of the amount of time taken by business to compile and return information requested by the Office for National Statistics in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [48925]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Whittingdale, dated 16 April 2002:

As national Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions concerning statistical questionnaires sent to businesses by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). (48925, 48927)

The time taken by business in 2001 to compile and return the information requested by ONS is estimated to be around 617 thousand hours. There were 1.57 million business inquiry forms despatched during this period. I attach below a table showing the periodicity and annual number of forms for each business inquiry conducted by ONS.

Your third question (48926) asks for the split between (a) UK companies, (b) manufacturing companies and (c) distribution and services companies. To provide this will take a special analysis and a reply will follow.

UK statistical inquiries of businesses carried out by the ONS 2001

Statistical inquiry	*Frequency*[1]	*Number of forms in 2001 compliance year*
Earnings and employment		
Wages and Salaries	M	99,600
New Earnings	A	234,700
Labour Disputes	C	287
The Quarterly Inquiry into the number of employees in local government (local authority survey)	Q	1,800
Vacancy Rate Inquiry	M	62,952
Overseas and financial		
Unit Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions	Q	328
Unit Trusts Annual Return of Assets and Liabilities	A	82
Property Unit Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions	Q	48
Property Unit Trusts Annual Assets and Liabilities	A	12

UK statistical inquiries of businesses carried out by the ONS 2001

Statistical inquiry	*Frequency*[1]	*Number of forms in 2001 compliance year*
Investment Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions	Q	172
Investment Trusts Annual Return of Liabilities and Assets and Overseas Income and Interest Paid	A	43
Monthly Inquiry to Credit Grantors	M	290
Security Dealers Quarterly Return of Liabilities and Assets of Transactions in Securities	Q	241
Security Dealers Quarterly Return of Income and Expenditure	Q	241
Assets Financing Quarterly Return of Assets and Liabilities of Transactions	Q	532
Asset Financing Annual Income and Expenditure	A	137
Quarterly Inquiry into Insurance Companies: Long Term funds, Income and Expenditure	Q	382
Annual Inquiry into Insurance Companies: Long Term Funds, Income and Expenditure	A	140
Quarterly Inquiry into Insurance Companies: Long Term Transactions in Financial Assets	Q	382
Annual Inquiry into Insurance Companies: Long Term Funds Balance Sheet	A	140
Quarterly Inquiry into Pension Funds: Income and Expenditure	Q	1,324
Quarterly Inquiry into Pension Funds: Transactions in Financial Assets	Q	1,324
Annual Inquiry into Pension Funds: Balance Sheet	A	331
Quarterly foreign direct investment—Outward: oil	Q	1,497
Quarterly foreign direct investment—Outward: other	Q	—
Quarterly foreign direct investment—Inward: oil	Q	2,922
Quarterly foreign direct investment—Inward: other	Q	—
Annual foreign direct investment: Outward	A	786
Annual foreign direct investment: Inward	A	1,797
Acquisitions and Mergers	C/Q	—
Domestic acquisitions and mergers	C/Q	2,570
Quarterly Inquiry into Companies GB Operating Profits	Q	6,510
Quarterly Survey of Financial Assets and Liabilities	Q	2,730
Quarterly Inquiry into International Trade and Services	Q	2,800
Annual Inquiry into International Trade in Services	A	6,180
Merchants Inquiry	A	213
Annual Inquiry into International Transactions: Films and Television	A	650
Survey of Business Enterprise Research and Development Carried out in the UK	A	2,000
Dividends Inquiry including Pilot	Q	4,824
ODI Proving	AH	738
E-Commerce Transaction of UK Businesses	A	9,000
Monthly Inquiry of Internet Service Providers	M	1,200
Ship managers[2]	A	0
Distribution and service sector		
GB cinema exhibitors	Q	64
Distribution and service sector—Monthly	M	957,337
Distribution and service sector—Quarterly (GAPS)	Q	27,390
Monthly retail trades inc. monthly self financed credit and monthly retail commodity inquiries[3]	M	58,089
Retail trades quarterly commodity	Q	280
Product prices and sales sector		
Producer prices indices	M	94,830
PPI Rotation	M	3,110
Export price indices	M	44,727
Import price indices (inc. import of capital goods)	M	22,848
Corporate service sector price indices (inc. CSPI turnover inquiry)	Q	18,375
PRODCOM Quarterly	Q	13,786
PRODCOM Annual	A	23,072
SERVCOM	Q	2,017
Production sector		
Monthly production[3]	M	107,968
Motor vehicles production	M	381
Engines production	M	96
Quarterly—production capital expenditure	M	96
Quarterly—non-production capital expenditure	Q	127,498
Monthly production stocks	Q	828
Quarterly production stocks (17)	M	29,416
Quarterly construction stocks (16)	Q	13,178
Quarterly retailers' stocks	Q	17,678
Quarterly wholesalers' and dealers' stocks	Q	16,050
Quarterly motor traders' stocks	Q	6,637
Business spending on Capital Goods Survey	Q	2,499
Capital Stocks Survey	A	935
Register and proving		
Register Inquiry—Annual	A	30,900
Register Inquiry—Other	A	17,000

UK statistical inquiries of businesses carried out by the ONS 2001

Statistical inquiry	*Frequency*[1]	*Number of forms in 2001 compliance year*
Retail prices		
Retail Prices Index[4]	M	3,478
Annual business inquiry		
Employment	A	75,604
Financial (including purchases)	A	
Total		1,570,063

[1] AH = ad hoc; A = annual; Q = quarterly; M = monthly; C = continuous; W = weekly; O = other.
[2] The inquiry was not run in 2001. It will resume in 2002.
[3] Includes the collection of quarterly employment figures from existing inquiries.
[4] This covers only businesses that complete ONS forms and excludes forms filled in by local prices collectors employed by ONS.
Notes:
1. STSD—Short Term and Structural Inquiries Division
EED—Earnings and Employment Division
SED—Socio Economic Division
NEI—National Expenditure and Income Division
OFD—Overseas and Financial Division
CPGID—Consumer Price General Inflators Division
BDD—Business Data Division
STOID—Short Term Outputs and Indicators Division

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the yield from capital gains tax in each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02, *(g)* 2002–03 (estimated) and *(h)* 2003–04 (estimated); and if he will make a statement. [48804]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 520W. An estimate for 2003–04 has not been published.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in his Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions he has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within his Department. [50477]

Ruth Kelly: Smart card technology will be used in the new Treasury building as part of the access control mechanisms, and for "cashless" purchase of catering and vending services. The technology is being provided by Exchequer Partnership as part of the PFI contract for the new building. There have been no direct discussions between the Treasury and the technology supplier.

More widely, in March 2002, the Treasury implemented two European directives on electronic money, which bring it within the scope of Financial Services Authority regulation. The directives aim to encourage the development of electronic money, in part through increasing business and consumer confidence in it as a new and developing means of payment.

The Treasury is also represented on a working group looking at Government policy towards smart card technology, chaired by the Office of the e-Envoy.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much public sector pay has increased since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [49679]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public sector pay has increased by 17.7 per cent. between 1997 and 2001.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Stockport IR Office for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49498]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of the total savings to public funds of the Stockport IR Office Private Finance Initiative is £0.2 million Net Present Costs by comparison with the Public Sector Comparator.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the National Insurance Recording Systems for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49502]

Dawn Primarolo: The potential savings identified, at the business case stage, of a PFI approach over a traditional procurement for NIRS2, were estimated at £101.7 million. The calculations were based on the traditional procurement approach in place in the Department of Social Security at the time the contract was awarded in April 1995.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Edinburgh IR Office for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49501]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of the total savings to public funds of the Edinburgh IR Office Private Finance Initiative is £0.5 million Net Present Costs by comparison with the Public Sector Comparator.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Bootle St. John's House (IR) for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49497]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of the total savings to public funds of the Bootle IR Office Private Finance Initiative is £1.7 million Net Present Costs by comparison with the Public Sector Comparator.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the CCTA Metropolitan Telecoms Service by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49665]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The MTS PFI contract was awarded in November 1996 for a 10-year period. At the time of contract award, a detailed comparison of the PFI bid was carried out against a public sector delivery option. That comparison suggested little difference in the overall cost of the two approaches, but the PFI option was chosen as providing greater flexibility and better risk management. This has been borne out in practice as the range of services and number of users has increased over the life of the contract to date.

Since 1996 the unit costs of service provision through the contract, as with all telecommunications costs, have fallen in comparison with those modelled in the Public Sector Comparator. However the costs in the PSC have not themselves been updated so that a meaningful comparison is not possible.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Glasgow IR Office for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49500]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of the total savings to public funds of the Glasgow IR Office Private Finance Initiative is £1.3 million Net Present Costs by comparison with the Public Sector Comparator.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Newcastle Estate Development Scheme for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49496]

Dawn Primarolo: No public sector comparator was undertaken for this project. Assurance that the Department was achieving value for money was obtained through a competitive tender process. The decision not to undertake a full Public Sector Comparator was consistent with Treasury guidance at that time.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Manchester IR Office for the Inland Revenue by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49499]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimate of the total savings to public funds of the Manchester IR Office Private Finance Initiative is £0.7 million Net Present Costs by comparison with the Public Sector Comparator.

Money Laundering

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* legislation and *(b)* other measures he is considering in respect of those countries which fail to meet the OECD's deadline for reform in order to comply with anti-money laundering requirements; and if he will make a statement. [48887]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Action Task Force has issued a list of countries that have been found not to be compliant with international anti-money laundering standards. In common with other FATF members, the UK has issued an advisory to all UK financial institutions warning them to pay particular attention to all transactions involving natural or legal persons resident or domiciled in listed jurisdictions. The Joint Money Laundering Steering Group, an industry body issuing good practice advice on money laundering, has issued advice that has been agreed with HM Treasury as appendix D to its guidance notes to the financial sector. This advice is available on the internet at www.jmlsg.org.uk. Where FATF has agreed that further countermeasures should be applied because insufficient progress has been made, the Government have issued further advice to the financial sector and more generally. To date, only Nauru has been subject to such additional countermeasures. The measures agreed by FATF are:

(a) stringent requirements for identifying clients are enhancement of advisories, including jurisdiction-specific financial advisories, to financial institutions for identification of the beneficial owners before business relationships are established with individuals or companies from these countries;

(b) enhanced relevant reporting mechanisms or systematic reporting of financial transactions on the basis that financial transactions with such countries are more likely to be suspicious;

(c) in considering requests for approving the establishment in FATF member countries of subsidiaries or branches or representative offices of banks, taking into account the fact that the relevant bank is from an NCCT;

(d) warning non-financial sector businesses that transactions with entities within the NCCTs might run the risk of money laundering.

A copy of the further advice on Nauru is also available from the JMLSG and Treasury websites.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49147]

Mr. Boateng: A large number of staff in the Departments and agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have contributed to the drafting of answers to the 10,625 parliamentary questions answered

by Treasury Ministers between April 1999 and March 2002. It is not possible to estimate the number of people involved.

Baltic Exchange

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the financial contribution made to the United Kingdom economy by members of the Baltic Exchange. [49473]

Ruth Kelly: The Government value the contribution made to the UK economy by the Baltic Exchange and the supporting maritime services that are located in the UK. International Financial Services London (IFSL) have estimated that the Baltic Exchange and its associated ship brokers contributed £327 million to the UK's overseas earnings in 2000.

Aggregates Levy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from *(a)* the quarry industry and *(b)* brick-makers concerning the introduction of the aggregates levy; and if he will make a statement. [50020]

Mr. Boateng: A number of discussions have recently been held at both ministerial and official level with representatives of the aggregates and associated industries throughout the UK about the implementation of the aggregates levy.

Wanless Report

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he received the final Wanless report. [50642]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Derek Wanless formally submitted his final report to the Chancellor on 15 April.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish Derek Wanless's final report on long-term health trends. [51014]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The report will be published at 9.30 am on 17 April. Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43273]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are not yet available. There are currently five special advisers appointed under special adviser terms and conditions and in line with the ministerial code.

These figures do not include the Council of Economic Advisers.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over-50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44912]

The Solicitor-General *(holding answer 25 March 2002):* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, has not employed any persons under the new deal schemes during the last three years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

In each of the last three years, the CPS has employed two people under the new deal scheme. The recruitment exercises were for the new deal scheme in general and were not specific to any of the categories identified. Both officers were offered a one-year fixed term contract (unsubsidised) as a Level A2 (Administrative Officer), and placed on the band minimum for that level. The posts were advertised through local job centres and, therefore, there were no costs to the Department.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has not employed any persons under the given new deal categories during the last three years.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not employed any persons under the given new deal categories during the last three years.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45062]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* In relation to my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, no cases have been brought against the Department under the Human Rights Act 1998.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service does not monitor centrally those cases that include a claim under the Human Rights Act, or collect information centrally in relation to the cost of these cases in terms of legal fees to defend the cases or compensation payments.

In general, claimants bring actions against the Crown Prosecution Service in two ways: by claiming malicious prosecution and/or negligence.

Some of these claims refer to the Human Rights Act 1998.

No records of cases against the Crown Prosecution Service are kept and the Department does not collect separate information centrally about the cost of legal fees and compensation payments in these cases.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department conducts litigation on behalf of many Government Departments but does not hold central records identifying all cases in which the Human Rights Act is relied upon. In relation to those cases where the Treasury Solicitor's Department is a party to litigation, the position is the same. Human rights are now integrated into the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a legal challenge. In relation to those cases brought against the Department, two have been identified which included human rights points.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department does not collect separate information centrally about the cost of legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include human rights issues. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element of a case.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office knows of no cases where the actions of its members or the use of its statutory powers have been challenged under the Human Rights Act. However, the Act permits Convention points to be raised, either by themselves or together with domestic law, in support of legal argument in criminal proceedings, or in judicial review applications. Obviously, since the implementation of the Act, Convention points have been raised frequently in litigation in SFO cases, principally in support of complaints of unreasonable delay. It is impossible to separate the cost of defending Human Rights Act arguments from prosecution costs generally but neither do we consider that there would be any justifiable case for doing so.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44957]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the target for replies to letters from hon. Members is 15 working days from the date of receipt and 20 working days from the date of receipt to reply to letters from members of the public.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

In 2002–03 the target for ministerial replies to letters from hon. Members will be 15 working days from the date of [illegible].

The Crown Prosecution Service has a target for responses to complaints from members of the public. The target for 2002–03 is to increase to 94 per cent. the proportion of replies to complaints which are made within 10 days.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor, as Chief Executive of the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency, replies to letters from hon. Members concerning the business of the Agency. She will in 2002–03 continue to aim to do so substantively within 15 working days of receipt of such letters.

Only the Bona Vacantia Division of the agency receives appreciable quantities of letters direct from members of the public. It has targets for 2002–03 of acknowledging letters within five working days of the date of receipt and dispatching, in 80 per cent. of cases, substantive replies within 20 working days of that date.

Serious Fraud Office

Under the Citizen's Charter, the SFO has accepted targets for dealing with correspondence and agreed to monitor achievement. These targets are that all correspondence from members of the public should be disposed of within four weeks of receipt and that correspondence from hon. Members should be disposed of within three weeks of receipt. The SFO exceeds these targets in virtually all instances. Most correspondents receive a reply within a single working week.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Solicitor-General what costs have been incurred by her Department since 23 January in connection with the Saville Inquiry. [46145]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Treasury Solicitor's Department carries out legal work for other Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, on a full cost recovery basis. While substantial work has been done by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in relation to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, in so far as that work is directly connected with the Inquiry, the cost will be recovered, or has been recovered, from the client Department or Departments represented.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has provided representation before the Inquiry for two ex-members of staff. No costs have been incurred in respect of this representation since 23 January 2002.

The Attorney General and staff at the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers have been involved in one matter relating to the Bloody sunday Inquiry since 23 January 2002 which concerned the scope of the undertaking given to witnesses appearing before the Inquiry. Such advice forms part of the usual work of the Department and the cost cannot be separately assessed.

PSAs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for the Treasury Solicitor's Department to achieve a reduction in average unit costs per chargeable hour in Litigation Division in real terms will be met by March. [47888]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Press Officers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many press officers there were in her Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46887]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, and the Treasury Solicitor's Department, share a single press officer who also acts as Private Secretary to the Attorney General. In relation to those two Departments the answer is *(a)* one; and *(b)* one.

On 1 May 1997 there were 5.5 press officers in the Crown Prosecution Service press office. A Head of Communications post was created later that year. In April 2002 there were four press officers and a Head of Communications.

On 1 May 1997 the Serious Fraud Office had two press officers. It now has three.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Complaints

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints she has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public about the service from her Department for each of the last 36 months; and if she will make a statement. [30850]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The records kept centrally by the Lord Chancellor's Department of correspondence received from hon. Members in each of the last 36 months do not distinguish those which are complaints. This information which is available is set out in Table A. More detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The statistics available for complaints by members of the public for each of the last three calendar years, and from 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001, are set out in Table B. Statistics for the courts as a whole are not held centrally and again could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hon. Members

Table A

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
Public Trust Office[1]	[2]—	[2]—	144	—
Public Guardianship Office[3]	—	—	—	93
Land Registry	39	60	30	19
Public Record Office	0	1	1	0

[1] The Public Trust Office ceased to exist on 31 March 2001.
[2] Not available.
[3] The Public Guardianship Office was created on 1 April 2001.

Members of the public

Table B

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
Lord Chancellor's Department HQ	[1]—	9	6	2
Public Trust Office[2]	[1]—	[1]—	344	—
Public Guardianship Office[3]	—	—	—	492
Land Registry	554	799	749	575
Public Record Office	128	80	76	35

[1] Not available.
[2] The Public Trust Office ceased to exist on 31 March 2001.
[3] The Public Guardianship Office was created on 1 April 2001.

PRIME MINISTER

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* total cost of television licences paid for by his Department. [48366]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the reasons why he did not publish the dossier on the status of Iraq's weapons programmes. [49843]

The Prime Minister: We have already placed some evidence concerning Iraq's programmes in the Library of the House. When the time is right, we shall release further material, including the threat posed by the development of weapons of mass destruction.

The Government believe it important that we should divulge as much information to the public as we can without prejudicing sensitive sources, including intelligence reporting. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on intelligence matters.

Egypt

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he discussed *(a)* human rights in Egypt, *(b)* progress towards democracy in Egypt and *(c)* the state of social inequality in Egypt with President Mubarak in December 2001; [48779]

(2) when his meeting with the President of Egypt in December 2001 was arranged; [48772]

(3) if he discussed *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU overseas aid programmes to Egypt during his meeting with President Mubarak in December 2001. [48780]

The Prime Minister: I discussed a range of issues with President Mubarak at an informal occasion arranged during the course of my family holiday to Egypt.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission reaches its projections for improved performance. [45572]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The commission's projections are based on performance over a rolling 12-month period, projected forward over the coming 12 months. The table shows the annual case completions since 31 March 1997, when the commission started case working. The commission began by working almost exclusively on the Home Office and Northern Ireland Office transfers. Stage 1 eligibility review was developed during 1997–98, and the Stage 2 Screen process was introduced in May 1999, following development as a pilot process between August 1998 and April 1999. The Stage 2 Screen has allowed the commission to complete about 1,000 cases in 1999–2000, 1,100, in 2000–01 and 1,200 in 2001–02. The number of cases waiting in trays has been reduced from a maximum of 1,208 cases in May 1999 to about 330 by 31 March 2002.

Case review statistics for 1997–2002

	Completions	*Completions*[1]	*Under review*	*In trays*
1997–98	310	310	217	855
1998–99	492	802	440	1,177
1999–2000	1,015	1,817	465	914
2000–01	1,109	2,926	487	582
2001–02	[2]1,197	[2]4,123	[2]369	[2]330

[1] Cumulative

[2] Estimated

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Criminal Cases Review Commission has taken to enhance public confidence in the criminal justice system; and how it measures its progress. [45570]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The commission publishes an annual report that provides an account of its activities. Since 31 March 2002 will mark completion of the commission's first five years of casework, the 2001–02 report will summarise the progress made over this period, and highlight some of the most significant case referrals.

In July 1997, the commission organised a meeting at which a number of stakeholders expressed their views on miscarriages and how to conduct effective case reviews. Another such meeting is being planned for 2003. In addition the chairman and chief executive will be appearing before the Home Affairs Committee on 30 April 2003.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Criminal Cases Review Commission has taken to promote the public's understanding of its role; and how it measures its progress. [45569]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The commission has taken a number of measures to promote the public's understanding of its role. These include: the revision of its Information Pack in the light of its growing experience; the expansion and monitoring of its website; and the publication of its annual report, which summarises progress and highlights the most significant referrals. It also held a meeting at which a number of stakeholders expressed their views on miscarriages of justice and how to conduct effective case reviews. Another such meeting is planned for next year. The commission has no reliable index of progress to improve public understanding of its role.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Criminal Cases Review Commission defines a substantial issue for review. [45576]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Substantial issues are those that require more than five Case Review Manager days of effort.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who the stakeholders are of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [45568]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Stakeholders include:

potential applicants and their representatives;

courts of appeal (as recipients of referrals);

The Court of Appeal (as a referring body);

my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) (in relation to Her Majesty's Prerogative of Mercy);

the Criminal Justice System and its agencies; and

the Government represented by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Home Department (Mr. Blunkett) and Northern Ireland (Dr. Reid).

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the precise process modifications made by the Criminal Cases Review Commission to achieve its goals. [45571]

Mr. Keith Bradley: About 30 per cent. of the applications to the Commission are found to be ineligible at Stage 1. During 2001–02, the Process Improvement Project (PIP) 1 recommended several actions to reduce this proportion, particularly improved communications, and further encouragement to prospective applicants to seek legal advice.

The time to review cases at Stage 1, Stage 2 Screen and Stages 2–3 depends on such factors as the availability of files and other materials, timeliness of responses from applicants and their advisers, and delays in obtaining expert reports. PIP 2 has been concerned with minimising these delays. In that regard, the Government announced

on 5 March 2001 that a £350,000 joint proposal from the commission and the Court of Appeal (to the Invest to Save scheme) for the electronic transfer of files had been successful. Work is still in progress on this project.

A goal for 2001–02 was to minimise the case accumulation at Stage 2 Screen. This will be achieved by 31 March 2002, or soon afterwards, and will be followed by reorganisation of Stage 2 Screen for steady-state operation. In future, some Stage 2 Screen cases will be distributed to case review managers outside the Stage 2 Screen group, to optimise their case portfolios.

During 2000–01, the commission implemented a computerised case management information (Vectus) and completed the necessary data migration. Since 1 April 2001, the benefits (of improved case management, with greatly reduced labour in tracking the progress of individual cases and in presenting casework statistics) have begun to flow.

Vectus

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statistical and performance indicators for casework produced by the Vectus information system in 2001–02. [45581]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Currently the Commission uses Vectus to provide monthly statistics on:

Case Intake

Case Completions at all Stages

Cases under review.

Correspondence

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walthamstow will receive a response to his letters regarding Mr. V. Poci (DEV/7050/929), sent on 25 October 2000 and 14 November 2001. [43773]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 15 April 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 30 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms Jamila Malik. [47767]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 12 April 2002.

Young Offenders

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals aged between *(a)* 10 and 11 and *(b)* 12 and 17 years were (i) cautioned and (ii) sentenced for indictable offences in each year since 1997 in each police force area in England and Wales. [45588]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested, from the Home Office Court Proceedings and Cautions Database, is shown in the table.

Information on cautions and court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Juveniles cautioned[1] and sentenced for indictable offences, by police force area, 1997–2000

	Cautioned		Sentenced	
Police force	*Age 10–11*	*Age 12–17*	*Age 10–11*	*Age 12–17*
1997				
Avon and Somerset	64	1,092	3	728
Bedfordshire	67	911	4	366
Cambridgeshire	39	708	1	495
Cheshire	36	1,006	4	805
Cleveland	166	1,447	9	1,026
Cumbria	77	689	5	572
Derbyshire	42	935	4	620
Devon and Cornwall	33	1,478	3	640
Dorset	8	443	—	237
Durham	51	658	8	877
Essex	102	1,909	10	1,195
Gloucestershire	68	852	—	363
Greater Manchester	318	4,512	27	3,198
Hampshire	131	2,559	9	1,313
Hertfordshire	36	940	—	415
Humberside	123	1,265	6	838
Kent	143	2,090	12	1,424
Lancashire	145	1,711	10	1,573
Leicestershire	33	846	5	892
Lincolnshire	51	855	—	466
London, City of	1	83	—	4
Merseyside	85	1,944	7	1,578
Metropolitan police	327	9,864	19	5,874
Norfolk	122	1,418	4	486
Northamptonshire	8	250	4	404
Northumbria	501	3,923	26	2,245
North Yorkshire	20	548	1	484
Nottinghamshire	174	1,753	18	1,285
South Yorkshire	91	970	10	1,407
Staffordshire[2]	219	1,606	6	850
Suffolk	46	823	3	441
Surrey	41	900	1	380
Sussex	53	1,696	2	747
Thames Valley	54	1,221	1	1,091
Warwickshire	31	691	10	304
West Mercia	68	1,330	4	687
West Midlands	359	5,030	15	3,573
West Yorkshire	242	2,618	35	2,524
Wiltshire	54	834	1	367
Dyfed Powys	58	794	—	404
Gwent	101	1,201	5	679
North Wales	50	680	1	463
South Wales	137	2,054	11	1,677
England and Wales	4,575	69,137	304	45,997
1998				
Avon and Somerset	66	1,106	1	620
Bedfordshire	55	767	8	386
Cambridgeshire	39	753	1	524
Cheshire	62	1,325	8	881
Cleveland	155	1,134	18	988
Cumbria	77	703	7	590
Derbyshire	53	823	1	650
Devon and Cornwall	37	1,266	2	642
Dorset	27	664	—	332
Durham	69	581	8	846
Essex	94	1,816	17	1,178
Gloucestershire	35	973	2	299
Greater Manchester	436	5,476	44	3,194
Hampshire	181	2,224	24	1,826
Hertfordshire	45	791	1	401
Humberside	125	1,492	5	922
Kent	197	2,256	21	1,631
Lancashire	126	1,817	23	1,589
Leicestershire	26	957	2	870
Lincolnshire	57	809	3	549
London, City of	—	57	—	1
Merseyside	116	2,138	19	1,641
Metropolitan police	680	12,727	23	6,260
Norfolk	55	1,050	5	547
Northamptonshire	8	331	4	601
Northumbria	437	3,443	47	2,819
North Yorkshire	55	755	3	486
Nottinghamshire	197	1,764	13	1,300
South Yorkshire	87	1,137	5	1,336
Staffordshire[2]	206	1,431	7	927

Juveniles cautioned[1] and sentenced for indictable offences, by police force area, 1997–2000

Police force	Cautioned		Sentenced	
	Age 10–11	Age 12–17	Age 10–11	Age 12–17
Suffolk	62	870	—	401
Surrey	48	962	1	367
Sussex	44	1,379	1	789
Thames Valley	58	1,176	—	1,102
Warwickshire	43	668	1	305
West Mercia	75	1,379	4	755
West Midlands	337	4,592	26	3,869
West Yorkshire	237	2,705	41	2,833
Wiltshire	58	816	1	511
Dyfed Powys	60	857	4	441
Gwent	100	1,292	2	661
North Wales	77	801	4	502
South Wales	119	2,001	14	1,764
England and Wales	5,121	72,064	421	49,136
1999				
Avon and Somerset	65	1,245	7	662
Bedfordshire	54	762	8	373
Cambridgeshire	35	626	5	655
Cheshire	58	1,085	7	779
Cleveland	104	937	13	974
Cumbria	61	810	7	620
Derbyshire	43	761	8	671
Devon and Cornwall	53	1,335	5	671
Dorset	30	637	3	387
Durham	46	557	15	1,014
Essex	98	1,434	3	1,107
Gloucestershire	59	793	4	318
Greater Manchester	379	4,381	47	3,419
Hampshire	215	2,513	42	2,100
Hertfordshire	36	846	2	435
Humberside	98	1,139	5	981
Kent	146	2,078	13	1,480
Lancashire	113	1,629	21	1,570
Leicestershire	50	884	3	812
Lincolnshire	28	629	4	525
London, City of	2	59	—	1
Merseyside	116	1,933	21	1,436
Metropolitan police	543	10,894	56	6,380
Norfolk	58	746	13	578
Northamptonshire	12	337	2	645
Northumbria	358	2,905	50	2,763
North Yorkshire	39	806	5	649
Nottinghamshire	148	1,492	21	1,350
South Yorkshire	125	1,371	25	1,451
Staffordshire[2]	107	1,104	9	792
Suffolk	48	667	7	451
Surrey	40	961	1	362
Sussex	60	1,597	4	705
Thames Valley	86	1,585	9	1,052
Warwickshire	26	558	4	368
West Mercia	58	1,200	15	822
West Midlands	376	3,984	48	3,821
West Yorkshire	264	2,598	50	2,921
Wiltshire	45	841	3	421
Dyfed Powys	72	906	1	399
Gwent	98	1,032	11	660
North Wales	77	834	3	574
South Wales	135	1,661	22	1,793
England and Wales	4,664	65,152	602	49,947
2000				
Avon and Somerset	58	1,171	6	761
Bedfordshire	34	582	5	349
Cambridgeshire	44	654	4	550
Cheshire	37	860	5	772
Cleveland	79	769	8	862
Cumbria	44	533	9	551
Derbyshire	64	732	5	674
Devon and Cornwall	135	1,598	9	784
Dorset	36	696	4	341
Durham	47	579	6	915
Essex	99	1,292	4	1,009
Gloucestershire	56	840	1	359
Greater Manchester	275	3,193	55	3,841
Hampshire	204	2,146	38	1,965
Hertfordshire	49	1,101	2	547
Humberside	95	1,026	9	912
Kent	148	2,069	11	1,289
Lancashire	109	1,696	35	1,637
Leicestershire	44	703	10	798
Lincolnshire	38	495	2	452
London, City of	—	65	—	2
Merseyside	63	1,182	12	1,508
Metropolitan police	438	8,978	45	6,447
Norfolk	53	1,016	5	432
Northamptonshire	55	736	3	501
Northumbria	353	2,702	49	2,262
North Yorkshire	35	644	6	563
Nottinghamshire	134	1,395	21	1,372
South Yorkshire	77	1,099	25	1,429
Staffordshire[2]	104	1,234	—	—
Suffolk	80	940	5	427
Surrey	19	559	5	415
Sussex	83	1,588	7	756
Thames Valley	131	2,334	9	1,221
Warwickshire	30	481	1	300
West Mercia	120	1,275	4	774
West Midlands	264	3,581	53	4,076
West Yorkshire	284	2,662	71	2,460
Wiltshire	74	930	3	444
Dyfed Powys	75	850	2	317
Gwent	76	814	8	643
North Wales	68	666	11	582
South Wales	81	1,478	14	1,640
England and Wales	4,392	59,944	599	48,661

[1] Includes reprimands and final warnings which replaced cautions for juveniles from 1 June 2000, having been piloted in seven police force areas from September 1998.

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been included in the total only.

Fingerprinting

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the requirement to take Polaroid photographs during fingerprint retrieval at the scene of a crime was introduced. [30706]

Mr. Denham: There is no actual requirement to take Polaroid photographs during fingerprint retrieval at the scene of a crime, although it is considered good practice to take a Polaroid or some other photograph as a means of recording the location of any fingerprints found at the scene. Their location can be recorded in the form of a sketch or some other manuscript description. Unfortunately, the information I gave in my answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1123W, supplied by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in good faith, was inaccurate and I apologise for this error.

Prisons (Wales)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maximum capacity is for each prison in Wales; and how many prisoners are held in each prison. [45795]

Beverley Hughes: On 22 March 2002, the operational capacity and number of prisoners held for each prison in Wales were as shown in the table.

Prison	*Operational capacity*	*Number of prisoners*
Cardiff	669	667
Parc	968	968
Prescoed	128	116
Swansea	366	344
Usk	220	215

Prisoners (Literacy and Numeracy)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest assessment is of progress on the PSA target to improve literacy and numeracy skills of prisoners discharged from their sentence. [47216]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Our most recent data suggest that there will be a shortfall on meeting our Service Delivery Agreement target to achieve 18,000 basic skills qualifications in 2001–02 by around 10 per cent. Nevertheless, this is still a major increase over the 12,500 basic skills qualifications achieved by prisoners in the previous year, and all of the qualifications achieved in 2001–02 will be at Level 2.

Female Imprisonment

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1393W, on female imprisonment, when statistics for 2001 on the number of women appearing before the courts and their subsequent sentences will be made available. [46607]

Beverley Hughes: Statistics on court proceedings and sentencing in 2001 will be published by December 2002 in "Criminal statistics, England and Wales 2001".

Victims' Charter

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the members of the team preparing the report on the Victims' Charter Consultation; what its terms of reference are; when its work is expected to commence; and when the report will be published. [46479]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A summary of responses to the consultation process on the Review of the Victims' Charter was placed in the Library and published on the Home Office website in July 2001.

The Victims' Charter Review Implementation Group first met on 2 October 2001. Its terms of reference are:

To complete the third stage of the Review of the Victims' Charter by October 2002; including making recommendations on the introduction of rights for victims, a Victims' Ombudsman/Commissioner, the feasibility of a victims' fund and other related policy matters.

The Victims' Charter Review Implementation Group is made up of representatives of the following Government Departments, organisations and victims' groups:

Home Office Justice and Victims Unit
Home Office National Probation Directorate
Home Office Research and Statistics Unit
Association of Chief Police Officers
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
Prison Service
The Court Service
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Criminal Cases Review Commission
Crown Prosecution Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Justices' Clerk's Society
Magistrates' Association
Victim Support
Judiciary.

The Group's work, and that of its subsidiary Groups working on the Victims' Ombudsman/Commissioner and the inclusion of victims of road traffic incidents within the scope of the Victims' Charter, is well under way. It will be reporting its conclusions later this year, and I expect to make an announcement in the autumn.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the members of the Victims' Charter Implementation Group, and the departments, organisations and victim groups which they represent. [46491]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Victims' Charter Review Implementation Group meets quarterly and its membership is comprised of representatives from the following departments, organisations and victims groups:

Home Office Justice and Victims Unit
Home Office National Probation Directorate
Home Office Research and Statistics Unit
Association of Chief Police Officers
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
Prison Service
The Court Service
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Criminal Cases Review Commission
Crown Prosecution Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Justices' Clerk's Society
Magistrates' Association
Victim Support
Judiciary.

Money Laundering

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence the SFO provided in answer to Nigerian and Swiss requests for assistance in the case of alleged money laundering using UK financial institutions by the late General Abacha; and if he will make a statement. [39004]

Mr. Blunkett: Ordinarily it is practice not to comment on international requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters as they concern on-going criminal proceedings. However, the fact of these requests have been acknowledged publicly by the Federal Government of Nigeria and in proceedings before the High Court.

Four requests for assistance were received from the Swiss authorities relating to criminal investigation of, inter alia, fraud and money laundering allegedly committed in violation of Swiss law. In execution of three

of the requests, evidential material was transmitted by the Home Office to the Swiss authorities on 18 October 2001. The remaining request is being processed.

The request from the Federal Government of Nigeria, which concerns criminal investigations and proceedings relating to allegations of corruption and theft of public funds in Nigeria, is being processed. Prior to a decision of the Divisional Court, handed down on 18 October 2001, a High Court injunction prohibited my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Blunkett) dealing with the request. The Federal Government of Nigeria has indicated through its solicitors that it is pleased with the way in which its request is being dealt with by the Government.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the target percentage improvements in the satisfaction of *(a)* victims and *(b)* witnesses with their treatment in the criminal justice system will be met by March. [47409]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The 2002 British Crime Survey and the 2002 Witness Satisfaction Survey will determine whether the targets for improvements of victim and witness satisfaction levels have been met. These surveys will be carried out shortly and the results will be available later in the year.

As an interim indicator, the 2001 British Crime Survey showed that the satisfaction level of victims had remained similar, at 58 per cent., to the result from the 2000 Survey.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the PSA target to increase public confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system will be measured; and if he expects the target to be met by March. [47229]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Public Service Agreement (PSA) target is to promote confidence in the criminal justice system. It will be measured through questions to the public in the British Crime Survey. The target is due to be specified in terms of a percentage increase later this year. The target date is 2004.

Criminal Appeals

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which criminal cases it is possible for the prosecution to appeal against *(a)* conviction and *(b)* sentence; and what proposals he has to extend the list of such cases. [47122]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are no powers for the prosecution to appeal against conviction.

At present, under the provisions of Sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 the Attorney-General has power to refer to the Court of Appeal cases where the sentence imposed appears to be unduly lenient. The power applies to sentences passed in the Crown court in relation to all indictable offences and to certain triable either way offences specified in orders made by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Blunkett) under section 35(4) of the 1988 Act. The latter applies to offences of indecent assault, threats to kill, cruelty to children and serious fraud sentenced in the Crown court, including those committed for sentence after conviction in magistrates courts.

An order extending the Attorney General's powers in relation to unduly lenient sentences came into effect on 21 August 2000, and applies to sentences passed after that date. This enables the Attorney-General to refer to the Crown court, sentences imposed for offences of illegal trafficking in drugs and pornographic material involving children and offences specifically against children (unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16, inciting a girl under 16 to have incestuous intercourse and indecent conduct towards a young child). The Government will keep under review whether further extensions should be made in future.

The Government are also committed to reforming the double jeopardy rule for murder cases, which would enable the prosecution to reopen proceedings following an acquittal, in certain circumstances. We are considering the nature and extent of this reform in light of the Law Commission's report, and Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the measurable criteria are for the PSA target to ensure just processes and just and effective outcomes; and if he expects the target to be met by March. [47230]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Ensuring just processes and just and effective outcomes is one of the key objectives in the 2001–02 Criminal Justice Business Plan. It will be measured using the Public Service Agreement target to reduce the rate of re-conviction of all offenders punished by imprisonment or by community supervision by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate.

Reducing the rate of re-conviction is one of this Government's key delivery priorities with a delivery plan in place. The delivery strands which will contribute towards the target have been selected on the principles of 'What Works' based on research evidence of effectiveness. The delivery strands are being monitored regularly to assess progress towards achieving this target, which is not due to be met until March 2004.

Drug Traffickers (Assets)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to increase by one third the amount of assets identified from drug traffickers and secured will be met by March. [47226]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Public Service Agreement (PSA) target was to increase the amount of assets identified from drug traffickers and secured by one third over a three-year period. The target is measured in terms of receipts from the enforcement of confiscation orders in drug trafficking cases. The baseline was receipts of £9.5 million during the 1997–98 financial year. The milestone objectives that were set were receipts of £10.4 million in year one (1998–99), £11.5 million in year two (1999–2000) and £12.6 million in year three (2000–01).

The outcomes for years one and two were £10.5 million in 1998–99 and £9.3 million for 1999–2000. The outcome for 2000–01 was £11.75 million, a little short of the PSA target but still representing the largest annual return to date.

The Government have since set a new target of doubling the amounts recovered from both drug traffickers and other serious criminals, from the £29.4 million recovered in 1999–2000 in confiscation receipts and cash forfeited under the Drug Trafficking Act 1994 to £60 million by 2004–05. This is to be achieved through changes in law and practice which the Government are seeking to bring about through the Proceeds of Crime Bill and the related initiatives published in the Asset Recovery Strategy.

"Living Without Fear"

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if delivery of the action points in Living Without Fear will be completed by the target date. [47449]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The great majority of the action points have been completed by the target date, including the funding of 58 projects combating violence against women under the Crime Reduction Programme, the publication in March 2000 of the Multi-Agency Guidance for Addressing Domestic Violence, and the increase of the annual grant to Victim Support to £25 million from April 2001. Police performance indicators have been introduced as part of the development of a consistent approach to the use of data on violence against women.

A new ministerial group on domestic violence ensures that the agenda for development of work in this area is kept relevant and focused. Five key headline areas of work have emerged as priorities for the group:

early intervention by health professionals;

improving the way in which criminal and civil jurisdiction work together in domestic violence cases;

promotion of safe accommodation choices for women and children fleeing domestic violence;

education and awareness raising; and

ensuring an appropriate and consistent police and Crown Prosecution Service response to domestic violence.

Restorative Justice

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress since 1997 on his policy of restorative justice. [47420]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government recognise the potential of restorative justice to offer a constructive response to crime which benefits victims, offenders and the wider community.

Restorative principles have been at the heart of the recent reforms of the youth justice system. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced a range of new options for juveniles which provide the opportunity for offenders to face up to the consequences of their crime and make reparation for it. The aim is to involve the community and victims in this process if appropriate. The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 developed this approach by introducing referral orders whereby youth offender panels operate as community conferences, involving community volunteers and victims, where possible. They agree contracts with the young offender which encourage reparation to the victim or the community and aim to address the causes of the offending behaviour. Referral orders were rolled out nationally on 1 April 2002.

In his review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales, the Lord Justice Auld recommended

> "the development and implementation of a national strategy to ensure consistent, appropriate and effective use of restorative justice techniques across England and Wales."

The Government are now considering its response to this recommendation.

Animal Tests

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for monitoring the impact of the inter-departmental concordat on data sharing on the duplication by Government Departments on tests on animals; and if he will make a statement on the impact of the concordat. [48693]

Angela Eagle: In August 2000, we announced the inter-departmental concordat on data sharing to enable Government Departments to reduce the duplication of tests on animals. The concordat commits United Kingdom regulatory authorities to help resolve legal and other obstacles and encourage data sharing between clients and thereby reduce animal tests.

My officials are in contact with the parties to the concordat to review progress. They have been asked how they have put the concordat to use in encouraging companies to share data in the field of regulatory toxicology. We have requested information on ways in which the concordat has achieved its aims within each organisation and are equally keen to hear of any problems there may have been in implementing these aims, or which have slowed progress down, together with suggestions of how these could be overcome.

The full impact of the concordat will be determined once the review is complete.

Bail Conditions

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to prevent young offenders on bail offending further. [50572]

Beverley Hughes: I am today making an order which will bring into force section 130 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 across England and Wales. It will do so on 22 April 2002 in the 10 street-crime initiative areas—London, Manchester, West Midlands, Merseyside, Thames Valley, Lancashire, Avon and Somerset, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire—and on 16 September 2002 in the rest of the country.

This section will give new powers to the courts to remand a 12 to 16-year-old into secure detention where they are of the view that the child or young person has a recent history of repeatedly committing imprisonable offences while on bail or in local authority accommodation. In such a case the court must be satisfied that only a secure remand would protect the public from

serious harm from him or her, or that only a secure remand would be adequate to prevent the commission of further imprisonable offences by him or her.

I have also made an order which brings into force sections 131 and 132 of the same Act which allows courts to tag 12 to 16-year-olds while on bail or on remand to local authority accommodation. This will increase the number of options available to the courts for dealing with children and young people who repeatedly offend while on bail as an alternative to custody. It will come into force on 22 April 2002 in the 10 street-crime areas listed above plus Northumbria, and in the rest of the country on 1 June 2002.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men have received a winter fuel payment for each year since the scheme began, broken down by *(a)* those who also receive another social security benefit and *(b)* those who do not receive another social security benefit. [44093]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

A gender breakdown is not available for the first two winters of the scheme, 1997–98 and 1998–99. Information is not yet available for winter 2001–02.

The information which is available is in the table.

Winter fuel payments

Thousand

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Great Britain	10,112.5	11,123.5
All men	[1]3,862.6	4,811.4
Men in receipt of a social security benefit	[1]3,862.6	4,194.3
Men not in receipt of a social security benefit	[1,2]Nil	617.0

[1] For the first three winters of the scheme 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, only people aged 60 or over in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance, or those over pension age in receipt of other qualifying benefits, were entitled to the payment.

[2] The figures for 1999–2000 exclude men aged 60 to 64 (and a small number of others) who became eligible for Winter Fuel Payments from 2000–01 onwards, and who were also able to claim retrospectively for previous years. It is not possible to relate the retrospective payments to specific years.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Public Houses

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 764W, what information she collates on rural pubs; and if she will make it available. [46505]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency collates data on rural pubs through its Rural Services Survey. The last survey undertaken in 2000 collected information on pubs, differentiating between those serving meals and those not serving meals, and between those independently owned and those which are part of a national chain. The headline results by parish and settlement size have been published in the Countryside Agency report entitled Rural Services in 2000.

The full report is also available on the agency's website along with parish and settlement files (which can be downloaded) currently containing the following information:

For the 12,289 settlements recorded in the survey, data are available on pubs serving meals and pubs not serving meals.

For the 6,103 parishes recorded in the survey, data are available on the total number of pubs in the parish.

The data on public houses can be found on-line at http://www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralservices/pubs.htm.

Correspondence

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Henley of 4 September 2001 (Defra ref. 159940), 28 September 2001 (Defra ref. 160862), 18 July 2001 (Defra ref. 158115), 16 July 2001 (Defra ref. 157925) and 10 July 2001 (Defra ref. 157840); and what the reasons are for the delay in replying. [26766]

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member's letter of 4 September 2001 was replied to on 26 January; of 18 July 2001 on 5 February; and of 10 July 2001 on 13 March.

The letter of 16 July has been transferred to the Department of Health.

We are unable to trace a copy of the letter of 28 September 2001.

Hon. Members are aware of the difficulties DEFRA faced last year in processing correspondence, following the foot and mouth disease outbreak, and the creation of the new Department. Steady progress is being made towards eliminating the backlog of cases, and performance on incoming letters has considerably improved. I can assure you that all efforts will continue to be devoted to this area until the problems have been fully resolved.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 14 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Christchurch to the Minister of State on the Biocidal Regulations 2001. [33639]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am sorry for the long delay in replying to the hon. Member's letter. The Department transferred the hon. Member's correspondence to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 10 April, as they have responsibility for the Biocidal Regulations.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what factors caused the delay between 23 October 2001 and 24 February 2002 in responding to the letter from the hon. Member for Christchurch about refrigerants. [40797]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The hon. Member's letter of 23 October was faxed to the Department on 15 January following an inquiry about the length of time the response was taking. There was no trace of the original letter in the Department.

Departmental Establishment

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the total establishment of her Department; and how many of these posts relate to functions of the former MAFF. [47967]

Mr. Morley: The number of staff in DEFRA and its executive agencies on 1 March 2002 was 13,658 full-time equivalents. The number of staff in MAFF and its executive agencies at the time of the transfer was 11,038 full-time equivalents. Due to reorganisations within the Department, current posts in DEFRA relating to the former MAFF cannot easily be identified and the number of such posts could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many posts with environmental protection responsibilities were transferred to her Department from the former DETR; and how many of those posts have become vacant since the transfer. [47966]

Mr. Morley: Approximately 500 posts with environmental protection responsibilities were transferred from the former DETR to DEFRA. Due to reorganisations within the Department, the number of those posts that have become vacant since the transfer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47110]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. The 1999 list contained information on all such visits undertaken from 2 May 1997 to 31 April 1999. Details for travel undertaken in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50471]

Alun Michael: DEFRA's e-business strategy does not currently propose the use of smart cards but as smart card technology matures and becomes more pervasive, DEFRA will consider its use as an authentication mechanism for e-business systems. While the Department has not had discussions with private companies about the use of smart cards, DEFRA receives information from the Office of the e-Envoy on this topic and has participated in the OeE's Smart Card Working Party which produced the Smart Card Framework document.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 736W, on fair trade goods, if she will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35915]

Mr. Morley *[pursuant to the reply, 8 January 2002, c. 736W]:* Support for fair trade initiatives both in developing countries and the UK has been given by the Department for International Development. This support forms part of a wider dialogue with the private sector to encourage them to adopt more socially responsible and ethical business practises.

Within DEFRA, the management of catering is outsourced and the use or promotion of particular goods is not yet a specific requirement under these arrangements though we will look seriously into making this a choice available for staff.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contracts her Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to her Department from and (B) from her Department to these firms. [32427]

Mr. Morley: Since DEFRA came into being on 8 June, 2001, the Department has let no contracts with Arthur Andersen or Accenture for accounting, audit and consultancy work. From records held centrally no staff have been seconded to the Department from these firms or from the Department to these firms.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of whether the sickness absence reduction target for 2001–02 will be met. [47666]

Mr. Morley: Following publication, in 1998, of the Cabinet Office report 'Working Well Together—Managing Attendance in the Public Sector' and the subsequent setting of targets for the reduction of sickness absence in the civil service this Department compiled comprehensive guidance on managing sickness absence which it successfully piloted in selected areas. Those arrangements were ready to be rolled out across the Department, when the outbreak of foot and mouth disease concentrated resources elsewhere.

Following the creation of the new Department and the ending of the foot and mouth outbreak, work on the new sickness absence management arrangements has been

re-started, but as yet no assessment has been made as to whether the sickness absence target for 2001–02 will be met.

Responsibility for attendance matters within the Central Science Laboratory Agency (CSL), the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) and the Centre for Environmental Fisheries and Aquaculture Science Agency (CEFAS)—all former MAFF agencies—has been delegated to the agency Chief Executives.

CEFAS has been developing a robust attendance management system incorporating return to work interviews and closer monitoring of short term absences. They are confident they are on track to meet the 2001 target and with the imminent introduction of the new arrangements they should be well placed to monitor absence levels which in turn will provide them with the best opportunity of meeting their 2003 target.

Responses from CSL and VLA have been included by letter. The Pesticides Safety Directorate, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate Agencies and the Rural Payments Agency are covered by the departmental response.

Letter from Professor Michael Roberts to Mr. John Bercow, dated April 2002:

I have been asked to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory, to your question regarding an assessment of whether the sickness absence reduction target for 2001–2002 will be met.

Following publication, in 1998, of the Cabinet Office report 'Working Well Together—Managing Attendance in the Public Sector' and the subsequent setting of targets for the reduction of sickness absence in the Civil Service, Central Science Laboratory has been carrying out continuous improvements to the process of managing sickness absence. This includes the employment of an on-site Occupational Health Adviser.

Work on the new sickness absence management arrangements have now been re-started, following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease which concentrated resources elsewhere, but as yet no assessment has been made as to whether the sickness absence target for 2001–2001 will be met.

Letter from Professor Steve Edwards to Mr. John Bercow, dated April 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on what recent assessment has been made of whether the sickness absence reduction target for 2001–2002 will be met.

VLA's approach to managing sickness has been based on a proactive stance in relation to all areas of health surveillance and sickness absence and by providing comprehensive advice and guidance to staff and managers. This is supported by appropriate monitoring systems. We are constantly reviewing procedures in the light of the Cabinet Office report 'Working Well Together—Managing Attendance in the Public Sector'.

VLA's sickness absence reduction target will be incorporated into that established for DEFRA. No separate assessment has yet been made as to whether the sickness absence target for 2001–2002 will be met.

Environmental Protection

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department has played in discussions relating to the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy; and if she will make a statement. [46569]

Mr. Meacher: As a member of the Strategy Council, we have participated fully in discussions relating to the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy since its endorsement at the 'Environment for Europe' Ministerial Conference in 1995, and will continue to do so.

In February officials from my Department attended the 6th meeting of the Strategy Council in Budapest, and the 'Biodiversity in Europe' Intergovernmental Conference which was held under the overall umbrella of the strategy, and which focused on facilitating European regional preparations for the 6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD/COP6), and strengthening co-operation on biodiversity in Europe.

The conference reviewed relevant on-going Pan-European processes, identified priorities and made a number of recommendations for action at the regional level. The conference discussed the main items on the CBD/COP6 agenda which were of special European concern, with a view to developing a regional input for the forthcoming negotiations at The Hague. Among the priority topics considered were:

Forest biological diversity

Invasive alien species

Financial resources and mechanisms for biodiversity

Indicators, monitoring and the clearing house mechanism; and

Strategic Plan for the CBD and the implementation of the Convention.

The main messages from Budapest to the global biodiversity community are that European countries are committed to work jointly for attaining common goals of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; and that Europe is keen to learn from a wide range of experiences of other regions with a view to enriching the Pan-European biodiversity process, and is ready to share its achievements and innovations with other regions of the world.

Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress with regard to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade. [46560]

Mr. Meacher: The Rotterdam convention was adopted on 10 September 1998. The convention will not come into force until ratified by 50 parties, 20 parties have ratified so far.

The European Commission adopted a proposal to implement the Rotterdam convention in the EU on 24 January 2002, which is now being discussed by the Environment Council Working Group and the European Parliament. European Community Regulation 2455/92 already implements (compulsorily) a voluntary scheme on trade in certain dangerous chemicals, which the European Commission's recent proposal seeks to amend to implement the convention in the EU. Germany and The Netherlands have implemented national legislation in advance of European Community action. The UK, and the rest of the Community, are also participating in a voluntary interim procedure prior to the convention coming into force.

Energy Policy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department intends to publish details of new energy efficiency indicators, targets and monitoring mechanisms for each sector of the economy; and if she will make a statement. [48686]

Mr. Meacher: The Government will be responding to this and other recommendations of the recent performance and innovation unit energy review in a White Paper later in the year, following public consultation. The Government recognise that energy efficiency is an important, and highly cost-effective, way of achieving our climate change goals. It has significant unrealised potential, and the Department will be considering how to enhance its future role. We will produce a domestic energy efficiency strategy, and are working to establish benchmarking, indicators and (where appropriate) targets, for those sectors of the economy which have the most significant impacts on energy efficiency. A review of local authorities' role in energy efficiency is also under way. Some sectors of course already have energy efficiency targets, for example, the Government estate, health and education sectors. The energy efficiency best practice programme (EEBPp) provides authoritative information and guidance on benchmarking and best practice for every sector.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to form a negotiated agreement with the finance sector to reduce the cost of financing energy efficiency measures by funding them as part of mortgage offers; and if she will make a statement. [48692]

Mr. Meacher: We will examine the performance and innovation unit's energy review recommendation in the course of preparing our domestic energy efficiency strategy, and for the introduction of the home seller's pack. The objective of this initiative is to make available to potential buyers relevant information about the property. We propose that the seller's pack should include an assessment of the property's energy efficiency performance (a SAP energy rating) and suggestions for improving that performance. It is anticipated that the information will encourage prospective home buyers to take energy efficiency into account in their buying decisions and, following purchase, to act on the suggestions and invest in energy efficiency measures. The ability to fund the measures as part of the mortgage loan would help to maximise the benefits from this initiative.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department plans to announce an extension of the energy efficiency commitment from 2005 to 2010; and if she will make a statement. [48688]

Mr. Meacher: We are considering the future of the energy efficiency commitment after 2005: we need to be sure that it remains the best way of delivering substantial savings in the domestic sector. Feedback on the early part of the programme for 2002 to 2005 will also enable us to take account of that experience in making our plans for the future.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department plans to undertake a review of low carbon delivery organisations; and if she will make a statement. [48690]

Mr. Meacher: The performance and innovation unit (PIU) energy review highlights the number and range of organisations involved in delivering policies and programmes for lowering carbon emissions and promoting energy efficiency. The Government will certainly consider this particular PIU recommendation carefully when responding to the energy review in a White Paper later in the year, following public consultation.

EU Directive 1999/74/EC

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the extent to which EU Directive 1999/74/EC was implemented by 1 January; and what formal action has been taken by the European Commission in respect of this matter by 1 January. [49279]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* EC Directive 99/74/EC came into force in all member states on 1 January 2002.

Ministerial Conference on the North Sea

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on matters discussed and decisions taken at the ministerial conference on the North sea, held in Bergen, in March; and if she will place in the Library copies of all United Kingdom submissions to the conference and submissions by other Governments and accredited bodies that are relevant to the United Kingdom. [47663]

Mr. Meacher: The fifth North Sea Conference was held in Bergen, Norway, on 20 and 21 March. I represented the UK and was supported by Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development at the Scottish Executive.

The Conference received a report on progress made in taking forward the commitments made at the fourth North Sea Conference held in Esbjerg, Denmark, in 1995. The outcome of the fifth North Sea Conference was a declaration for further action to protect the marine environment of the North Sea. It covered establishing an ecosystem approach, the conservation of habitats and species, fisheries, shipping, hazardous substances, eutrophication, offshore installations, radioactive substances, renewable energy, marine litter and waste management, spatial planning and future co-operation.

The Conference was very successful in producing an agreed declaration which provides a worthwhile step for the further protection of the marine environment. Key initiatives include a commitment to develop and pilot ecological quality objectives to assess progress made towards an ecosystem-based approach, a commitment to designate relevant areas of the North Sea as a network of well-managed marine protected areas by 2010 and the creation of a network of investigators and prosecutors to tackle pollution from shipping. It was also agreed that Sweden would host a Ministerial meeting on the environmental impacts of shipping and fishing by 2006.

The declaration also contains proposals to work through the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic to develop guidance on offshore wind energy schemes and consider how best to share information on spatial planning for the North Sea. It also endorses further work through OSPAR to tackle pollution from hazardous substances, offshore installations, radioactive substances and the prevention of eutrophication.

I have placed copies of both the progress report and the declaration in the Library of the House. They are also available at *http://www.northseaconference.no.*

Refrigerators

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement updating the Government's strategy for stripping CFC foam from fridges and freezers in the UK; and how long it will take to deal with the backlog of appliances. [48593]

Mr. Meacher: There has been considerable progress. Facilities for treating CFC foams are now coming on-stream in the UK. A mobile plant is already operating and two static plants are due to be operational by the end of June. Additionally, refrigerators from various parts of the UK are being exported to Germany for treatment. Sufficient plant should be in place by the end of the year to ensure that the backlog of fridges does not increase further. Current estimates suggest the backlog of appliances will be dealt with during 2003.

Waterways Access

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of inland waterways are accessible to canoeists *(a)* freely and *(b)* on payment of a fee. [48207]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's most recent findings on access to water by canoeists are contained in our research report, "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the facts" which was published in December 2001. The researchers did not distinguish between paid and unpaid access where agreements were in place. Canoeists (and other users) have a free right of access to those inland rivers and canals which have public navigation rights.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to improve access to inland waterways for canoeists; and if she will make a statement. [48203]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Our research report, "Water-based Sport and Recreation: the facts" was published in December 2001. The report has aroused a great deal of interest amongst the canoeing community abd I have set out our approach in responses to letters from many hon. and right hon. Members.

My officials recently met British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England as the other sponsors of the research along with other interested Government Departments to discuss the report's findings which are quite complex. Just before Easter my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael) met the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and representatives of the British Canoe Union to hear their views. We are considering what action to take in light of the report's findings.

Laying Hens

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she made to the European Union prior to its passing of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive. [48956]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Ministers were directly involved when the proposal was discussed at the Council of Agriculture Ministers and UK officials were fully involved in the negotiations on the Directive.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on the cost of egg production in cage-based systems of implementation of Directive 1999/74/EC on the Welfare of Laying Hens; and if she will estimate the change in cost expected in the cage-based system following implementation of Directive 1999/74/EC. [46392]

Mr. Morley: A regulatory impact assessment has been produced, following public consultation. It will be published to accompany the Statutory Instrument to implement the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage producers to move laying hens out of small cages before the final phase-out date of 2012; and if she will make a statement on her policy in respect of the keeping of birds in modified cages in the long-term. [49280]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* It is intended that Council Directive 99/74/EC will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. If further changes are proposed, there will be full public consultation.

Beef

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of the National Beef Association. [46401]

Mr. Morley: There are, at present, no specific arrangements for the Secretary of State to meet with the National Beef Association.

However, I recently met with the Association, on 4 April, to discuss matters regarding TB in cattle.

My noble Friend (The Lord Whitty) last met directly with the Association on 7 November, in order to discuss the Animal Movement Regime and has accepted an invitation to attend the Association's forthcoming event 'Beef 2002', organised for 24 May.

Lord Whitty also maintains regular contact with representatives of the Association through attendance at stakeholder meetings and looks forward to continuing dialogue on issues facing the Beef Industry.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals of each species were slaughtered *(a)* for human consumption and *(b)* otherwise than for human consumption (i) at registered low throughput slaughterhouses, (ii) at other registered slaughterhouses and (iii) elsewhere in (A) 2000 and (B) 2001. [48192]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is given in the table for Great Britain.

Thousand head

	Species						
	Cattle[1]	*Sheep*	*Pigs*[2]	*Solipeds and Equidae*	*Goats*	*Deer*	*Rabbits*
2000							
(a) For human consumption							
(i) at registered low throughput slaughterhouses	28	190	73	0	1	2	46
(ii) at other registered slaughterhouses	2,036	18,000	11,462	11	7	88	0
(iii) elsewhere	[7]—	[7]—	7	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
(b) Not for human consumption							
(i) at registered low throughput slaughterhouses							
Rejected at slaughterhouse[3]	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
(ii) at other registered slaughterhouses							
Over Thirty Month scheme	841	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Rejected at slaughterhouse[3]	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
(iii) elsewhere[4]							
Slaughtered due to swine fever	[7]—	[7]—	75	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Pig welfare disposal scheme	[7]—	[7]—	183	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
2001							
(a) For human consumption							
(i) at registered low throughput slaughterhouse	25	200	67	0	1	1	37
(ii) at other registered slaughterhouses	1,746	12,105	9,517	10	10	53	0
(iii) elsewhere	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
(b) Not for human consumption							
(i) at registered low throughput slaughterhouses							
Rejected at slaughterhouse[3]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(ii) at other registered slaughterhouses							
Over Thirty Month scheme	511	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Rejected at slaughterhouse[3]	1	10	22	0	0	0	0
(iii) elsewhere[4]							
Slaughtered due to FMD	592	3,392	141	[7]—	2	1	[7]—
Welfare disposal scheme[5,6]	169	2,107	287	[7]—	[7]—	5	[7]—

[1] Including bison.
[2] Including wild boar.
[3] Data on animals rejected at the slaughterhouse for human consumption only collected by the Meat Hygiene Service for April 2001 onwards.
[4] Excludes animals disposed of on farm for which no reliable information is available.
[5] Includes light lambs.
[6] Data shown for deer are for deer, goats, llamas and others.
[7] Not applicable or not available.

Source:
Statistics (Commodities and Food) Division, Economics and Statistics Directorate, DEFRA 11 April 2002
Data on slaughterhouse throughputs provided by the Meat Hygiene Service.
Data on slaughterings under the Over Thirty Month scheme provided by the Rural Payments Agency

On-farm Burials

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on EU proposals to ban the on-farm burial of livestock from this end of this year. [48381]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A new EU Animal By-Products Regulation will tighten the controls on the disposal of animal by-products and ban the routine burial of livestock except in remote areas (the Highlands and Islands of Scotland). Further negotiations between the Council of Ministers, European Parliament and European Commission are still required, but we expect the regulation to come into force in member states between the end of 2002 and mid 2003. We are discussing future arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock with stakeholders.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the number of farms which carry out on-farm burial of livestock. [48382]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* No such assessment has been made. However, the State Veterinary Service carried out small scale surveys in 1998, 1999 and 2000. The results (which may not be representative) suggested that 17 to 21 per cent. of fallen cattle and 60 to 76 per cent. of fallen sheep and goats were buried on farm.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) in how many contiguous premises slaughter was completed within 48 hours of a clinical diagnosis of the disease during the foot and mouth epidemic; [47603]

(2) on average how long after clinical diagnosis slaughter was completed on the infected premises during the foot and mouth epidemic. [47604]

Mr. Morley: Information regarding the time taken to slaughter on contiguous premises is presented in the two charts, which have been placed in the Library.

Animal Experiments

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government have taken to ban the testing of finished household products on animals. [45765]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not ruled out a ban on the testing of household products. The need for testing household products on animals is something that the Animal Procedures Committee is considering and will advise on later this year as part of its review of the cost/benefit assessment. In the meantime, the Government will continue to work to ensure that animals are only used where there are no alternatives.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Community Care

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of applications for community care grants have been given a priority of medium or high; and how many applications regarded as of high or medium priority have been *(a)* fully awarded, *(b)* partially awarded and *(c)* not awarded in each year since 1997. [48645]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The available information is in the table.

Community care grant awards by priority

Year	High priority awards	Medium priority awards
1997–98	229,000	6,000
1998–99	218,000	7,000
1999–00	215,000	4,000
2000–01	223,000	2,000

Source:
Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Figures are for initial awards only.
3. Data on the numbers of applications by priority are not held. It is not practical to collect such data as one application could include requests for high, low and medium priority items.
4. Details of full and partial awards and refusals are not held by priority.

Carers Service

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the work of the new Disability and Carers Service and the arrangements for handling of individual cases in which other services within the Department may also be involved. [45809]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Disability and Carers Service aims to provide a responsive, consistent and reliable service in administering Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance. It is working with other parts of the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that a quality service is available to all customers from April 2002.

All DWP businesses operate within a single Department and the customer of one should be treated as the customer of all. Any customer who contacts a DWP business outlet that is not focused upon their particular needs, will be helped to find the assistance they need as quickly as possible and with the minimum of inconvenience. This may mean redirecting them and telephoning in advance, or arranging an appointment on their behalf. Comprehensive guidance has been issued to staff setting out the standards of service we expect when the needs of customers span more than one business.

Disability Living Allowance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families there are with two or more disabled children who are in receipt of disability living allowance in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [47984]

Maria Eagle: Disability Living Allowance is awarded to severely disabled people on the basis of their individual care and mobility needs, and information on family circumstances is not collected. At 31 August 2001, about 196,100 children aged under16 were receiving Disability Living Allowance in England, 21,000 in Scotland, and 14,000 in Wales. These figures are based on 5 per cent. data and rounded to the nearest hundred. The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security matters within Northern Ireland.

Rents

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Rent Service report indicating that the number of localities would have increased from 400 to 4000 as a result of the Court of Appeal judgment on local reference rents in Stockport delivered on 26 October 2001, referred to in the First Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, *Official Report*, 14 January, column 12. [45853]

Malcolm Wicks: We have not received a formal report from the Rent Service. The likely increase in the number of localities was a Rent Service estimate for England.

Housing Benefit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 729W, how many housing benefit claimants are subject to non-dependent deductions; and

what percentage of that number are *(a)* registered disabled, *(b)* aged 60 and over, *(c)* in receipt of income support or JSA and *(d)* lone parents. [45854]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Housing Benefit cases in Great Britain to which non-dependant deductions have been applied—May 2000

Cases	
Cases with non-dependant deductions (number)	159,000
Of which:-	
Receiving a disability premium (percentage)	20
Aged 60 or over (percentage)	49
In receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (percentage)	64
Lone parents (percentage)	16

Notes:

1. The figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. The data refer to Housing Benefit recipients who may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit recipient can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share.

3. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and do not sum because Housing Benefit recipients can fall into more than one client group.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2000.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to speed up the processing of housing benefit applications; and if he will make a statement. [40470]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Under Best Value, we have set a range of performance indicators for HB which are designed to ensure that authorities provide their communities with a faster, more accurate service which is more secure against fraud, and which provides value for money and takes account of the views and needs of clients. Authorities are required to set challenging local targets against the indicators and, from April 2002, will be set aspirational national targets for speed of processing.

On 21 March we published performance standards for the full range of HB administration. These address all aspects of administration including effective strategic management of the service; speed and accuracy of processing; modern accessible customer service; preventing and tackling fraud; working with landlords; and overpayments. Local authorities will be able to self-assess their performance against standards.

The HB Help Team is working in partnership with local authorities to support them in improving the administration of HB. We are already seeing real improvements in administration as a result of the Team's work and the ongoing programme of inspections by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate. We also want to help more authorities deliver a high standard of HB service by sharing good practice. We are developing a dedicated web-site to do so and we plan to make available shortly on CD a "toolkit" which the Help Team has developed.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the average time taken for local authorities to process housing benefit applications has been over the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [40471]

(2) what the target time is for local authorities to process housing benefit applications; how many achieved that target in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [40472]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The first full year in which data was collected on the performance of local authorities against performance indicators was 2000–01. The average times for local authorities to process Housing Benefit applications in England and Scotland are in the tables.

England	
Average time for processing new claims	52 days
Average time for processing notifications for changes of circumstances	17 days
Percentage of renewal claims processed on time (ie by the end of the existing benefit period)	63 per cent.

Note:

Not all local authorities provided the data requested and some expressed doubt about the way their data had been collected. Therefore, the figures given are an average of the performance of the local authorities who responded.

Source:

Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000–01.

Scotland	
Average time for processing new claims	48 days
Average time for processing notifications for changes of circumstances	22 days
Percentage of renewal claims processed on time (ie by the end of the existing benefit period)	75 per cent.

Note:

Three of the 32 local authorities in Scotland failed to provide the data requested and, in some cases, the appointed auditors expressed doubt as to the reliability of the data collected. Therefore, the figures given are an average of the performance of the local authorities who responded.

Source:

Accounts Commission "Performance Indicators 2000–01—Benefits, Finance and Corporate issues".

Best Value performance information for local authorities in Wales will be published very shortly by the Audit Commission.

At present there are no national target times for local authorities to process Housing Benefit applications. However, on 21 March we published national performance standards for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit administration. Local authorities will be able to assess their own performance, identify areas that need attention and work towards achieving the standards.

The performance standards for processing benefit claims are shown in the table.

Performance standards	
Average processing time for new housing benefit and council tax benefit claims	36 days
Average processing time for housing benefit and council tax benefit changes of circumstances	9 days
Percentage of renewal housing benefit and council tax benefit claims processed on time (ie by the end of the existing benefit period)	83 per cent.

Social Fund

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for alignment payments from the Social Fund have been received each month since January 2001; and what proportion were *(a)* refused, *(b)* fully awarded and *(c)* partially awarded. [48643]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The available information is in the table.

Social Fund crisis loan awards—alignment payments

Month	*Number of awards*
January 2001	44,831
February 2001	38,164
March 2001	40,940
April 2001	37,331
May 2001	39,785
June 2001	38,588
July 2001	40,876
August 2001	41,618
September 2001	37,566
October 2001	43,585
November 2001	41,318
December 2001	32,677
January 2002	46,522
February 2002	42,732

Note:
1. The Social Fund computer system does not capture separately the number of applications for alignment payments nor the number of such applications that are refused or result in a partial award.

Source:
Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System

Pension Service

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on his plans to create Pension Service and Job Centre Plus; and what access pensioners will have in person to these offices; [50487]

(2) what access pensioners will have in person to Benefits Agency offices under the new Pension Service arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [50488]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 651–52W.

Personal Pension Funds

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have personal pension funds. [46918]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

People who have a personal pension

	Million
Numbers contributing to a personal pension	4.08
Numbers receiving income from a personal pension	0.02
Total number of people with a personal pension.	4.10

Notes:
1. Information is drawn from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) for the year 2000–01 and covers Great Britain only.
2. Due to the size of the FRS sample and the fact that the Survey relies on self-reporting of pension income the information may be subject to a margin of error.

War Pensions

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason MOD War Pensions will be subject to compulsory automated credit transfer in advance of state pensions and benefits. [47424]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

War pensions will be treated no differently from other state pensions and benefits. At this time there is no compulsion for customers to change from their current method of payment. From October 2002 the Veterans Agency will be inviting existing customers paid by order book or payable order to change to payment through a bank or building society with effect from April 2003. The Department for Work and Pensions will be issuing similar invitations to recipients of child benefit.

Basic Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners receiving one or more means-tested benefit have a weekly income of *(a)* up to £100, *(b)* £101 to £120, *(c)* £121 to £140, *(d)* £140 to £160, *(e)* £160 to £180, *(f)* £180 to £200, *(g)* £200 to £220, *(h)* £220 to £240 per week, *(i)* £240 to £260, *(j)* £260 to £280, *(k)* £280 to £300 and *(l)* over £300 per week. [35845]

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to the reply, 12 February 2002, c. 257W]:* The information requested is as follows.

Number of pensioners in receipt of means tested benefits by weekly income band—Great Britain 1999–2000

Weekly income before housing costs	*Number of pensioner units*
Up to and including £100	440,000
£101 to £120	510,000
£121 to £140	460,000
£141 to £160	310,000
£161 to £180	250,000
£181 to £200	190,000
£201 to £220 weekly income	160,000
£221 to £260	160,000
£261 and over	100,000
Total	2,590,000

Source:
Family Resources Survey 1999–2000

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what recent assessment he has made of

whether the PSA target that 25 per cent. of all business transactions should be capable of being carried out electronically by 2002 will be met on time; [46097]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of whether the child support scheme targets for accuracy of payment arrangements and the level of compliance will be achieved by April 2003; [46101]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target that a new assessment of liability to pay child support maintenance shall be completed within seven weeks will be met by the end of 2002; [46099]

(4) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to reduce benefit losses from fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 10 per cent. by March 2002 will be met; [46098]

(5) which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44822]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Progress against PSA targets is set out each year in the departmental report. The 2001 report, Cm 5115, sets out our progress against the PSA targets for the period April 2000–01. The 2002 report will set out our progress for the period April 2001–02.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces; [44066]

(2) how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44540]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not held centrally and could be assimilated only at disproportionate cost. Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The Civil Service Code (Para 9.2.5) requires Departments and agencies to allow time off for attending these duties. Responsibility for the decision making, in relation to attendance, for such activities has been delegated to business units within the Department. However, I am pleased to confirm that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's Diary Manager holds a commission with the Territorial Army.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Vocational Engineering

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the vocational engineering GCSE is to become an option for those not undertaking any physics courses at the same level. [49854]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department will not prescribe how the new GCSEs in vocational subjects may be combined with other subjects. Those decisions will be taken at local level within the context of the requirements of the statutory curriculum.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the vocational engineering GCSE is to be presented as an option for students considered less academically capable. [49855]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The new GCSEs in vocational subjects, which will include engineering, will be promoted by the Department as being available and suitable to young people of all abilities.

Nursery Education (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what nursery provision has been provided by her Department to each London education authority in inner London boroughs over the last five years. [48682]

Margaret Hodge: Since September 1998 all four-year-olds in the inner London area have been able to access a free, part-time, early education place prior to statutory education.

In 2002–03, 11 of the fifteen local education authorities will be able to provide a free early education place to all three-year-olds in their area. The remaining authorities are able to offer a free place to over 65 per cent. of their three-year-olds. All three-year-olds will have access to a free early education place by September 2004.

The following table shows the amount of specific funding received by inner London education authorities to fund free early education places for four-year-olds. From April 2001, all free four-year-old places have been funded by local authorities from their own resources.

£

	Total NEG funding			
LEA name	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Camden	1,661,012	707,078	743,998	829,868
City of London	25,893	18,407	8,739	9,589
Hackney	2,574,606	649,922	823,863	761,122
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,442,670	328,243	277,154	336,321
Haringey	3,111,948	178,857	228,405	584,764
Islington	2,075,786	337,116	348,345	363,544
Kensington and Chelsea	805,775	251,970	208,222	262,080
Lambeth	2,170,135	720,105	937,331	1,093,867
Lewisham	2,977,996	431,562	618,404	432,917
Newham	4,202,907	123,746	161,050	337,115
Southwark	3,032,361	494,272	515,208	725,614
Tower Hamlets	2,852,105	94,748	132,919	109,428
Wandsworth	2,169,446	973,936	1,372,461	1,067,739
Westminster	1,208,802	506,879	521,302	543,259

Note:
The funding figures for four-year-olds in 1997–98 are significantly higher as all free places in this year were funded centrally. From 1998–99 only new places created in the maintained sector and all free places in the private, voluntary and independent sector were funded through specific grant. Existing places in the maintained sector were funded by the authority from their own resources.

The following table shows the amount of specific funding received by inner London education authorities to fund free early education places for three-year-olds. This funding commenced September 1999.

£

LEA name	*Total NEG funding*		
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Camden	514,872	825,919	987,228
City of London	0.00	1,160	14,256
Hackney	597,915	1,155,980	1,768,932
Hammersmith and Fulham	275,401	618,429	706,860
Haringey	511,711	690,364	958,716
Islington	606,558	994,046	1,163,052
Kensington and Chelsea	0.00	341,506	825,660
Lambeth	957,549	1,524,750	1,955,448
Lewisham	592,391	1,110,739	1,860,408
Newham	547,647	1,004,639	1,325,808
Southwark	510,820	1,231,909	1,182,060
Tower Hamlets	227,797	317,143	702,108
Wandsworth	1,153,768	1,699,174	2,050,488
Westminster	218,579	815,164	1,090,584

The information contained in the tables have been extracted from LEA Nursery Education Grant returns and is subject to change as a result of external audit.

School Absences

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the number of half days missed through authorised absence in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools; and if she will make a statement. [48262]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's analytical section provides analysis of all absence data collected by the Department. A statistical bulletin was published in December 2001 and is available on the DfES website. Authorised absence accounts for nearly 90 per cent. of all school time missed and therefore can be as much a barrier to improving school standards as unauthorised absence.

In addition, the Department has commissioned a research project on the causes of absence from school. This project will interview children, parents and teachers about the cause of absence and will report in the autumn.

Swimming Advisory Group

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Swimming Advisory Group has completed its work; and when a report will be made. [48058]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Swimming Advisory Group has completed its work and its report is now under consideration within the Department for Education and Skills.

Public Bodies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many bodies receive some or all of their funding from her Department; how much funding was received by each body in each year since 1997; and who the chief executive of each body was. [47748]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45601]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My Department has only one PFI contract, which is with Capita, to deliver the Connexions Card project. The final contract price was £109.7 million over seven years. The details of the various bidding stages during contractual negotiations are commercial in confidence and in terms of Part II of the code of practice on access to Government information are exempt from disclosure.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on progress with the investigations into abuses of the Individual Learning Account scheme; and in how many cases money has been recovered from ILA providers who abused the scheme. [48254]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In respect of current investigations, 117 learning providers have been passed to the Department's Special Investigations Unit (SIU). Following detailed SIU work, 80 of these have been referred to nine different police forces: Cheshire, City of London, Cumbria, Dorset, Kent, Leicestershire, Metropolitan, National Crime Squad and West Midlands and the SIU are discussing a further 16 with the police. To date police have made 45 arrests that have resulted in 8 accepting cautions and charges being brought against 13 individuals, 12 of whom are awaiting court appearances and one person has been convicted.

A total of £4.47 million of payments are withheld from the 80 providers referred to the police and the 16 SIU are discussing with the police.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been given by her Department for section 11 funding for schools in each Inner London borough in the last year. [48683]

Mr. Timms: The education element of the Home Office's Section 11 Grant scheme ceased on 31 March 1999. It was replaced with the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, which is administered by my

Department. For 2002–03 £155,862,368 is available nationally to improve attainment of minority ethnic pupils. The amounts allocated to London boroughs are set out.

Ethnic minority achievement grant

LEA	*£*
Corporation of London	107,415
Camden	2,931,900
Greenwich	1,912,505
Hackney	4,299,222
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,202,577
Islington	2,529,175
Kensington & Chelsea	1,164,506
Lambeth	3,402,055
Lewisham	2,698,457
Southwark	2,053,869
Tower Hamlets	8,044,136
Wandsworth	2,332,179
Westminster	2,136,538
Barking	634,870
Barnet	1,913,572
Bexley	273,969
Brent	2,991,961
Bromley	112,808
Croydon	2,107,095
Ealing	3,701,735
Enfield	2,476,533
Haringey	3,599,985
Harrow	1,263,821
Havering	109,926

Ethnic minority achievement grant

LEA	*£*
Hillingdon	792,240
Hounslow	2,360,138
Kingston Upon Thames	312,690
Merton	989,608
Newham	3,333,858
Redbridge	2,417,966
Richmond Upon Thames	142,621
Sutton	229,067
Waltham Forest	2,557,579

Note:
All figures include both DfES grant and LEA Contribution

English Teaching

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grant aid has been paid to each local education authority in each of the last five years to assist in the teaching of English to ethnic minority pupils. [48753]

Mr. Timms: My Department provides additional ring-fenced support to raise the achievement of ethnic minority pupils and meet the needs of those for whom English is an additional language through the Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMAG) strand of the standards fund. EMAG replaced the education element of the Home Office's Section 11 grant scheme in April 1999. Individual programme allocations for each authority for each year from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 are as follows:

£

LEA number	*LEA*	*Total allocation* 1999–2000	2000–01[1]	2001–02
201	Corporation of London	108,500	107,415	107,415
202	Camden	2,931,900	3,102,868	2,931,900
203	Greenwich	1,783,616	1,866,510	1,912,505
204	Hackney	4,299,222	4,442,766	4,299,222
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	940,880	1,189,642	1,202,577
206	Islington	2,529,175	2,529,175	2,529,175
207	Kensington and Chelsea	1,177,506	1,219,975	1,164,506
208	Lambeth	3,436,055	3,603,405	3,402,055
209	Lewisham	2,211,561	2,543,947	2,698,457
210	Southwark	1,431,818	1,910,192	2,053,869
211	Tower Hamlets	8,125,390	8,095,454	8,044,136
212	Wandsworth	1,912,879	2,163,323	2,332,179
213	Westminster	2,151,538	2,136,538	2,136,538
301	Barking	662,475	672,625	634,870
302	Barnet	1,459,113	1,190,476	1,913,572
303	Bexley	179,781	313,705	273,969
304	Brent	2,370,904	2,804,240	2,991,961
305	Bromley	51,161	166,547	112,808
306	Croydon	2,032,254	2,163,023	2,107,095
307	Ealing	2,949,203	3,556,921	3,701,735
308	Enfield	2,293,602	2,357,497	2,476,533
309	Haringey	3,337,039	3,526,622	3,599,985
310	Harrow	863,751	1,214,881	1,263,821
311	Havering	75,640	131,090	109,926
312	Hillingdon	629,631	872,091	792,240
313	Hounslow	1,829,207	2,279,528	2,360,138
314	Kingston upon Thames	222,389	309,329	312,690
315	Merton	803,895	913,930	989,608
316	Newham	253,058	1,038,976	1,410,781
317	Redbridge	1,965,442	2,228,929	2,417,966
318	Richmond upon Thames	76,785	164,041	142,621
319	Sutton	151,345	301,005	229,067
320	Waltham Forest	2,054,111	2,426,419	2,557,579
330	Birmingham	5,908,043	7,288,725	8,211,164
331	Coventry	3,208,635	3,208,635	3,208,635
332	Dudley	1,679,723	1,679,723	1,679,723

£

LEA number	LEA	Total allocation 1999–2000	2000–01[1]	2001–02
333	Sandwell	331,689	1,594,539	1,736,068
334	Solihull	—	73,120	39,978
335	Walsall	1,962,120	1,962,120	1,962,120
336	Wolverhampton	2,498,696	3,566,228	2,498,696
340	Knowsley	—	4,002	6,760
341	Liverpool	444,014	519,083	573,262
342	St. Helens	27,343	86,914	34,064
343	Sefton	—	79,841	13,525
344	Wirral	—	12,340	20,631
350	Bolton	938,052	1,147,765	1,052,062
351	Bury	487,320	539,266	487,320
352	Manchester	2,988,148	3,305,363	3,013,363
353	Oldham	2,423,068	2,423,934	2,403,068
354	Rochdale	1,490,703	1,608,763	1,490,703
355	Salford	94,732	206,052	125,078
356	Stockport	114,892	103,080	120,653
357	Tameside	531,905	646,649	531,905
358	Trafford	421,131	518,210	523,308
359	Wigan	121,503	243,818	121,503
370	Barnsley	—	81,322	11,316
371	Doncaster	139,870	324,711	174,730
372	Rotherham	628,345	667,136	628,345
373	Sheffield	1,870,859	2,018,222	1,870,859
380	Bradford	7,569,000	7,788,980	7,569,000
381	Calderdale	1,150,746	1,150,746	1,150,746
382	Kirklees	4,152,833	4,187,568	4,152,833
383	Leeds	1,186,136	1,704,706	1,512,802
384	Wakefield	474,288	563,667	474,288
390	Gateshead	54,404	128,279	65,549
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	504,213	600,263	613,453
392	North Tyneside	155,504	198,051	161,012
393	South Tyneside	208,885	208,885	208,885
394	Sunderland	128,867	194,214	144,208
420	Isles Of Scilly	—	0	63
800	Bath and North East Somerset	—	45,686	51,622
801	Bristol	1,126,875	1,036,269	1,036,269
802	North Somerset	—	14,479	18,253
803	South Gloucestershire	—	404,142	44,911
805	Hartlepool	23,221	23,722	25,807
806	Middlesbrough	459,107	612,787	454,607
807	Redcar and Cleveland	45,820	45,320	45,320
808	Stockton-on-Tees	197,972	195,418	195,418
810	Kingston-upon-Hull	51,694	52,791	60,019
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	—	387,330	19,690
812	North East Lincolnshire	43,476	43,476	43,476
813	North Lincolnshire	281,121	281,121	281,121
815	North Yorkshire	72,456	174,580	43,963
816	York	—	146,838	58,901
820	Bedfordshire	1,018,635	1,227,363	1,018,635
821	Luton	2,215,052	2,287,952	2,188,832
825	Buckinghamshire	1,594,891	1,803,612	1,594,891
826	Milton Keynes	384,562	480,419	467,667
830	Derbyshire	—	107,991	121,568
831	Derby City	1,741,890	1,911,083	1,653,054
835	Dorset	—	65,534	26,415
836	Poole	48,708	67,272	22,098
837	Bournemouth	—	24,909	31,284
840	Durham	—	336,146	92,529
841	Darlington	191,074	114,645	114,645
845	East Sussex	149,209	334,931	180,666
846	Brighton and Hove	247,270	247,270	247,270
850	Hampshire	177,125	397,838	250,513
851	Portsmouth	217,491	217,491	217,491
852	Southampton	483,237	483,237	483,237
855	Leicestershire	634,726	1,048,455	811,986
856	Leicester City	3,255,001	3,645,064	3,645,064
857	Rutland	—	0	1,630
860	Staffordshire	490,666	490,666	528,985

£

LEA number	LEA	1999–2000	Total allocation 2000–01[1]	2001–02
861	Stoke-on-Trent	614,112	614,112	614,112
865	Wiltshire	—	280,985	89,375
866	Swindon	178,352	128,473	142,712
867	Bracknell Forest	—	18,058	23,219
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	242,142	281,552	307,795
869	West Berkshire	—	20,692	26,541
870	Reading	503,353	480,975	480,975
871	Slough	1,084,527	1,238,694	1,344,916
872	Wokingham	25,109	297,927	72,947
873	Cambridgeshire	461,390	889,509	456,390
874	Peterborough	1,008,312	1,084,212	981,212
875	Cheshire	—	280,000	35,384
876	Halton	—	0	4,175
877	Warrington	110,886	108,886	108,886
878	Devon	17,597	325,827	36,839
879	Plymouth	108,390	108,390	108,390
880	Torbay	—	3,563	6,159
881	Essex	10,658	548,237	124,623
882	Southend-on-Sea	—	17,583	31,111
883	Thurrock	51,146	133,954	72,670
884	Herefordshire	—	2,019	3,480
885	Worcestershire	374,099	374,099	374,099
886	Kent	1,824,159	2,459,221	1,824,159
887	Medway	456,320	343,320	343,320
888	Lancashire	4,134,560	4,506,176	4,134,560
889	Blackburn with Darwen	2,069,706	2,069,706	2,069,706
890	Blackpool	—	5,176	8,491
891	Nottinghamshire	176,832	362,633	267,267
892	Nottingham City	1,989,797	2,004,797	1,973,797
893	Shropshire	—	35,230	39,608
894	Telford and Wrekin	216,498	211,140	228,496
908	Cornwall	—	124,501	10,843
909	Cumbria	—	86,920	12,900
916	Gloucestershire	329,641	534,935	361,118
919	Hertfordshire	2,272,207	2,841,259	2,272,207
921	Isle Of Wight	—	0	4,168
925	Lincolnshire	124,699	369,384	153,817
926	Norfolk	317,925	679,779	305,925
928	Northamptonshire	837,562	1,139,918	837,562
929	Northumberland	—	89,118	12,271
931	Oxfordshire	690,665	1,188,472	742,282
933	Somerset	94,353	246,840	94,353
935	Suffolk	357,869	519,886	356,984
936	Surrey	433,308	886,970	596,398
937	Warwickshire	1,498,412	1,498,412	1,498,412
938	West Sussex	312,228	571,061	430,072
	England Total	139,274,586	162,946,443	153,907,740

[1] For 2000–01 Ethnic Minority Achievement grant was combined with Traveller Achievement grant. It is not possible to disaggregate the figures for each.

Note:

All figures include both DfES grant and LEA contribution

Organisational Requirements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what requirements have been *(a)* placed on and *(b)* removed from (i) head teachers, (ii) school governors, (iii) local education authorities, (iv) universities, (v) further education and sixth form colleges, (vi) the Office for Standards in Education and (vii) Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in each year since 1997. [49799]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people, broken down by sector and region *(a)* have undertaken and *(b)* are undertaking modern apprenticeships. [49849]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following tables contain the requested information. The first table contains the total number of starts on Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA) and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA) between September 1995 and December 2001. The second table contains the number in learning on

23 December 2001. For both tables, the breakdown by sector and region is estimated from incomplete information. Where the total number of learners in a sector across all regions is estimated to be 200 or less, no estimate is provided. All other estimates are rounded to the nearest 10.

Number of modern apprenticeships undertaken from September 1995 to December 2001

Sector	South East	London	Eastern	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands	Yorkshire and Humber	North West	North East	England
101 Agriculture and commercial horticulture	190	50	380	1,130	770	430	760	567	220	4,500
102 Business administration	10,220	6,080	9,130	8,100	13,700	9,880	13,610	21,928	12,030	104,540
103 Chemicals industry	30	20	10	0	20	10	170	462	150	860
104 Early years care and education	4,480	4,750	1,900	2,330	3,090	2,250	1,730	4,893	890	26,360
105 Electrotechnical industry	3,010	2,300	1,850	2,280	2,100	2,190	2,240	3,390	730	20,110
106 Engineering manufacture	7,500	2,360	4,550	6,260	7,790	5,130	5,940	11,044	5,680	56,230
107 Engineering construction	100	20	40	10	90	40	70	345	490	1,170
108 Information technology	2,950	1,920	1,900	1,280	1,710	1,800	5,520	2,670	1,710	21,440
111 Polymers	0	10	20	0	40	70	60	48	10	270
112 Retailing	10,030	9,140	9,530	5,840	9,290	5,460	8,900	11,418	7,430	77,070
113 Steel industry	40	10	30	70	340	80	290	50	50	960
115 Travel services	1,410	990	970	1,470	1,420	760	1,100	2,056	650	10,830
116 Construction	4,940	2,130	5,490	4,460	4,770	4,860	7,490	11,206	4,890	50,140
117 Plumbing	1,370	730	910	1,070	970	1,150	1,260	1,752	720	9,940
201 Accountancy	1,840	820	1,550	1,520	1,990	2,010	2,210	3,009	920	15,860
202 Aviation	210	110	300	60	2,030	10	30	330	0	3,100
204 Craft baking	40	10	40	80	50	50	20	233	120	640
205 Builders merchants	90	50	60	60	100	50	80	146	50	680
206 Bus and coach	40	70	70	20	420	10	0	305	0	930
210 Clothing	10	10	20	0	70	140	120	292	100	740
211 Electricity supply industry	60	50	70	40	40	70	100	113	10	540
212 Heating, ventilation, air conditioning	510	770	300	440	300	310	380	728	150	3,900
213 Residential estate agency	390	210	400	220	130	90	60	146	70	1,730
214 Furniture manufacture	80	10	30	90	30	200	150	427	20	1,030
216 Glass	100	40	70	120	140	180	250	1,074	40	2,000
217 Hairdressing	8,310	5,890	5,940	5,520	5,630	4,720	6,220	10,413	3,960	56,620
219 Amenity horticulture	640	130	420	490	390	290	260	751	200	3,580
220 Hospitality	9,550	9,660	8,030	7,300	9,180	7,110	7,040	11,639	3,980	73,610
225 Meat industry	50	0	350	50	360	220	180	450	150	1,800
227 Printing	500	690	400	440	200	360	510	570	160	3,830
228 Road haulage and distribution	450	60	180	130	120	210	350	350	310	2,160
230 Security	90	550	50	130	20	20	40	493	70	1,470
231 Sports and recreation	1,810	1,010	1,000	1,020	920	390	800	2,175	580	9,700
232 Telecommunications	490	1,640	260	1,970	320	70	260	686	200	5,930
234 Marine industry	130	0	70	270	0	10	30	153	70	730
235 Motor industry	5,880	3,740	3,820	6,020	4,120	4,650	4,390	6,411	2,330	41,410
236 Health and social care	6,920	2,100	4,110	5,340	5,460	3,080	4,790	9,261	3,560	44,610
237 Newspapers	40	60	10	20	50	10	10	78	0	270
241 Banking services	0	230	90	0	220	120	50	7	0	730
244 Floristry	160	30	100	130	100	40	80	148	40	840
247 Horse industry	70	10	160	90	50	80	20	63	20	550
248 Insurance	50	290	120	130	220	80	110	452	10	1,460
254 Agriculture and garden machinery	80	0	170	280	240	180	180	105	40	1,270
257 Electronic system servicing	260	80	60	10	250	20	50	38	0	760
259 International trade	50	110	80	20	100	20	60	106	10	560
260 Management	260	360	260	220	400	280	150	367	240	2,540
262 Animal care	560	370	1,560	760	540	520	490	626	240	5,690
263 Customer service	6,990	10,040	5,010	5,250	5,490	5,940	5,610	10,370	5,180	59,930
264 Food and drink	70	0	110	60	50	210	260	419	40	1,200
265 Gas industry	120	60	70	50	70	30	140	211	20	770
267 Warehousing	240	80	230	140	360	300	360	590	240	2,550
276 Textiles	0	0	0	0	20	200	170	42	0	440
270 Health and beauty therapy	10	0	0	20	20	20	30	64	60	230
282 Building services engineers	10	30	0	20	40	30	0	72	0	210
283 Manufacturing	40	0	80	100	340	40	320	314	40	1,260

Sources:
Trainee Database System (to 25 March 2001)
LSC Individualised Learner Records (from 26 March 2001)

Number undertaking modern apprenticeships on 23 December 2001

Sector	South East	London	Eastern	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands	Yorkshire and Humber	North West	North East	England
101 Agriculture and commercial horticulture	50	50	140	350	360	140	190	220	40	1,530
102 Business administration	2,490	1,370	2,250	2,060	3,280	2,280	3,610	5,190	2,680	25,200
104 Early years care and education	1,610	1,690	720	970	1,090	830	510	1,840	320	9,590
105 Electrical installation eng./national electrot.	970	1,070	730	940	850	750	810	820	220	7,160
106 Engineering manufacture	3,740	730	1,600	2,780	2,690	1,840	2,110	4,200	1,900	21,590
107 Engineering construction (AMA only)	40	50	30	20	130	10	60	150	260	740
108 Information technology	940	370	340	280	430	310	1,290	550	480	5,000
112 Retailing	1,840	1,260	1,800	1,180	1,540	970	1,850	2,110	1,200	13,750
115 Travel services	100	180	30	340	250	30	60	360	40	1,390
116 Construction	2,040	740	2,250	1,760	1,680	1,620	2,420	3,780	1,820	18,110
117 Plumbing	660	310	400	500	450	470	540	710	270	4,320
201 Accountancy	490	130	360	390	450	500	610	840	210	3,980
202 Aviation	110	10	140	50	2,000	0	10	200	0	2,540

Number undertaking modern apprenticeships on 23 December 2001

Sector	South East	London	Eastern	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands	Yorkshire and Humber	North West	North East	England
206 Bus and coach	10	20	40	0	140	0	0	80	0	290
211 Electricity supply industry (AMA only)	20	10	10	50	90	60	70	40	0	350
212 Heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration.	120	320	90	140	110	50	210	330	20	1,390
213 Residential estate agency	90	10	50	40	30	20	20	10	20	280
215 Furniture manufacture	60	10	20	20	10	90	100	180	0	490
216 Glass	10	0	0	30	0	0	20	540	0	600
217 Hairdressing	2,450	1,370	1,760	1,650	1,560	1,300	1,750	3,050	1,120	16,020
219 Amenity horticulture	280	30	150	160	110	120	110	310	70	1,350
220 Hospitality	2,380	1,450	1,800	1,900	2,320	1,970	1,730	3,070	1,030	17,640
225 Meat industry	0	0	70	10	60	50	30	80	40	340
227 Printing	20	30	50	50	50	70	90	100	20	480
230 Security	10	220	0	30	0	0	10	160	10	450
231 Sports and recreation	520	260	350	250	290	70	250	720	170	2,870
232 Telecommunications	80	1,220	120	900	110	0	60	200	300	2,720
233 Timber trade (wood machining) (AMA only)	10	40	20	40	20	50	30	30	0	240
234 Marine industry (AMA only)	30	0	0	180	0	0	0	0	0	210
235 Motor industry	1,480	930	750	1,810	930	1,060	1,120	1,840	740	10,660
236 Health and social care	1,760	650	1,090	1,440	1,240	830	1,280	2,340	950	11,560
244 Floristry	70	10	30	40	30	10	30	50	10	270
247 Horse industry	80	120	250	150	70	90	50	90	10	910
248 Insurance	60	80	50	100	30	60	40	180	0	590
254 Agriculture and garden machinery	40	0	40	100	90	70	60	50	10	460
257 Electronic system servicing	130	40	30	50	20	10	20	30	0	320
260 Management (AMA only)	180	170	120	120	170	120	80	210	110	1,260
262 Animal care	80	40	290	90	60	20	70	140	50	830
263 Customer service	1,960	1,730	1,250	1,240	1,390	1,590	1,510	2,800	1,400	14,870
264 Food and drink manufacturing operations	40	20	50	70	60	80	80	150	40	580
265 Gas industry (AMA only)	40	10	0	20	10	0	50	90	10	230
267 Warehousing	140	50	200	110	270	190	230	510	190	1,900
283 Manufacturing operation (FMA only)	30	0	20	90	230	20	120	150	10	670

Sources:
Trainee Database System (to 25 March 2001)
LSC Individualised Learner Records (from 26 March 2001)

Mathematics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how she plans to replace the British mathematics students who have dropped the subject after taking their AS-level examinations. [49853]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In response to concerns about the high failure rate in AS mathematics in summer 2001, the Secretary of State commissioned the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to investigate the cause as part of the Review of Curriculum 2000.

This review is expected to result in revised specifications for first teaching from 2004. In the meantime, there will be an additional opportunity for students to sit mathematics units in the autumn of 2002 to 2004 inclusive, and additional funding for teaching these units.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48391]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental annual reports.

Television Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by her Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48337]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* My Department has four subscriptions to digital satellite at a cost of approximately £5,000 per year and up to 25 subscriptions to digital cable at a cost of approximately £15,000 per year. We do not have any subscriptions to digital terrestrial television. The purpose of the subscriptions is for parliamentary business and constant access to news and House of Commons transmissions.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new measures her Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47324]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* My Department takes physical security of its headquarter buildings seriously and is constantly looking at ways to improve the systems in place. As well as introducing new measures we already have a number of security measures/systems in place, which include:

Clear written policy that is communicated to all staff;

Asset registers and inventories that record asset descriptions, serial numbers, location, who has responsibility for them and value;

"Ownership" of assets assigned to named individuals;

Periodic checks (both management and independent) to confirm the continued existence and condition of assets;

Passes needed by staff giving permission to take assets such as laptops and projectors out of Government buildings;

Random searches of bags by security staff;

Clear written procedures about what to do when assets are damaged or go missing; and

Security markings on equipment.

Additional measures that have been introduced during 2001–02 include the:

Upgrading of the alarm system on the London estate so that it is capable of detecting movement on roofs and within its buildings;

Fitting of alarms to the main computer stores on the London estate;

Replacing the doors to the IT server with stronger materials to prevent forced access;

Electronic tagging of any new laptops which are supplied from our Information Technology team. This system records the exact time and date when the equipment leaves the building; and

Upgrading of the photo pass equipment on all headquarter sites to digital images which are stored electronically.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from non-Governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45229]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since April 1999, 19 members of staff have been seconded to this Department from non-Government organisations, as follows:

	Number
1 April 1999—31 March 2000	9
1 April 2000—31 March 2001	14
1 April 2001—31 March 2002	6

Where a secondment covers two or more financial years, it has been counted in all the financial years it occurs.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the companies from which her Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43404]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff in her Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41084]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In the former Department for Education and Employment one member of staff in the press office received a termination payment in 2001. No other such payments were made in the preceding three years, and there were no redundancies.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38938]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Unlicensed Medicines

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those websites that have been *(a)* closed and *(b)* forced to amend their webpages by the Medicines Control Agency due to breaching the law on the sale of unlicensed medicines via the internet since March 2000; [39022]

(2) how many prosecutions by the Medicines Control Agency against sellers of unlicensed medicines via the Internet *(a)* have been undertaken, *(b)* have been successful and *(c)* are in preparation since 12 July 2000. [39023]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has no powers contained within its statutory enforcement provisions to force closure of websites. However, MCA achieves compliance from internet service providers who are given advice on UK legislation. Websites are usually withdrawn or modified to comply with UK law.

To date the MCA has achieved six site closures through voluntary compliance from ISPs, seven compliances by operators amending their website, one successful prosecution and 12 referrals to other Government agencies or overseas enforcement authorities.

There are 10 further cases under investigation.

As a matter of policy the MCA does not publish details of voluntary compliance.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* appraisals and *(b)* sets of guidelines were issued by NICE in (i) Q4 2000–01 and (ii) Q1, (iii) Q2 and (iv) Q3 in 2001–02. [46284]

Ms Blears: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of technology appraisals	*Number of clinical guidelines*
January-March 2001	5	0
April-June 2001	4	3
July-September 2001	4	1
October-December 2001	1	0
Total 2001	14	4

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence also published "Referral advice, a guide to appropriate referral from general to specialist service" in December 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appraisals of new or existing technologies by NICE were produced in 2001. [47293]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) today.

GP Home Visits

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce compulsory home visits by GPs for elderly patients. [39455]

Jacqui Smith: We have no plans to vary the existing arrangements. General medical services general practitioners (GPs) must currently offer to make an annual home visit to all patients aged 75 years or over. GPs working within personal medical services are required to make arrangements which best meet the needs of the local population, including elderly patients, but the detail of the arrangements are a matter to be agreed locally as part of the Personal Medical Services pilot agreement.

Registered Homes Act

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most recent date of publication has been of the statistical report on private hospitals, homes and clinics registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984. [40873]

Jacqui Smith: The statistical bulletin—"Community Care Statistics 2000—Private Nursing Homes, Hospitals and Clinics" was published in February 2001.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42477]

Ms Blears: As any annual leave taken by staff is recorded and checked locally by business areas within the Department, there is no centrally held information available on the cost of parental leave taken by staff.

The Department has for some time had a special leave policy enabling its staff to take parental leave. Since it came into force the Department has complied with the Parental Leave Directive. As a responsible employer the Department is committed to supporting its staff to work flexibly around their family responsibilities and has a flexible working pattern policy and a child care and carer support scheme. The Department benefits by retaining skilled staff and being valued as an employer.

Correspondence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time taken to answer letters to Ministers has been in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [43948]

Ms Blears: For the calendar year 2001, the average time Ministers have taken to reply to letters is 22.91 days.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter dated 17 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell relating to any inquiry by Mr. Reeve of 6 Wellesford Close, Banstead, Surrey. [48209]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 23 October 2001.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if he has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44069]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record details of civil service staff who are also members of the Territorial forces.

The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) requires Departments and agencies to allow members of the Reserve Forces, Territorial Army or Cadet Forces time off work. The decision over whether such time off is paid or unpaid has been delegated to Departments and agencies.

The Department has a special leave policy that allows members of the Reserve Forces, Territorial Army and Cadet Forces to take special leave with pay for periods of training. Staff are also permitted to accept payments in respect of their membership of the Reserve Forces, Territorial Army and Cadet Forces.

Advertising

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department will spend on advertising, other than for job vacancies, in the current financial year. [43883]

Ms Blears: The Department has spent £19.81 million so far on advertising in this current financial year.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how the money was allocated; and if he will make a statement. [44597]

Ms Blears: No specific allocations have been made for expenditure on the Jubilee by the Department. Information is not collected centrally in a form to identify any incidental expenditure that may have taken place.

Staff (Locally Elected Representative)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44544]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record details of civil service staff who are locally elected democratic representatives.

Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) also requires departments to allow time off for attendance required by section 50 of the ERA 1996.

Special leave policy rests with individual departments and agencies who are free to decide on the amounts of special leave, and the circumstances for which it is granted and whether such leave is paid or unpaid.

As part of its commitment to encouraging staff to be active in the community, the Department of Health has a special leave policy that allows staff who are elected members of local authorities an annual limit of 18 days paid leave.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44925]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record New Deal recruits under these categories.

New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Since joining the scheme in 1998 the Department of Health has taken 72 New Deal recruits. The Department also regularly provides Cabinet Office with New Deal statistics for progress reports for Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on recruitment to meet the benchmark figure for civil service participation in the New Deal programme.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44905]

Ms Blears: Information is not held centrally on the number of New Dealers who have found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks or who have returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44867]

Ms Blears: While the Department does not provide creche facilities for its staff, it does provide staff with an allowance towards the cost of nursery care.

The allowance year runs concurrently with the academic year and the cost of providing nursery allowance (£600 per parent) for the last academic year (1 September 2000 to 31 August 2001) was £95,725.

Anaesthetic Services

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of anaesthetic services *(a)* in the Scarborough accident and emergency Yorkshire NHS Trust area and *(b)* in the Yorkshire and north-east area as a whole. [45107]

Ms Blears: Clinical governance was introduced into the national health service for the first time in 1999. This is underpinned by a statutory duty of quality on NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities in the Health Act 1999, which requires them to put and keep in place arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of health care they provide.

In the case of the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust, difficulties were identified in the provision of services for general anaesthetics across the trust due to a shortage of consultant anaesthetists. In order to ensure adequate cover, the trust decided to restrict operations that require general anaesthetics to three sites and as Malton Community Hospital was the site with the lowest general anaesthetic activity, general anaesthetic services at Malton will cease with effect from 1 April 2002. From that date patients will either have their operations under a local anaesthetic, where appropriate, in Malton or be treated under a general anaesthetic at one of the trust's other sites at Scarborough, Bridlington or Whitby.

National Care Standards

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 March 2002, ref 43898, on National Care Standards, how many and what percentage of care homes have completed their *(a)* application for registration, *(b)* statement of purpose and *(c)* application for registration; and what enforcement action the Commission can take if compliance with these standards is not achieved. [45659]

Jacqui Smith: As of 1 April 2002 the National Care Standards Commission had received approximately 2,500 applications from providers and managers who were required to apply for registration by that date. It is not possible to say how many of these applications are from care homes since the commission is still assessing from which service areas the applications originated and the associated documentation with them.

Providers who have submitted their application for registration will be given protection from section 11(1) of the Care Standards Act until their application can be processed by the commission. Providers who failed to submit their application for registration by 31 March are committing an offence under section 11(1), of the Act. However, before taking prosecution action as set out at section 11(5), we would expect the commission to take account of the circumstances as to why an application was not made.

Nursing Care Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards nursing homes passing on an administration charge to residents for the payment of the free nursing care money. [46575]

Jacqui Smith: The allocations made to health authorities for NHS funded nursing care include an amount for general administration. In implementing the arrangements, the national health service has been asked to ensure that the administrative burdens on both the NHS and homes should be kept to a minimum. Care homes with concerns about the administrative burden should raise this with the responsible local NHS service body.

NHS Procurement

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 304W, on Procure 21, if he will list the pilot areas for the NHS procurement initiative Procure 21; and what the minimum financial level will be of the contract which will be awarded in relation to NHS Procure 21. [46322]

Mr. Hutton: Procure 21 comprises programmes to improve the performance of the NHS as a client of the construction industry, to improve design, and to introduce partnering frameworks. "Best Client" and design initiatives apply nationally. Partnering frameworks are being piloted in the North West and West Midlands regions of the NHS. The minimum financial value of contracts that will be awarded under NHS Procure 21 will be £1 million (this is the works cost as defined in the NHS Capital Investment Manual). This information was detailed in the Contract Notices placed in the Supplement to the European Journal in April 2001 (refs Works Contracts (Publicly Funded Schemes) 2001/S 71–048469, Services Contracts (PFI/PPP Schemes) 2001/S 71–048708).

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a decision was made after the pilot scheme on the best use of a Government procurement card in his Department. [45721]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* On 7 April 2000, it was decided that use of the Government procurement card should be made available to any units across the Department who can justify its issue in terms of the transactions they undertake.

Autism

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding was made available to the Medical Research Council for research into autism each year from 1992 to 2001; and how the £2.5 million funding available to the Medical Research Council for continued research into autism will be used. [46423]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Research Council (MRC) funds a large amount of work on the causes and treatment of autism, and to increase the knowledge base of issues surrounding autism. In recent years the MRC has spent the following amounts on autism research:

	£
1996–97	826,000
1997–98	905,000
1998–99	1,041,000
1999–2000	1,114,000
2000–01	1,182,000

Information for earlier years is not readily available.

I announced on 14 February an extra £2.5 million to the MRC to help them to take forward recommendations on further research contained in their report of their review of the epidemiology and causes of autism. The additional funds provide the opportunity for the MRC to accelerate research on autism, building on existing strengths and addressing gaps which were identified in the report. It will complement and add to the MRC's current support for research in this field. It is likely that the range of research supported will be broader than that of the MRC review and may include research to develop and evaluate interventions. Previous research has not been supported from ring-fenced funding. We will continue to pursue our constructive dialogue with the MRC on autism research.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason he has not yet issued guidance on atypical and traditional anti-psychotic medication for schizophrenia; when he expects to issue guidance to NICE to investigate the use of atypical and traditional anti-psychotic medication for older people in care settings; and if he will make a statement. [46554]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is appraising atypical anti-psychotic drugs for schizophrenia. NICE has produced its final appraisal determination which is subject to appeal. We are not in a position, until the result of the appeals is known, to state when guidance will be issued.

There are no plans at present for NICE to consider separately the use of anti-psychotic drugs for older people in care settings. Through measures such as the National Service Framework for Older People and the Care Standards Act, we have set out clear requirements for the proper management of medicines for older people.

Pharmacies

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the limited opening hours of local pharmacies on Sundays. [44040]

Ms Blears: Under the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 arrangements for pharmacies to open on Sundays are determined locally.

"Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan" commits the NHS, in partnership with NHS Direct, local pharmacies and patient representatives, to review arrangements so that patients who need medicines out of hours will get them easily. We plan to issue advice for the NHS later this year.

Residential Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs concerning the use of rural leisure accommodation for residential care for the elderly. [47028]

Jacqui Smith: No discussions have taken place on this subject with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There are no proposals that rural leisure accommodation should be used to provide residential care for the elderly.

Public Relations Companies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which public relations companies have been used by the NHS; how much money has been spent in the past 12 months on each of them; and on which projects. [47850]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Intermediate Care Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the composition in terms of location of the extra intermediate care beds which have been introduced, and are planned to be introduced, under the National Plan. [47843]

Jacqui Smith: A survey of NHS intermediate care in England was carried out in August 2001. Local health and social care communities were asked to provide data for intermediate care services in place in 1999–2000, and those planned at that time for 2001–02, to enable progress in achieving the NHS Plan targets for intermediate care beds and places to be measured.

The results of the survey showed that by the end of 2001–02 there would be, compared to the baseline of 1999–2000, around an additional 2,400 intermediate care beds. The full results of the survey, giving data by region and by health authority, are in the Library.

Haemodialysis Stations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* new and *(b)* replacement haemodialysis stations have come into operation since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47009]

Jacqui Smith: Since the publication of the NHS Plan in July 2000, capital modernisation allocations from the Department have wholly or partly funded the delivery of 277 new and 22 replacement haemodialysis stations in England. These are in addition to those implemented locally by the NHS in line with regional expansion and development programmes.

Mental Health

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the London region of the NHS decided to reduce the number of mental health services bought from outside London. [47500]

Jacqui Smith: London is developing local national health service mental health services, in line with the adult mental health national service framework and NHS Plan. The development and expansion of local services will also reduce London's reliance on out of London placements in the independent sector and on other NHS facilities. This will mean less travelling for patients and their carers and is therefore supported by them. Where local services do not exist, London will continue to use mental health facilities outside of London based on clinical advice and appropriate services being available.

Mental Illness

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of people, broken down by age, were *(a)* admitted and *(b)* discharged from hospital in each of the last five years where the main diagnosis was mental illness, but the patients also suffered malnourishment. [40579]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* There was one admission and one discharge from NHS Hospitals in England in 2000–01 with a main diagnosis of mental illness and with malnutrition as a secondary diagnosis. The admission and discharge were aged over 85. There were no discharges or admissions in the previous four years (1996–97 to 1999–2000).

Note:

Malnutrition = ICD-10: E40-E46; mental illness = ICD-10: F00-F99.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of people, broken down by age, were *(a)* admitted and *(b)* discharged from hospital in each of the last five years where the main diagnosis was malnourishment, but the patients also suffered from mental illness. [40578]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The figures represent the number of discharges (table 1) and admissions (table 2) to NHS hospitals in England, where the main diagnosis was malnutrition and mental illness was a secondary diagnosis, by age in each of the last five years.

Between 0 per cent. and 0.002 per cent. of all discharges and admissions had a main diagnosis of malnutrition with mental illness as a secondary diagnosis.

Note:

Malnutrition = ICD-10: E40-E46; mental illness = ICD-10: F00-F99.

Table 1: Number of discharges where the main diagnosis was malnutrition and mental illness was a secondary diagnosis, by age and year; finished episodes, 1996–97 to 2000–01; NHS Hospitals in England

Age	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*All 5 years*
0–16	0	1	2	0	0	3
17–24	0	1	0	1	1	3
25–44	4	10	11	5	11	41
45–64	16	19	20	6	14	75
65–74	7	8	14	7	4	40
75–84	2	3	3	4	8	20
85+	3	2	4	0	0	9
Total	32	42	52	22	37	185

Table 2: Number of admissions where the main diagnosis was malnutrition and mental illness was a secondary diagnosis, by age and year; finished episodes, 1996–97 to 2000–01; NHS Hospitals in England

Age	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99	1997–98	1996–97	All 5 years
0–16	0	1	2	0	0	3
17–24	0	1	0	1	1	3
25–44	8	15	11	8	12	54
45–64	20	21	19	15	18	93
65–74	7	8	18	13	6	52
75–84	11	10	7	8	16	52
85+	9	4	4	4	3	24
Total	55	58	59	48	55	275

Notes:
1. Admissions are defined as the "first" period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.
2. Discharge episodes are defined as the last period of in-patient care and ends with death, discharge or a transferred to other hospital.
3. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
4. Figures are grossed for both coverage and missing/invalid clinical data, except for 2000–01 which is not yet adjusted for shortfalls.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

NHS Treatment

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for paying the travel costs of people from outside London who travel to London for specialist NHS treatment not available in their region. [41285]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Hospital Travel Costs Scheme which is part of the NHS Low Income Scheme exists to assist patients with the cost of travel to hospital for NHS treatment under the care of a consultant, irrespective of the distance to be travelled. The scheme is intended to assist patients on low incomes to receive full or partial reimbursement of reasonable expenses for travel to hospital by the cheapest means of travel available to the patient.

Primary Care Workforce Review

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the contributors to the Primary Care Workforce Review have received copies of the final report; [42587]

(2) when he will publish *(a)* the report and *(b)* the conclusions of the Primary Care Workforce report; and if he will place copies in the Library. [42589]

(3) when his Department received the Primary Care Workforce review; and if he will make a statement. [42590]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Primary Care Workforce Review was an internal exercise conducted and written by the Department, which engaged with a large group of external stakeholders. This review covered both the numbers and skills of staff needed in primary care and how the workforce should be planned in future years. Ministers received a draft report on these issues last year.

The work underpinning the review will form the basis of guidance on workforce planning in primary care to be issued shortly.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private care and acute NHS trusts which have applied to share in resources for monitoring hearing aid services in 2002–03 and, in respect of each, the sum of money awarded. [45980]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* We will announce the national health service trusts that will be taking part in the second wave pilot when a decision has been made. Private hospitals will not be involved in the project. A small pilot project is about to begin to look at the possible role that private sector hearing aid dispensers could have in a modernised NHS hearing aid service.

National Care Standards Commission's Business Plan

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the National Care Standards Commission's business plan; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [45640]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The National Care Standard Commission is expected to publish its business plan in late April or early May. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Inspection Consistency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure that there is consistency between Commission for Health Improvement and National Care Standards Commission regulation inspections. [45644]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* We will be bringing section 9 of the Care Standards Act 2000 into force shortly and making regulations so that the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) may arrange for CHI to exercise NCSC's function on its behalf in relation to independent hospitals. We will be preparing these regulations and discussing their implementation with the chief executives of CHI and NCSC to enable appropriate arrangements to be brought into force later this year.

Care Workers (Training)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the total number of staff working in the *(a)* health sector and *(b)* social care sector with NVQ level II in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [45632]

(2) how many people in the care sector in each of the last five years *(a)* obtained National Vocational Qualification level II and *(b)* held National Vocational Qualification level II; and how many staff were working in the sector. [45622]

(3) what estimates he has made of the cost *(a)* to local authorities, *(b)* to health authorities, *(c)* to individuals and *(d)* in total of training care workers to NVQ level II. [45633]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Although we collect data about the number of staff who work in local council's social services departments every year, information about the number of staff working in social care in the voluntary and private sectors has only been collected through ad-hoc surveys which look at specific service user areas. From this information we estimate that there are over one million people in the social care workforce.

We do not hold data on the "total" numbers of staff in either the health or social care sectors that hold their NVQ Level 2. Some data on the numbers of local council social services staff who have either already achieved their Care Level 2 NVQ, or who are working towards attainment of this qualification has been collected through the Training Support Programme (TSP) Grant since 1999. Other data on the numbers of social care staff who hold qualifications has been obtained though various ad-hoc surveys.

Data about the numbers of social care staff with NVQ Level 2 taken from the training support programme grant forms

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Number Holding NVQ Level 2 at the beginning of the year	5,357	11,627	15,480
Number Achieving NVQ Level 2 during the year	3,004	4,595	[1] —

[1] Data is not yet available on the numbers of staff who completed their NVQ Level 2 during 2001–02.

The above table shows the data about completion of Care NVQ Level 2 that has been collected through the Training Support Programme grant since April 1999. Although data was collected about the completion of NVQs prior to this date it was not split between the various levels.

The staff that have attained their NVQ Level 2s will be mainly employees of the local council social services department, but some may be working for voluntary or private social care employers who are contracted by the local council to provide statutory services.

In the report "Who Cares? A Profile of the Independent Sector Home Care Workforce" (which was produced in September 2000) it states that there were an estimated 121,500 home care workers and 5,000 home care managers working in the independent home care industry. Of the 1292 home care staff who responded to the survey, 8.2 per cent. held an NVQ Level 2.

In future, we are anticipating NVQ information to be available centrally on most healthcare staff in the form of the Electronic Staff Record. This system is being developed currently and is intended to be operational for all staff employed by the NHS in hospital and community health services from early 2005.

The National Care Standards Commission will be collecting data about both the number of staff who work in the services that they regulate, and the qualifications that staff and managers hold. We are presently considering what other systems can be implemented in order to collect data for the whole of the social care workforce.

The National Training Strategy "Modernising the Social Care Workforce" considers the cost of improving the qualifications of the social care workforce and in Appendix 5 it provides calculations showing the estimated costs of numbers of staff undertaking qualifications over the five year period 2000–05. However, these calculations do not give a breakdown of the cost per employer or individual. They consider the cost of staff who work in a particular client group area achieving a specific qualification.

Funding has been provided to help implement this Training Strategy with £2 million being disseminated through the National Training Organisation for Social Care (TOPSS) for 2001–02. This amount has been used to promote and embed Induction Training. There will be £15 million in the Training Strategy Implementation Fund for 2002–03 and it is intended to use these funds to enable various staff to undertake Induction Training; to compete the new Registered Managers NVQ Level 4 and to undertake Assessor, Verifier and Mentor training.

Care Home Standards

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps the National Care Standards Commission will take if a care home is failing to comply with National Minimum Standard 18; [45631]

(2) how he plans to measure the compliance of care homes on National Minimum Standard 18 of the Care Standards Act 2000. [45643]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* It will be for the National Care Standards Commission to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents.

Where a care home fails to comply with one or more standards the Commission will have a number of options as to what action to take. The Commission's decision will depend on the degree to which the home fails to meet the standards and the risk to the welfare of the residents. The Commission could impose requirements on the care home to make improvements in a given time scale and monitor the home to ensure that this is done. Standard 18 of the national minimum standards for care homes for older people concerns abuse. In the case of abuse by an individual member of staff the Commission could insist on his or her removal as a person unfit to work with vulnerable adults. As now, if the welfare of the residents was at serious risk, the Commission will have the power to close the care home.

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional expenditure has been incurred by the Health Protection Agency on *(a)* counter-terrorism and *(b)* civil protection since 11 September 2001. [46615]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) and the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research (CAMR), which will be incorporated into the Health Protection Agency from April 2003, have incurred £1,176,000 of additional expenditure since 11 September 2001 on counter-terrorism and civil protection work. These sums are in addition to programmes of related work which were in place prior to 11 September. It has not been possible to divide these figures up between counter-terrorism and civil protection as the two areas involve overlapping work. No additional expenditure has been incurred by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) and the National Focus for Chemical Incidents (NFCI).

The Chief Medical Officer's strategy, "Getting Ahead of the Curve", proposes the creation of a Health Protection Agency which will take over functions currently performed by the PHLS, CAMR, NRPB and the NFCI. We aim to establish the new agency by 1 April 2003.

Smallpox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, to the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), *Official Report*, column 410W, how many smallpox vaccine doses would be required to contain a smallpox outbreak with a two-week time to disease recognition, in an area with a population density of *(a)* 100 persons per sq km, *(b)* 1,000 persons per sq km and *(c)* 10,000 persons per sq km. [44006]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Because of the large number of variables involved in calculating possible smallpox transmission rates it is not possible to provide specific answers to the questions posed. These variables include, among others the nature of the release of the organism and the number of individuals initially infected as well as the effectiveness of public health interventions such as patient isolation and contact tracing.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47191]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department currently has 496 staff (9.5 per cent.) working part-time.

The Department has for some time had a flexible working patterns policy and actively encourages and supports its staff and managers to work flexibly. A range of flexible working patterns including part-time working, job sharing and home working is available to staff by arrangement with their management.

Service Reviews

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmental services have been reviewed since agreement in September 1999 on the programme to do so. [47365]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Since September 1999, the Department has reviewed 30 of its services, equating to approximately 25 per cent. of its activities. The review process was in accordance with Government policy in the handbook "Better Quality Services".

Since March 2001 specific BQS activity has been incorporated into a fundamental review of all the Department's services and activities. This fundamental review was carried out in the spirit of BQS in line with Government policy. It has generated a programme of change that focuses on the Department's delivery contract and which aims to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who undertakes the review of departmental services. [47364]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Reviews of departmental services are undertaken by using either in-house expertise or external consultants, where it is felt that they can add value.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for £15 million savings from action on contractor fraud will be met on time. [47288]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The target was to prevent £9 million worth of pharmaceutical contractor fraud and to recover £6 million worth of the same fraud by the end of 2001–02. The table shows prevention figures to March 2002 and recovery figures to February 2002. Both elements of the target have been met, and in the case of recovery ahead of the end date set.

Pharmaceutical contractor fraud outputs—Prevention[1]

	£
December 1998 to March 1999[2]	52,882
April 1999 to March 2000	2,103,119
April 2000 to March 2001	3,189,111
April 2001 to March 2002	3,972,342
Total	9,317,454

Pharmaceutical contractor fraud outputs—Recoveries

	£
December 1998 to March 2000	[3]2,251,815
April 2000 to March 2001	3,097,676
April 2001 to February 2002[4]	2,130,260
Total	7,479,751

[1] Figures relate to prevention of continuing fraud.
[2] Progress tracked since December 1998 when PSA targets on pharmaceutical contractor fraud for the period to the end of 2001–02 were published.
[3] Figure relates to all recoveries December 1998 to March 2000.
[4] Recovery figures for March 2002 not yet available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for a 50 per cent. reduction in prescription charge evasion by the end of 2002–03 will be met on time. [47289]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* On its formation in late 1998 the NHS Counter Fraud Service (NHS CFS) inherited the public service agreement target to reduce patient prescription charge fraud by 50 per cent. by 2002–03.

The progress the NHS CFS has made against the target has already shown a reduction in losses to fraud in this area of 41 per cent. (£48 million) by the end of 2000–01. This is a good indication that the target of a 50 per cent. reduction by the end of 2002–03 will be met.

Mastectomy

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the criteria used for deciding when to carry out a mastectomy. [46753]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* "Improving Outcomes in Breast Cancer: The Manual (Guidance for Purchasers 1996)" states that a range of operations should be available for the treatment of breast cancer. If the cancer is not too large or diffuse, surgical options include mastectomy or breast conserving surgery. In such cases, the choice should be made jointly by the surgeon and the patient, who should be fully informed of all the options and their potential risks, benefits and implications for further treatment. Breast reconstruction should be discussed with patients who are to undergo mastectomy.

A copy of the guidance is available in the Library.

Intensive Care Baby Incubators

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for an intensive care baby incubator in London NHS hospitals at the latest date for which figures are available. [46688]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department does not collect information on the average waiting times for intensive care baby incubators.

Intensive care baby incubators are always available for sick babies.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of intensive care baby incubators in London NHS hospitals; and what measures are being taken to increase availability. [46686]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In 1999 the London Health Authority chief executives convened a steering group to oversee a review of neonatal intensive care services in London. A discussion document was published in September 2001 which set out proposals for modernising the provision of neonatal intensive care for London. This also included the revised standards recently published by the British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM). Copies of the discussion document have been placed in the Library.

A number of initial consultation meetings have been undertaken to agree on next steps which include establishing managed clinical networks and determining the levels of care to be provided within the networks. This work is currently in progress.

Emergency Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances serve Greater London; and how many paramedics there are *(a)* in cars and *(b)* on motorbikes. [46759]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number of resources on duty at any one time varies according to the time and day. The London Ambulance Service has a fleet of 395 front line ambulances, 204 patient transport vehicles, 30 fast response cars, 10 motorbikes and eight special care baby units.

Breast Screening

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of breast screening. [46763]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) recently evaluated the evidence on breast screening. The results of the evaluation were announced on Tuesday 19 March this year and confirmed earlier advice as to the effectiveness of breast screening.

IARC concluded that trials have provided sufficient evidence for the efficacy of mammography screening of women between 50 and 69 years and that the reduction in mortality from breast cancer among women who chose to participate in screening programmes was estimated to be about 35 per cent.

The working group which consisted of 24 experts from 11 countries also considered the earlier criticisms of the trials and concluded that many of these were unsubstantiated, and the remaining deficiencies were judged not to invalidate the trials' findings.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the extent of mastectomies carried out as a precaution on women who have had a tumour detected by breast screening but were of a kind that may never develop into cancer; [46764]

(2) what proportion of women who undergo breast screening have had mastectomies carried out as a result of the screening in the last three years. [46762]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* One in five breast cancers detected through screening will be found when still within the milk duct. This is called Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS). DCIS is difficult to treat as it is not known which women might progress rapidly to invasive cancer and need extensive treatment, and which women could be managed more conservatively. Detecting DCIS does not necessarily lead to mastectomy. Treatment options are always discussed with women and most women will be offered a choice between mastectomy and less drastic treatment.

Of the 9,525 cancers detected by the breast screening programme in the UK in 1999–2000, 2,009 were DCIS. 29 per cent. of non-invasive screen-detected breast cancers resulted in mastectomy[1].

NHS Cancer Screening Programmes are funding a study to improve quality of care for women with screen detected DCIS. The results of the study will lead to an evidence-based review on the approach taken to the management of women with DCIS. The study is due to report in 2004.

[1] British Association of Surgical Oncologists, May 2001

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47248]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department takes very seriously the theft of and damage to its property. We keep under continuous review the steps we take to protect our property and introduce new security measures where these are cost effective.

In 2001–02 we introduced the following new measures:

The setting-up of a cross-departmental management security forum to strengthen policy and compliance;

Issue of cable locking devices to secure laptop computers;

Issued guidance to all staff on the identification and record keeping of unique serial numbers for mobile telephones to help deter theft.

Other security measures already in place include:

Periodic checks to confirm the continued existence and condition of assets;

Individual authorisations to staff to take mobile IT assets from official premises;

Random searches at building exits by security staff;

Clear written procedures to staff on procedures to protect assets;

Checks to detect unsecured portable property;

Security markings on IT equipment.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48398]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in departmental annual reports.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community hospitals there were in settlements with under 3,000 people in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [46456]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* This information is not collected for individual hospitals.

The concept of care closer to home as identified by the National Beds Inquiry (NBI) underpins our plans for modernising the health service. To this end maximum use needs to be made of community hospitals in delivering and coordinating the local population's care. Community hospitals are working hard to develop their roles, for example in carrying out day surgery, minor procedures and caring for patients in the recuperative phases of recovery from illness or accident. They will be key players in meeting our target of introducing an additional 5,000 intermediate care beds—the bridge between hospital and home—by 2004.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were admitted to wards from accident and emergency departments within *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three, *(d)* four and *(e)* more than four hours, after being seen by a doctor or consultant in (i) March 1997 and (ii) the latest month for which figures are available. [46707]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Figures for March 1997 were not collected.

The latest published figures are for the third quarter of 2001–02. These are in the table.

Admission from Accident and Emergency Departments, England, 2001–02, quarter 3

	Number	*Percentage*
Patients admitted through Accident and Emergency	573,266	—
Patients placed in bed in a ward within two hours of a decision to admit	396,016	69.1
Patients placed in bed in a ward within two to four hours of a decision to admit	111,493	19.4
Patients not placed in bed in a ward within four hours of a decision to admit	65,757	11.5

Source:

Department of Health form OMNG

International Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W, on international nurse recruitment; (1) how he plans to inform *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* overseas Governments, *(c)* overseas nurses and *(d)* nursing organisations of those nursing recruitment agencies which have failed to adhere to the code of practice; [39224]

(2) how many people have been assigned to assess international nurse recruitment agencies' compliance of the code of practice; how long each assessment takes; and what additional funding has been allocated to the code of practice to ensure that standards are enforced; [39302]

(3) how many international nurse recruitment agencies *(a)* are to be assessed by the code of practice, *(b)* had been assessed by 1 March 2002, *(c)* had signed up to comply to the code of practice and *(d)* had failed to adhere to the code of practice; and by when he expects code of practice reviews to be completed. [39303]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 28 February and 4 March 2002]*: We are working with international recruitment agencies and their representative bodies and other stakeholders to establish arrangements whereby agencies can register their agreement to comply with the Code of Practice on international recruitment.

Those commercial agencies who agree to adhere to the Code of Practice will be listed on the Department's website. In addition, overseas Governments will receive information via the Embassies and High Commissions and through the Commonwealth Secretariat.

This work will be undertaken by departmental officials in conjunction with international recruitment leads working with NHS trusts. No date for completing this work has been set.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 April 2002

PRIVY COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49142]

(2) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49100]

Mr. Robin Cook: In the parliamentary Session 2001–02 beginning on 9 June and up until 29 January 2002, 41,366 parliamentary questions were asked to this Government, at a cost of answering of over £5 million.

For the average cost of a parliamentary question, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Financial Secretary, on Thursday 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W.

Each Department has a parliamentary section responsible for co-ordinating the preparation of draft answers to written parliamentary questions, drawing on the input of departmental officials.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts awarded by her Department to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte Touche, (ii) Ernst and Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [34986]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with her Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with her Department in each of the past five years; [38751]

(2) if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed; [38752]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38750]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43676]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Sellafield

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the level of radioactive technetium found in boreholes within the vicinity of Sellafield. [36001]

Margaret Beckett: I understand that sampling and analysis of groundwater from nine boreholes on the Sellafield site and from one perimeter borehole has indicated the presence of technetium-99. The highest level found at an on-site borehole was 290 becquerels per litre. The level in the perimeter borehole was 0.2 becquerels per litre. An assessment has been made of the potential radiological impact of the presence of technetium-99 in groundwater and the Environment Agency is satisfied that this would be insignificant. The Agency and the Health and Safety Executive are working with BNFL to establish the source of the contamination. The regulators will then need to consider what further measures need to be taken.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when a substantive reply will be given to Mr. H. P. Atkinson's letter of 16 July 2001, concerning the 20 day movement restrictions. [36858]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry for the delay in replying to the hon. Member's letter. A reply was sent on 16 April.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38937]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June, 2001. The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the total

external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement; [43199]

(2) if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case; [42996]

(3) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement; [45615]

(4) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45600]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June, 2001. The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) on how many infected premises slaughter was completed within 24 hours of a clinical diagnosis of the disease during the foot and mouth epidemic; [47605]

(2) on average how long after a clinical diagnosis of the disease slaughter was completed on the contiguous farms during the foot and mouth epidemic. [47602]

Mr. Morley: Information regarding the time taken to slaughter on infected premises is presented in two charts, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

When looking at the charts the following should be taken into consideration:

The charts show the percentage of infected premises culled out, on a weekly basis, within the 24-hour target and the number of infected premises culled out, on a weekly basis, within the 24-hour target.

The 24-hour target policy was based upon the time from which suspicion of disease was first communicated to DEFRA offices, not the time and date of clinical diagnosis. The time to slaughter has been calculated as the difference between this time and date and the time and date by which all animals on each premises had been slaughtered.

Premises which presently have missing dates, negative times to slaughter and times to slaughter greater than 500 hours have been excluded. The charts have been created from the data within DEFRA's Disease Control System Database and they may be subject to change as the data cleansing exercise is carried out.

The charts are based on a majority of data held on DCS and give a representative picture of the times taken to slaughter.

Although a total of 2,026 infected premises (IPs) were reported in the UK, the "time to slaughter" charts do not include IPs that were previously Dangerous contacts or slaughter on suspicion cases. These premises have not been included since, at the time, it would not have been identified that a 24-hour target was to be worked towards. The charts are based on around 1,500 premises, the final difference being down to missing dates and negative times to slaughter.

The percentage target hit, on its own, does not reflect the number of premises that were having to be dealt with—a 50 per cent. hit may be representing a figure of two cases or 200.

The charts do not give context to the underlying data. They obviously do not give any information regarding the reasons why culls may have taken longer than 24–48 hours, and cannot describe the practical difficulties faced by regional offices attempting to slaughter premises quickly in often extremely difficult circumstances. The count of premises slaughtered does not take into account the number of animals involved (size or herd) or the species.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make representations to the European Parliament inquiry into foot and mouth to include Somerset in their programme of visits. [49038]

Mr. Morley: It is a matter for the European Parliament Temporary Committee to decide their programme of visits.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47171]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 50W.

Chemical Weapons

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the number of chemical weapons dumped at sea and the potential risk they pose. [48889]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

Detailed inventories of chemical weapons and other munitions disposed of to dumpsites at sea are no longer available, as many records were destroyed after the disposals as a matter of routine custom and practice. Where records of the disposals do remain in existence, they have been released to the Public Record Office. Information on the locations of sea disposals of chemical weapons has also been placed in the Library of the House. As to the potential risk posed by chemical weapons, the long-held consensus of international scientific opinion is that munitions on the seabed present no significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment, provided they remain undisturbed.

Laying Hens (Welfare)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to lay the order for the laying hens welfare code; and if she will make a statement. [48836]

Mr. Morley: The laying hens welfare code will be laid before Parliament at the same time as the English regulations to implement the Welfare of Laying hens Directive 99/74/EC.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department intends to make proposals for the introduction of the Laying Hens Welfare Code which go beyond those stated in the 1999 EU Directive on Welfare of Laying Hens 1999/74/EC; and if she will make a statement. [48837]

Mr. Morley: A new Welfare Code for Laying Hens will be published to accompany English regulations to implement the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 99/74/EC. It is intended that the Directive will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. The Code focuses on the welfare outcome for the birds.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to carry out a full public consultation on changes to the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive. [50344]

Mr. Morley: A full public consultation on domestic Regulations to implement Council Directive 99/74/EC has already taken place. Any further proposed changes to the Regulations or Directive will be subject to another public consultation exercise.

Development (Special Urgency Provisions)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often in the last three years, and for what purpose, her Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments). [48946]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (and before 8 June 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) has not applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) over the last three years.

Floods

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what sources of EU funding are available for flood relief and prevention measures from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund; what the total is of such funds for which the UK is eligible in 2001–02; and what the total is of such funds which her Department has *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been allocated in 2001–02. [48984]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* No significant financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of flood and coastal defences.

Pet Passports

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on when she intends to allow the use of pet passports for the USA and Canada; and how the scheme will operate. [48803]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* In January 2001, the Pet Travel Scheme was extended to rabies-free islands, including Hawaii. Mainland USA and Canada have not been included in the scheme as it was concluded that doing so would increase the risk of importing rabies.

However, the Government undertook to review the position of these countries. We have received a further assessment on the risk of importing rabies and a report on other zoonotic diseases which could be introduced to the UK if the scheme was extended to the USA and Canada. Both reports are being reviewed and evaluated. I hope to make an announcement on the conclusions of these reports shortly.

The import of dogs and cats from the USA and Canada, along with other third countries, would become subject to EU rules if agreement is reached on a proposal from the Commission for a regulation on the animal-health requirements applicable to non-commercial movement of pet animals. This proposal will be discussed at the meeting of Agriculture Ministers on 22 and 23 April.

The Government will need to take account of this proposal before reaching final decisions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Insolvency Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her Department's answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 632W, on the Insolvency Service, what progress the Insolvency Service has made in centralising its administrative functions in areas of *(a)* lower growth and *(b)* high unemployment. [42224]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service will continue to seek to make best use of its existing estate and, wherever possible, to reduce its costs. The movement of work from areas and offices where there are pressures on accommodation or difficulties with recruitment or retention of staff to other offices is carried out where appropriate and the service has piloted a successful scheme to enable flexible, remote working by staff in its London office. The redevelopment of the service's IT systems over the next few years will increase the capability and capacity for such remote working and enable further savings in accommodation costs to be made.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49122]

Ms Hewitt: The Department is clear that overtime should be an exception. If regular overtime is required, management should consider how the work can be accomplished in ways other than by continued overtime.

Where overtime is necessary, all staff below the senior civil service are entitled to receive payment, or time off in lieu, or both, for work carried out in addition to weekly conditioned hours (41 in London and 42 hours outside London).

Staff in the senior civil service are not entitled to receive payment for overtime.

For all staff working part-time, payments are made for additional hours worked up to the weekly conditioned hours. Payments for hours worked beyond net conditioned hours are available as above.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many smaller enterprises have benefited from the regional venture capital funds on an annual basis in each of the regions since the inception of the scheme, [49860]

Nigel Griffiths: The first regional venture capital funds only became operational in January 2002 so the information requested is not yet available.

Claims Direct

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Claims Direct franchisees paid for their franchises with loans supported by her Department; how many such Claims Direct franchisees with such loans have become bankrupt; and if she will make a statement. [48745]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme has assisted eight Claims Direct franchisees to set up their business. To date no claims have been made under the guarantee.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [48879]

Ms Hewitt: The majority of the Department's training budget is allocated to individual directorates. Each directorate has responsibility for managing, monitoring and evaluating attendance at training events in line with the departmental business and training plans. Disproportionate costs would be incurred to collate the data centrally for the purposes of answering this question.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years [48880]

Ms Hewitt: The Department centrally funds some leadership training. These figures, available for the last three years, are detailed in the table.

	£
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	[1]592,064
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	380,449
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	276,444

[1] Provisional

However, the majority of the Department's training budget is allocated to individual directorates. Each directorate has responsibility for managing, monitoring and evaluating attendance at training events in line with the departmental business and training plans. Disproportionate costs would be incurred to collate the data centrally for the purposes of answering this question.

The Department also encourages the use of in-house mentors, coaches and job shadowing as a means of developing staff. Although recognised in terms of staff costs, this does not have a direct cash cost

Costs

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [48878]

Ms Hewitt: The majority of the Department's training budget is allocated to individual directorates. Each directorate has responsibility for managing, monitoring and evaluating attendance at training events in line with the departmental business and training plans. Disproportionate costs would be incurred to collate the data centrally for the purposes of answering this question.

Construction Industry

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the names of those organisations which have made representations to her about the operation of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme. [48757]

Mr. Wilson: Approximately 30 landscape firms, plus the British Association of Landscape Industries, have made representation about the operation of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS).

Representations have also been received about the Major Contractors Group and their policy on the CSCS.

Healthcall

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answers of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W and 10 April 2002, ref 48035, what penalties have been levied on Healthcall for *(a)* failure to provide reports fit for purpose and *(b)* reports delivered beyond 28 days targets. [49328]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is unable to comment on the financial details with Healthcall as they are commercially confidential. However, the Department has worked very closely with Healthcall from the start of the scheme to ensure that services are being delivered efficiently and effectively. The proportion of MAP reports returned as "not fit for purpose" is being closely monitored and is falling. The figures in the answer of 11 March referred not just to "not fit for purpose" returns but included also substantive queries on the medical content of the reports.

Rail Safety

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with highway authorities to ensure that contractors accessing pylons under construction are not endangering road bridges over railways. [50031]

Mr. Wilson: I would expect the National Grid Company and its contractors to comply with the requirements of the highway authorities, for whom I am not responsible.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many SMEs are operating in Barnsley, East and Mexborough. [49986]

Nigel Griffiths: Within the Barnsley, East and Mexborough constituency there were 1,140 businesses registered for VAT with 1–249 employees in 2000, the latest year for which VAT statistics are available. Local labour force statistics provide an estimate of a further 3,000 self-employed individuals operating with no employees.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50284]

Ms Hewitt: None of my Department's PFI projects has been refinanced.

Construction Quality Mark

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her Department is doing to make the public aware of the construction Quality Mark; [50013]

(2) what her Department is doing to encourage UK builders to apply for a construction Quality Mark. [50012]

Mr. Wilson: I announced on the 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W, that the scheme will be rolled out across the country over a 3–4 year period. A Quality Mark Shadow Ownership Group has been set up and, at its first meeting on 19 April, will begin developing a comprehensive implementation strategy and detailed business plan. An announcement about the next stages of the roll out is expected after the first meeting.

The DTI is working with a number of reputable trade bodies to fast-track their members into the Quality Mark scheme. Following recommendations in the pilot review, the scheme will be developing recruitment mechanisms, including subsidised registration costs, until a critical mass has been achieved.

The DTI is also working with local authorities, financial services groups, consumer groups and others to promote the scheme to tradesmen and encourage the participation of the latter wherever possible.

The national launch of the Quality Mark at the Ideal Home Show produced extensive television and radio coverage and articles in regional newspapers. The scheme is already being marketed successfully to consumers in Birmingham and Somerset through a variety of media, including Yellow Pages and Thomsons directories, household leaflet distribution with advertising and editorial coverage in a number of local papers and radio stations. Further targeted marketing will follow in new areas once sufficient numbers of builders and tradesmen are registered.

There has been considerable interest from firms operating outside of the existing Quality Mark regions in England, Wales and Scotland. In these cases we have advised (and we will continue to advise) firms that there is nothing to stop them applying for the scheme.

Pay Gap

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her practice to collect and publish data relating to the pay gap between men and women by constituency. [45862]

Alan Johnson: The Office for National Statistics publishes data on the pay gap between men and women in the New Earnings Survey. However, in the case of some constituencies, the data is not sufficiently reliable for publication.

Current trends in women's individual incomes have been explored in two studies published last year by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU). Copies of these reports are available on the WEU website.

("http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/publications/research_and_publications.htm")

WEU Gender Briefing, which provides statistical briefing on the position of women compared with men in the labour market, is also available on the website.

("http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/gender_briefing/home.htm")

There are no plans to commission further research into the gender pay gap by constituency.

Scroby Sands Offshore Generating Station

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce her decision on Powergen Renewable Offshore Wind Ltd.'s application to build a 76 MW offshore generating station at Scroby Sands, off Great Yarmouth. [51287]

Mr. Wilson: I have today granted consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to Powergen Renewables Offshore Wind Ltd. for the construction and operation of a 76 megawatt offshore windfarm at Scroby Sands, off Great Yarmouth.

This development marks a significant step forward for the wind industry. It is the first offshore windfarm development to be approved from the 18 potential sites identified by developers who successfully pre-qualified last year for Crown Estate seabed leases. Offshore wind in the UK can make a major contribution to climate change objectives, to secure electricity supplies, and to our economic well being through job creation and exports. I am very pleased that this potential is beginning to be realised.

Copies of the Press Notice and the decision letter and consent are being placed in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48395]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* In line with the Government's commitment in their response to the sixth report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, it is the Department's intention to publish details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 concurrently with the departmental performance report.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46803]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Figures for 1996–97 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For financial year 2001–02, the cost of running the Ministry of Defence's central press office was £981,000.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press officers there were in his Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46890]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information for 1 May 1997 is no longer available.

As at 15 April 2002, the Ministry of Defence's Corporate Communications division employed 20 press officers in its headquarters press office and in its regional network. In addition, Defence agencies, the permanent joint headquarters and the single service commands and units also employ personnel with a press officer function, some as a secondary task to their main role.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in the past 12 months regarding arms exports to Sri Lanka from representatives of the Tamil people. [49338]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent meetings he has had with representatives of the Tamil people to discuss human rights issues in Sri Lanka. [49341]

Dr. Moonie: The Secretary of State for Defence has had no meetings with representatives of the Tamil people.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding *(a)* arms exports to Sri Lanka from Britain and *(b)* their subsequent effect on the Tamil people; and if he will make a statement. [49333]

Dr. Moonie: There have been a number of approaches by UK companies in the past 12 months seeking marketing advice for potential sales to this region. We have given advice on these on a case by case basis making it clear that the advice given does not prejudge the outcome of an export licence application. All such applications are considered against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. We will not issue an export licence where there is a clear risk that the goods might be used for internal repression or international aggression or to undermine regional stability.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many times he has met representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka to discuss arms exports in each of the past five years; [49336]

(2) when he will next meet representatives of the Sri Lankan Government to discuss arms exports; and if he will make a statement. [49342]

Dr. Moonie: There have been no such meetings in the past and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has no current plans to meet with representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka. The Government welcome the progress being made to achieve peace in Sri Lanka. Should we be asked, we would of course give positive consideration to any initiatives that might assist this process.

Shoeburyness

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been received in each of the past five years from households in the Tendring peninsula relating to alleged damage to their properties as a result of the activities at the Shoeburyness ranges. [45113]

Dr. Moonie: Our records are not in a form that readily enables provision of the information as requested. I will write to my hon. Friend following further analysis of the data and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Subsistence Payments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what subsistence payments are payable to service men and women carrying out duties in the United Kingdom away from their base. [50040]

Mr. Ingram: Service personnel who incur extra expense for food or accommodation while on temporary or detached duty in the UK are reimbursed via range of UK subsistence allowances. In the first instance, every effort is made to accommodate personnel in service messes where food and accommodation costs are paid direct by the Ministry of Defence. If service accommodation is used, £1.50 per 24-hour period can be claimed for incidental expenses.

If service accommodation is unavailable, the preferred option is to arrange hotel B&B accommodation through MOD's Central Hotel Booking Service (CHBS) that make bookings within a set cost ceiling. Personnel can also book hotel accommodation direct and are then entitled to claim the cost up to a set ceiling of £50 per night. Personnel staying in a hotel may claim a total of £22.90 per 24-hour period to cover additional costs incurred for lunch, dinner and travel, and incidental expenses such as telephone calls or laundry. Alternatively, personnel may choose to stay with family or friends and claim £27.90 per 24-hour period to cover food, and other expenses.

If no overnight accommodation is required and service messing is not available, then a daily subsistence rate of £4.25 for over five hours and £9.30 for over 10 hours can be claimed for meals. This range of subsistence

allowances is designed for periods of up to 30 days after which a different set of accommodation allowances are normally used.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the funds being spent on the repeated repairs to service accommodation over the last five financial years. [36824]

Dr. Moonie: The defence estate currently consists of around 64,000 buildings. The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Type 22 Frigates

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to sell Type 22 frigates to Chile; what discussions his Department has had to this effect, and if he will make a statement. [49743]

Dr. Moonie: There are no current plans to sell surplus RN Type 22 frigates to Chile because of the lack of available vessels to offer in the immediate future. We have nevertheless maintained dialogue with the Chilean authorities over ship disposal issues to establish future possibilities.

Submarines

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fleet submarines will be in service in 2009. [49749]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans there will be nine fleet submarines in service in 2009. In the early years of the next decade this will increase to the SDR approved force level of 10. However, the introduction into service of the new ASTUTE class submarines and the arrangement of the long-term refit programme will enable sufficient submarines to be available to ensure that the Royal Navy is able to meet its standing commitments and fulfil contingent tasking prior to the establishment of the planned force levels.

Tornado F3

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3 are fully operational with AMRAAM missiles; and what the operational inventory is of Tornado F3. [49755]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 94 Tornado F3 aircraft fully operational with AMRAAM missiles. The Tornado F3 Required Operating Fleet which is defined as the theoretical number of aircraft needed to support the operational task is 93.

Firearm Deaths

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 947W, how many members of HM armed services have *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured as a result of the discharge of firearms on or near military property (i) in Great Britain and (ii) overseas in each of the past eight years; what the results of (1) internal investigations and (2) coroner's inquest for each fatality were; where other soldiers were involved what disciplinary actions were taken; where papers were passed to the CPS, how many weeks were taken to reach a decision on prosecution; and what the result was. [48677]

Mr. Ingram: The number of members of HM forces who have died as a result of the discharge of firearms in the last eight years is as follows:

	Army		*Navy*		*RAF*		
Year of death	*UK*	*Overseas*	*UK*	*Overseas*	*UK*	*Overseas*	*Total*
1994	8	15	1	1	1	1	27
1995	14	5	—	—	1	—	20
1996	9	8	—	—	—	—	17
1997	4	—	—	—	1	—	5
1998	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
1999	4	3	—	—	—	—	7
2000	1	8	1	—	—	—	10
2001	5	4	—	—	—	—	9
Total	46	43	2	1	3	1	96

Note:
Figures exclude the territorial army, reserves, foreign service personnel and the Gibraltar regiment.

It is not possible to provide details of the exact location of each of these deaths or the results of the related coroner's inquests as this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Nor is it possible to provide details of the number of injuries, owing to the current unreliability of data held as a result of the under reporting of sickness and injuries; this situation is, however, currently being addressed. I am withholding information on the result of internal investigations or any resultant disciplinary action in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice of Access to Government Information.

Naval Manpower

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the Royal Navy's manpower is committed to operations. [49758]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1019–20W.

Refits

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Talent's refit will commence; and how long it will last. [49747]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Talent's refit is planned to start in spring 2003 and will last until early 2006.

Cadet Forces

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many cadets there are in *(a)* maintained schools and *(b)* independent school detachments; [50523]

(2) how many combined cadet forces and single service cadet detatchments there are in (a) maintained schools and (b) independent schools. [50524]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Harrier GR7 has a gun capability; and if it is planned that Harrier GR9/A will have a gun capability. [49752]

Mr. Ingram: The Harrier GR7 does not have a gun capability, and we have no plans to give a gun capability to the GR9/A.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties were flown by *(a)* Harrier GR7 and *(b)* Sea Harrier in operations over Sierra Leone in 2000. [49751]

Mr. Ingram: Between 11 May 2000 and 6 June 2000 inclusive, Harrier GR7 and Sea Harrier flew 147 and 134 sorties respectively, while deployed in support of operations in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the integration work on Sea Harrier for ASRAAM has been completed; and at what cost. [49763]

Mr. Ingram: The work to integrate Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) on Sea Harrier has been terminated in the light of the recent decision to withdraw the aircraft from service by 2006 which is earlier than originally planned.

Expenditure on the ASRAAM integration programme did not exceed £1.2 million.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Harrier GR7 will be operational with *(a)* Brimstone and *(b)* Storm Shadow. [49754]

Mr. Ingram: Following the upgrade of Harrier GR7 to GR9 standard, it is intended that the Brimstone anti-armour weapon will enter operational service on it in 2006.

We do not currently intend to integrate Stormshadow on to Harrier GR9. The operation of Harrier GR9 from the CVS with Stormshadow will not be practical, due to the size and weight of the missile. In addition, it is not currently considered to be cost effective to integrate Stormshadow on to Harrier GR9 solely for land-based operations; this capability will be provided by Tornado GR4.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the Indian Government about the purchase of Fleet Air Arm Sea Harriers. [49761]

Dr. Moonie: Officials within the Ministry of Defence have received inquiries from representatives of the Government of India regarding the future availability of surplus Fleet Air Arm Sea Harriers. As part of its marketing strategy for the sale of these aircraft, the Disposal Services Agency will follow up all expressions of interests accordingly, subject, of course, to the normal export controls.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications need to be made to the Harrier GR7 for sustained operations at sea. [49753]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1166–67W.

Balkans

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on future plans for British military involvement in the Balkans. [50003]

Mr. Ingram: NATO is currently undertaking a major review of its operations in the Balkans, entitled the "Joint Operational Area Review", the outcome of which will be discussed by NATO Foreign Ministers in May 2002. We welcome the review and remain committed to maintaining the military contribution to NATO peacekeeping in the Balkans. No decisions have been taken regarding the form that British military involvement will take following implementation of the review's findings.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46805]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The total cost of running FCO's News Department in 2000–01 was £1,746,000. Comparable information for 1996–97 is not held as new costing software was introduced during the course of that year. The total cost for 1995–96 was £971,000 and for 1997–98 was £1,342,000.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 610, if he will place in the Library copies of the evidence possessed by Her Majesty's Government in respect of the status of programmes aimed at developing weapons of mass destruction respectively by *(a)* the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, *(b)* Iraq, *(c)* Libya and *(d)* Syria. [48252]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 861–62W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49615]

Mr. Straw: None.

Uganda

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many cases in the last six months the high commission in Uganda has refused to see people who had interviews; how entry clearance officers at that high commission handle appointments; and if he will make a statement. [48893]

Mr. Bradshaw: In response to the events of 11 September, and in the light of the specific security situation in Uganda, access to the visa section at the British high commission premises can only be granted to

people who hold satisfactory evidence of their identity. I regret the need for this requirement but it is temporary, for the safety of our staff and members of the public and is necessary and proportionate in response to the perceived threat.

Satisfactory identity documents are:

a valid national passport,

a verified refugee document issued by the Directorate of Refugees of the Office of the President of Uganda,

a verified laissez-passer issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

No record has been kept of the numbers of people who had appointments and who have not been able to enter the high commission. However, many of the applicants affected are relatives seeking family reunion with refugees who have settled in the UK, and others.

Around 360 family reunion cases are outstanding in Kampala. Few of these applicants appear with satisfactory evidence establishing their identity or relationship with the sponsor in the UK and they have to be referred to the Directorate of Refugees or UNHCR.

Following necessary inquiries with the Home Office, applicants who hold satisfactory documents of identity are offered the next available date for interview. In cases involving couples with children, if after the interview the applicant has still not been able to satisfy the entry clearance officer about the claimed relationship, DNA testing may be offered to avoid unnecessary refusal. Priority will be granted to applicants in cases involving genuine compassionate circumstances. Applicants unable to attend pre-arranged appointments as a result of the restrictions currently in place will be afforded priority consideration once the restrictions have been lifted.

The security situation is kept under review, and further announcements will be made if and when it changes.

Military Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made in respect of each of the three disposition projects for surplus military plutonium in Russia agreed in the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy non-Proliferation Working Group. [49492]

Mr. Bradshaw: The European Union Joint Action for surplus weapons-grade plutonium in Russia involves seven projects in all.

In the first project, 'Safety Regulations', Gosatomnadzor of Russia (GAN) is to establish new safety regulations covering the use of surplus weapons-grade plutonium as mixed oxide fuel in Russia. Of the total budget of 500,000 euros, contracts have been signed for 300,000 euros, and draft contracts to the value of 200,000 are being discussed, with signatures expected in May this year.

In the second project, on a trial use of mixed oxide fuel, preliminary steps have been taken towards the loading of three lead test assemblies in a pressurised water reactor at Balakovo. Of a total budget of 1,300,000 euros, a contract has been signed for 5,000 euros, and the remaining contracts are under discussion.

The third project is a study into the transport and storage of surplus weapons-grade plutonium in Russia, with a budget of 200,000 euros. Contracts are being prepared and should be placed around September this year.

In the fourth project, a study of future high temperature reactors and ex-weapons plutonium disposition in Russia (in particular particle coated fuel burn rates), contracts are being prepared and should be signed around September this year. The budget for this project is 300,000 euros.

The fifth project is a continuation of work on 'Safety Regulations'. In total, the EU Joint Action will finance the preparation of 12 to 16 regulatory documents. The budget is 1,300,000 euros. Draft contracts are being discussed for around 500,000 euros, and signatures are due in June.

The sixth project is a continuation of the trial of mixed oxide fuel, with a budget of 1,500,000 euros. No contracts have yet been placed but all are due to be signed before June 2003.

A seventh and final project, on 'Immobilisation', awaits progress in bilateral discussions currently taking place between Russia and Germany.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans are in place to ensure that a public discussion takes place on the Convention on the Future of Europe. [50032]

Peter Hain: Since the Nice Declaration, the Government have been seeking a wide range of views on the future of Europe through regional visits, seminars, radio phone-ins and interviews. I have personally spoken to trade unions, businessmen, academics, students and other members of the public about the future of Europe. I have also undertaken a number of regional visits, including Cardiff last October, Edinburgh last November, Northern Ireland in February and South Yorkshire in March. That listening process is continuing, in parallel with the "listening phase" in the Future of Europe Convention. The coming months will see me making further regional visits, including to Birmingham in May and Liverpool in July. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs plans to visit the Devolved Administrations. There will be other activities focusing on the future of Europe, including a Youth Convention and Europe Day. In addition, a dedicated website providing for open and public discussion on the future of Europe will be established and open for contributions by the summer.

Nepal

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Nepal. [50440]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are increasingly concerned about the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. We strongly condemn the Maoists' violence and intimidation against the Nepalese security forces and civilians. We are particularly concerned about recent attacks on food, water and electricity supplies and other economic, development and

infrastructural targets. We urge the Maoists to disarm, renounce violence, and rejoin the peace process in good faith.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards peace in Sri Lanka. [50439]

Mr. Bradshaw: We warmly welcome the progress which the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE have made towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Sri Lanka. As we have made clear to all concerned, the UK fully supports the Norwegian-facilitated peace process, and we look forward to the start of direct talks in the near future. We call on all sides to work together in the interests of all Sri Lankans. Any solution must satisfy the aspirations of all communities.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent meetings he has had with representatives of the Tamil people to discuss human rights issues in Sri Lanka; [49340]

(2) when he will next meet representatives from the Sri Lankan Government to discuss human rights issues and the state's policy towards the Tamil people; [49334]

(3) what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding human rights issues in Sri Lanka concerning the Tamil people; and if he will make a statement; [49335]

(4) what representations he has received in the past 12 months regarding human rights issues in Sri Lanka from representatives of the Tamil people; [49339]

(5) how many times he has met representatives of the Sri Lankan Government to discuss human rights issues in each of the past five years. [49337]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have raised human rights on a regular basis over the last five years with the Sri Lankan authorities at both ministerial and official level and will continue to do so. In March 2001, the Prime Minister and the then Foreign Secretary, discussed the situation in Sri Lanka with President Kumaratunga and then Foreign Minister Kadirgamar. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is planning to meet the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister in July. We are also concerned about human rights abuses committed by the LTTE, and welcome their recent announcement that they will cease recruiting under the age of 18 and that they are addressing the concerns of the Muslim community. We are in close touch with UK-based Sri Lankan groups, human rights organisations and representatives from all communities in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil community.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet his Spanish counterpart in the next round of the Brussels process. [48851]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1306W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of income was spent on administration by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts in the last financial year. [48881]

Mr. Caborn: Figures for the last financial year, 2001–02, are not yet available. NESTA's published accounts for the financial year to 31 March 2001 show that 9.9 per cent. of income was spent on operating costs.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans exist for the future funding of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. [48882]

Mr. Caborn: Plans for funding NESTA will be considered alongside other options for the future use of lottery funds.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the return or investment made by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. [48876]

Mr. Caborn: In accordance with the National Lottery Act 1998, NESTA's endowment is managed by the National Investment and Loans Office on behalf of the National Debt Commissioners. The endowment is invested in Government Bonds and Treasury Bills whose performance reflect prevailing base rates. Since establishment, the endowment has produced an annual average return of 5.25 per cent. The interest on the endowment is invested separately by NESTA in an equities and bonds portfolio managed by Schroders Investment Management. Since establishment, this fund has produced an annualised average return of 3.4 per cent.

NESTA's performance will be considered in its Quinquennial Review in 2004–05.

Sport

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to encourage people to participate in sport; and if she will make a statement. [48915]

Mr. Caborn: School sport is a priority for the Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is working closely with the Department for Education and Skills to improve the quality of and access to PE and sport in schools and links to clubs. Sport England's Active Sports programme involves 8 to 16-year-olds across the country in sport through a national network of 45 sports partnerships, while Sport Action Zones encourage participation by all age groups in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Sport England has now awarded over £1.5 billion of Lottery funding, the majority of which has been used to provide facilities for local community sport.

Sports

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time sports coaching staff (i) her Department and (ii) its agencies have funded in each of the last seven years broken down by sport; and if she will make a statement. [48916]

Mr. Caborn: My Department does not fund coaching staff directly. The majority of public funding for sport is channelled through UK Sport and Sport England. Comprehensive information on the number of coaches funded from Sports Council grants is not held centrally. The following tables are drawn from records kept by UK Sport and Sport England.

Coaches funded by UK Sport

Sport	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Athletics	—	—	—	2[2]	2[2]
Badminton	—	—	1[1]	1[1]	1[1]
Curling	—	—	—	—	1[2]
Equestrian	—	2[1]	3[1]	5[1]	7[1]
Fencing	—	—	—	3[2]	3[2]
Gymnastics	—	—	—	—	10[1]
Ice skating	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]	3[1]
Judo	3[1]	4[1]	4[1]	4[1]	4[1]
Modern pentathlon	—	—	4[1]	4[1]	5[1]
Orienteering	1[1]	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]
Rowing	—	—	—	11[1]	11[1]
Sailing	—	—	—	—	5[1]
Trampolining	—	—	—	—	1[1]
Triathlon	—	—	—	—	4[1]
Waterskiing	1[1]	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]	2[1]
Wheelchair basketball	1[1]	1[1]	1[1]	1[1]	1[1]

[1] Full time
[2] Part time

Coaches funded by Sport England

Sport	*Number*
Athletics	38
Basketball	168
Cricket	167
Football (girls)	282
Netball	228
Hockey	148
Rugby Union	191
Swimming	67
Tennis	80

Sport and Physical Education

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from parents in Bristol regarding the distribution of New Opportunities Fund grant to local schools for the purpose of improving facilities for sport and physical education. [48752]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has received no such correspondence.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which *(a)* secondary schools in England and *(b)* local education authorities have received New Opportunities Fund payments to improve sport and physical education facilities; and what the total amount was in each case. [48751]

Mr. Caborn: Local education authorities (LEAs) have received notification of their allocation under the scheme and bids are being developed. The deadline for LEAs to submit their stage 1 applications is the 22 April. Funding allocations are made up of a baseline allocation (based on the size of the school population in the LEA) and levels of deprivation in the area.

The allocation figures for each LEA area are given in the following table.

	£
Total England allocations	495,163,000

Note:
Isles of Scilly have been allocated a de minimus allocation of £25,000; this is not based on the school population size.

LEA area	*Allocation (£)*
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	2,571,000
Cambridgeshire	2,879,000
Essex	9,068,000
Hertfordshire	5,684,000
Luton	2,008,000
Norfolk	6,358,000
Peterborough	1,355,000
Southend-on-Sea	1,303,000
Suffolk	4,701,000
Thurrock	1,619,000
Eastern England total	38,046,000
East Midlands	
Derby	2,712,000
Derbyshire	6,097,000
Leicester	4,996,000
Leicestershire	3,355,000
Lincolnshire	4,987,000
Northamptonshire	5,034,000
Nottingham	5,080,000
Nottinghamshire	7,358,000
Rutland	203,000
East Midlands totals	39,822,000
Inner London	
Camden	2,460,000
City of London	53,000

LEA area	Allocation (£)
Hackney	4,259,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,560,000
Haringey	3,775,000
Islington	3,796,000
Kensington and Chelsea	1,338,000
Lambeth	4,362,000
Lewisham	3,817,000
Newham	5,425,000
Southwark	4,286,000
Tower Hamlets	4,204,000
Wandsworth	1,448,000
Westminster	1,758,000
Inner London totals	42,541,000
Outer London	
Barking and Dagenham	3,082,000
Barnet	1,776,000
Bexley	1,874,000
Brent	2,965,000
Bromley	1,906,000
Croydon	2,376,000
Ealing	2,978,000
Enfield	2,995,000
Greenwich	3,886,000
Harrow	1,029,000
Havering	1,684,000
Hillingdon	1,403,000
Hounslow	1,573,000
Kingston upon Thames	678,000
Merton	903,000
Redbridge	2,131,000
Richmond upon Thames	849,000
Sutton	1,176,000
Waltham Forest	3,481,000
Outer London total	38,745,000
London totals	81,286,000
North East	
Darlington	1,075,000
Durham	7,335,000
Gateshead	3,057,000
Hartlepool	1,510,000
Middlesbrough	2,264,000
Newcastle upon Tyne	4,338,000
North Tyneside	2,364,000
Northumberland	2,972,000
Redcar and Cleveland	2,208,000
South Tyneside	3,031,000
Stockton-on-Tees	2,407,000
Sunderland	5,377,000
North East total	37,938,000
North West	
Blackburn with Darwen	2,562,000
Blackpool	2,362,000
Bolton	3,475,000
Bury	1,704,000
Cheshire	4,816,000
Cumbria	4,607,000
Halton	2,337,000
Knowsley	3,194,000
Lancashire	11,987,000
Liverpool	9,217,000
Manchester	8,823,000
Oldham	3,362,000
Rochdale	2,873,000
Salford	3,922,000
Sefton	3,331,000
St. Helens	3,092,000
Stockport	2,150,000
Tameside	3,363,000
Trafford	1,634,000
Warrington	1,807,000
Wigan	4,310,000
Wirral	4,448,000
North West total	89,376,000
South East	
Bracknell Forest	530,000
Brighton and Hove	2,246,000
Buckinghamshire	2,599,000
East Sussex	3,589,000
Hampshire	6,634,000
Isle of Wight	1,371,000
Kent	10,535,000
Medway	2,165,000
Milton Keynes	1,455,000
Oxfordshire	3,329,000
Portsmouth	1,450,000
Reading	920,000
Slough	1,057,000
Southampton	2,310,000
Surrey	5,297,000
West Berkshire	811,000
West Sussex	3,925,000
Windsor and Maidenhead	721,000
Wokingham	812,000
South East total	51,756,000
South West	
Bath and North East Somerset	965,000
Bournemouth	1,283,000
Bristol, City of	4,458,000
Cornwall	4,518,000
Devon	3,953,000
Dorset	2,082,000
Gloucestershire	3,663,000
Isles of Scilly	25,000
North Somerset	1,170,000
Plymouth	3,154,000
Poole	630,000
Somerset	3,062,000
South Gloucestershire	1,261,000
Swindon	1,363,000
Torbay	1,832,000
Wiltshire	2,163,000
South West total	35,582,000
West Midlands	
Birmingham	16,919,000
Coventry	4,529,000
Dudley	3,244,000
Herefordshire	1,084,000
Sandwell	5,526,000
Shropshire	1,514,000
Solihull	1,945,000
Staffordshire	5,839,000
Stoke-on-Trent	4,547,000
Telford and Wrekin	1,747,000
Walsall	3,959,000
Warwickshire	3,358,000
Wolverhampton	3,963,000
Worcestershire	3,100,000
West Midlands total	61,274,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	3,993,000
Bradford	8,035,000
Calderdale	2,003,000
Doncaster	4,746,000
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,196,000
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	4,212,000

LEA area	Allocation (£)
Kirklees	4,821,000
Leeds	7,712,000
North East Lincolnshire	1,965,000
North Lincolnshire	1,319,000
North Yorkshire	3,421,000
Rotherham	3,832,000
Sheffield	6,010,000
Wakefield	5,000,000
York	818,000
Yorkshire and Humberside total	60,083,000

Digital Television

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance will be provided to those who are unable to take up digital television in Suffolk on the grounds of *(a)* affordability, *(b)* access and *(c)* reception. [50584]

Dr. Howells: The Digital Television Action Plan, posted on www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk and agreed by stakeholders, sets out a framework of actions to be taken by Government and industry, in partnership, to enable the take-up of digital television and achieve the tests of accessibility, availability and affordability announced in September 1999. The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until those tests are achieved.

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to maintain diversity in the ownership and provision of digital television services. [49794]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Independent Television Commission is responsible for licensing commercial digital television services in the UK. One specific criterion to which the commission must have regard when awarding the multiplex licence is the capacity of the digital programme services proposed to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests. The Government's consultation paper on media ownership proposed that specific limits should not be placed on the ownership of digital services. Competition law should ensure that there is effective competition between digital platforms and the Government will continue to act to ensure open access to gateways on these markets.

Television Licence Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Director General of the BBC on the guidelines for enforcement by the Television Licensing Authority of television licence payments. [49083]

Dr. Howells: I have had no such discussions. The BBC has statutory responsibility for the administration and enforcement of the television licensing system. As Licensing Authority, it is for the Corporation to set enforcement guidelines for its agent TV Licensing.

National Lottery

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she had with Camelot on the new National Lottery logo; and if she will make a statement. [49929]

Mr. Caborn: The National Lottery logo is owned by the National Lottery Commission. There is no new logo, although Camelot have been discussing with the commission minor modifications to the current design. Camelot have recently introduced a new corporate logo; that is wholly a matter for them. The Department has not been involved in either matter.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1539W, on National Lottery funding for football and rugby stadiums, if she will break down the 2001 National Lottery expenditure on Rugby League stadiums by *(a)* type of work undertaken and *(b)* venue. [48647]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Since my answer of 28 February to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens South, *Official Report*, column 1539W, Sport England has informed me that the National Lottery funding for Rugby League in 2001 was £512,142. The breakdown requested is as follows:

Leeds Rugby Ltd. (Leeds Cricket Football and Athletic Co) at Headingley—lottery award of £53,617.

Safety/security control box that serves the rugby and cricket grounds.

Batley Bulldogs RLFC at the Heritage Road ground—lottery award of £200,000.

Retaining walls, bases and foundations; concrete terracing and apron; structural frame and front handrail; roof and wall cladding; seating for 2,410; and disabled toilet block.

Hull Kingston Rovers FC at the Craven Park ground—lottery award of £58,525.

Turnstile replacement; turnstile monitoring system; additional safety rails; enhancement to perimeter fencing; undercroft conversion; public address system upgrade; safety signage; control room shutters; and other small works.

Leigh Centurions (Leigh at Hilton Park Ltd.) at the Hilton Park Ground—lottery award of £200,000.

Public toilets to the south stand and under the north stand; replacement of wooden seats with plastic moulded seats, public toilet refurbishment throughout the stadium; provision of turnstiles; upgraded public address system and closed circuit television system; provision of perimeter lighting and safety barriers; upgrade to the car park surface; reconstruction of a boundary wall; overlay concrete terracing in the east stand; and the provision of directional signage.

Coin Machines

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the value of transitions through coin-in coin-out machines in unlicensed premises. [50011]

Mr. Caborn: We have made no such assessment.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which of the services of her Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50324]

Dr. Howells: So far reviews of 8 per cent. of departmental services have been completed. A recent project carried out jointly with the Treasury and the Centre for Management and Policy Studies will lead to the completion of reviews of core support functions by 2003. IT technical support in the Department will be

reviewed by 2004. The Department is on course to meet its service delivery agreement target of conducting Better Quality Services reviews of 50 per cent. of its activities by the end of 2004. Other services do not form part of the programme under the current service delivery agreement and a programme of reviews post 2004–05 has yet to be drawn up.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, regarding replies to parliamentary and public correspondence, what percentage of letters *(a)* from hon. Members and *(b)* from members of the public were answered in 2001–02 within 18 working days. [50550]

Mr. Caborn: Provisional figures for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 indicate that 90 per cent. of letters from hon. Members and 93 per cent. of letters from members of the public were answered within 18 working days. Final figures will not be available until the beginning of May.

Part-Time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47175]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 11 April 2002 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, *Official Report,* column 553W.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46957]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has one special adviser in post at 12 April 2002. On salaries, I refer the hon. Member for West Chelmsford to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 11W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Children)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the placing of children of imprisoned fathers and mothers into care with special reference to the length of time they spend in care. [42942]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to identify this information from the data collected.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41044]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 336W.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy of his Department is towards age discrimination. [42584]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has made a commitment to provide staff of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to maximise their skills and achieve their potential. This is incorporated into our employment policy on discrimination and is set out in our new equal opportunities statement. Continuing work to promote a diverse work force will include monitoring of recruitment, selection and appraisal statistics to ensure that age discrimination is not taking place.

The Department has recently completed a comprehensive review of its age retirement policy, resulting in a change in age retirement policy throughout the Home Office (including agencies), except for the prison service which is carrying out its own separate review. The new policy, which will come into force on 1 April 2002, will allow staff in all grades below the senior civil service to retire at any point between the ages of 60 and 65.

The Home Office (including agencies but excluding the prison service) has also changed its recruitment policy as of 1 April 2002, to allow the recruitment of staff up to the age of 64 subject to their meeting normal standards of health. Provided that there is an expectation of a reasonable period of employment and a return on recruitment and training, the primary criterion for selection will be the ability of a candidate to carry out the duties of the vacant post. If the most suitable candidate happens to be over sixty years old, this should not prevent a candidate being offered the post.

In making these various changes, the Home Office is implementing the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) report "Winning the Generation Game".

Drugs

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to tackle drug taking and drug-related crime in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the north-west. [44050]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My right hon. friend the Home Secretary has an overarching role in monitoring progress against the United Kingdom drugs strategy, taking account of differences in approach where responsibility is devolved. The National Assembly for Wales has devolved responsibility for setting the strategic direction in Wales and monitoring its progress.

Criminal justice policy, however, is not devolved and I am pleased to report that arrest referral schemes and drug testing and treatment orders—both of which aim to help break the link between drug misuse and crime by helping offenders access treatment services—are now available throughout Wales.

Also, to help the police and local communities in England and Wales tackle neighbourhood drug problems and the crime associated with them, the Government have allocated "Communities Against Drugs" funding worth over £220 million over three years. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will use this money to finance locally determined actions, including in Wales.

In the north-west, there are 22 drug action teams implementing a wide range of measures to address problems of drug misuse at a local level. These include:

The drawing up of young people's substance misuse plans to deliver better and integrated services for young people;

Arrest referral schemes in all five police forces;

The roll-out of drug testing and treatment orders across all five probation service areas;

The development of treatment plans, in conjunction with Drugs Prevention Advisory Service and the National Treatment Agency, to reduce the time in accessing treatment and expand the range of support provision within each drug action team area.

Police Officers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* special constables there were in (i) Wales and (ii) Lancashire in each year since 1997. [44046]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Wales		*Lancashire constabulary*	
Year[1]	*Police*	*Special Constable*	*Police*	*Special Constable*
1997	6,952	1,142	3,247	483
1998	6,617	1,097	3,257	489
1999	6,646	1,088	3,245	449
2000	6,632	835	3,179	382
2001	6,927	789	3,255	360
2001	7,134	775	3,288	325
2002[2]	7,116	n/a	3,316	n/a

[1] As at 31 March
[2] Figures are those for 31 January 2002

UK Security

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reviews of UK security he is undertaking; and when he expects to report on them to Parliament. [44691]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government keep all aspects of the security of the United Kingdom under continuous review. My hon. Friend will appreciate that it would not be appropriate to make the details of these matters public. However, the provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 are both subject to independent reviews and the reports arising from these reviews will be laid before Parliament.

Irish Terrorism

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidents connected with Irish terrorism, excluding murder, have taken place in Great Britain between 1969 and 10 April 1998 for which nobody has been convicted; and if he will list them; [44333]

(2) how many murders connected with Irish terrorism have taken place in Great Britain between 1969 and 10 April 1998 for which nobody has been convicted; and if he will list them. [44332]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The answer to this question can be provided only at a disproportionate cost. However, from March 1973 to 31 December 2001, there were 371 devices in London, and 17 shootings. In the rest of Great Britain there were 583 devices and 34 shootings. A total of 164 arrests were made in London and 261 in the rest of Great Britain during the same period. I understand that Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) (Alan Fry) of the Metropolitan police would be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters if you wish.

Extradition

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those people subject to extradition proceedings for offences committed in Great Britain in connection with Irish terrorism before 10 April 1998; and for what offences extradition is being sought. [44334]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* It is not our policy or practice to list the names of those who are the subject of extradition proceedings. I understand from the Attorney-General that the United Kingdom has sought the return of three fugitives under the backing of warrants arrangements in place as between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Those cases involve charges of conspiracy to murder; conspiracy to cause explosions; escape from lawful custody, and unlawful wounding.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the processes are of *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* training and *(c)* assessment of the welfare of the Criminal Cases Review Commission's expert staff. [45574]

Mr. Keith Bradley: At 31 March 2001, 47 Case Review Managers (CRMs) were in post; 50 CRMs are expected to be in post at 31 March 2002. During 2001–02, eight CRMs will have joined the Commission, together with one recruited from within, and six will have left; a net increase of three.

Salary scales affect the Commission's ability to recruit, motivate and retain CRMs, and other staff of appropriate standards, against growing outside competition. Discussions have been held within the Commission and with the Home Office concerning the current scales.

One of the Commission's two Legal Advisers left at the end of September 2001, and recruitment of a successor is under way.

Process Improvement Project 3 is concerned with the development of an integrated training programme for all staff. Particular developments include training on induction and mentoring, and for the roles of Assigned Commission Member and of Reviewer in the Commission's Personal Development Review programme.

The Commission will continue to ensure that its diversity policies are in line with best practice, and ensure that diversity issues are included in its integrated training programme. It is conducting a staff attitude survey the results of which will be available early in 2002–03.

Victim's Charter

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who the special representative of road traffic victims is on the main Victim's Charter Implementation Group. [46490]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Victim's Charter Review and Implementation Group does not include a special representative of road traffic victims. However, RoadPeace, Brake and the Campaign Against Drinking and Driving are each represented on the Road Deaths and Injuries Working Group, a subsidiary group considering the inclusion of road traffic victims within the scope of the Victim's Charter.

The Victim's Charter Review and Implementation Group receive periodic updates on the progress made by the Working Group and fully recognise that the specialist knowledge and experience of the voluntary organisations should strongly influence any emerging recommendations on how best to meet road traffic victims' needs. This is achieved through the subsidiary group.

More generally, the Home Department is setting up a separate and permanent Victims' Advisory Panel in order to advise on all current and future developments for victims. The terms of reference and membership of the panel are currently being actively considered, and an announcement will be made later this year.

Life Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases regarding life prisoners who maintain their innocence referred to the Court of Appeal by the Criminal Cases Review Commission have been rejected; and if he will make a statement. [48654]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The specific information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is possible to provide figures relating to those with convictions for murder where it might be assumed that a life sentence was involved. The latest available figures show that there have been 59 such referrals since the establishment of the commission. Of these, 31 are awaiting an appeal hearing. Of the 28 appeals against a murder conviction that have been heard, the conviction was quashed in 19 cases, and judgment reserved in one case. Of the eight such convictions that were upheld by the Court of Appeal, one went on to the House of Lords where it was quashed.

Legislation requires the Court of Appeal to allow an appeal against conviction if they think the conviction is unsafe and to dismiss such an appeal in any other case. In each case the Court of Appeal's written judgment sets out the reasons for their decision on the safety of the conviction.

Almost all of those applying to the Criminal Cases Review Commission to have their convictions reviewed do so because they are maintaining their innocence.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with members of the Criminal Cases Review Commission about the treatment of life prisoners who maintain their innocence; and what the outcome was of these discussions. [48650]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There have been no such discussions. Since the establishment in 1997 of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had no role in the review of alleged miscarriages of justice. The commission is an independent body and it would therefore be inappropriate for the Home Secretary to intervene in this way.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39054]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Staff in my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, are on secondment from other Government Departments and external advertising is not used.

As for the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details have been placed in the Library.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42437]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Details of the figures available on energy costs incurred are as follows:

Year	£
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	
2001–02	8,215.24
2000–01	8,153.13
1999–2000	5,881.02
1998–99	6,787.19
1997–98	5,964.01
1996–97	9,035.55
1995–96	9,218.11
1994–95	8,362.24
1993–94	10,695.19
Treasury Solicitor's Department	
2001–02	49,100.92
2000–01	44,169.90
1999–2000	27,529.55
1998–99	47,010.24
1997–98	49,394.66
1996–97	58,686.60
1995–96	46,588.50
1994–95	56,704.83
1993–94	60,827.63
Government Property Lawyers	
2001–02	14,167.71
2000–01	8,961.50
1999–2000	15,400.33
1998–99	16,191.88

Year	£
1997–98	16,631.20
1996–97	18,010.56
1995–96	18,965.60
1994–95	19,679.48
1993–94	19,361.91

The Government Property Lawyers ceased business in September 1999. Since then the building they occupied has been let and fuel costs are recovered from the tenants.

Year	£
Crown Prosecution Service	
2001–02	949,191
2000–01	867,796
1999–2000	842,962
1998–99	842,137
1997–98	874,934
1996–97	1,117,690
1995–96	875,393
1994–95	913,832
1993–94	945,084
1992–93	802,949
1991–92	813,625
Serious Fraud Office	
2000–01	64,514
1999–2000	69,932
1998–99	64,926
1997–98	71,049
1996–97	93,160
1995–96	98,814

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43265]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* None of the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible employ special advisers.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42644]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* I am not aware of any equipment having been stolen from my Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, since 1 May 1997.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

Since May 1997, six computers and one printer have been stolen from the Crown Prosecution Service. Details of the equipment stolen are as follows:

1998–99

One computer—new and unused.

One laptop computer—used—contained administrative data.

1999–2000

Two computers—used.

(i) Court link PC—no data retained on PC.

(ii) Typist PC—case related data retained on PC.

One laptop computer—used—contained management data.

One computer—used court link PC—no data retained on PC.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Computer memory chips stolen from the Treasury Solicitor's Department in 1997 were new and unused.

A laptop computer stolen in 2001 had been used, but contained no data other than the standard office word processing package.

Serious Fraud Office

A password protected computer stolen from Counsel's chambers was in used condition.

The data contained on the computer were case related, consisting of miscellaneous lists, statements and documents. The loss was considered by the Case Controller and its impact was assessed as insignificant.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44890]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office have not entered into any public-private partnerships or private finance initiatives.

No private finance initiatives or public-private partnership projects entered into by the Crown Prosecution Service have been delayed. The CPS's private finance initiative IT project, 'Compass', has been managed well and is on track. A new PFI contract was agreed with Logica plc in December 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the difference was between the price offered in reaching referred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45680]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office have not entered into any public-private partnerships in each of the last four years.

The Compass project, which is a private finance initiative, is the only relevant contract let by the Crown Prosecution Service in the last four years. The price for the Compass project at preferred bidder stage and the final contract price were identical. There is an allowance of 1 per cent. built into the contract price to take into account any findings arising from a further period of due diligence. The actual contract price is subject to commercial confidentiality.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the percentage level of income recovery was in 2001–02 from clients of the Treasury Solicitor's Department within 30 days of their receipt of a validated invoice. [47889]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39919]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The figures for staff, administration and related costs are as follows:

	£000
1997–98	[1]2,540
1998–99	[1]2,891
1999–2000	3,386
2000–01	3,971
2001–02	3,945

[1] Prior to 1999–2000 the internal communication function was subsumed within other parts of the Department, and costs cannot be identified separately.

Expenditure from the Department's central advertising and publicity budget is as follows.

	£000
1997–98	10,879
1998–99	13,426
1999–2000	9,902
2000–01	14,595
2001–02	11,688

In addition to expenditure from this central budget, expenditure from budgets allocated to individual programmes will also include spend on publicity related activity. It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to separately identify all such publicity related expenditure. It is possible to identify expenditure on advertising and on public relations drawn from all budgets and this is as follows:

£000

	Advertising	*Public Relations*
1997–98	9,992	0
1998–99	15,673	549
1999–2000	11,900	88
2000–01	29,066	794
2001–02	17,665	655

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many special advisers were employed by her *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was for each of those years. [41259]

Estelle Morris: From May 1997 to June 2001, up to three full-time equivalent special advisers have been in post at any one time; from September 2001 this dropped to two.

In relation to special adviser costs I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43266]

Estelle Morris: My Department has two special advisers in post as at 13 March 2002.

In relation to special adviser costs I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43675]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what creche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44854]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for its staff and supports a range of child care provision, which helps staff balance family and working life.

100 full-time work place nursery places are available to staff working in Sheffield and Runcorn; 112 full-time playscheme places, operating during the school holidays for children in full-time education aged up to 12, are available to staff working on all DfES sites. In 2001–02 these arrangements were provided at a cost of £230,000.

IT Contracts

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many contracts her Department has with ICT suppliers; how many ICT suppliers have contracts with her Department, and what the names of these ICT suppliers are. [49930]

Mr. Ivan Lewis:

(a) The Department has 60 contracts with ICT suppliers;

(b) 47 ICT suppliers have contracts with the Department;

(c) The names of the Department's ICT suppliers are shown in the following table.

No.	Supplier	Number of contracts
1	4S Systems Ltd.	1
2	Advanced Data Services Ltd.	1
3	AXIOS Systems Ltd.	2
4	Baltimore	2
5	British Telecom	1
6	Cap Gemini Ernst and Young	1
7	COLT Ltd.	1
8	Custom Communication Consultants	1
9	DE TE WE	1
10	Epixtech	1
11	Forvus	2
12	Graphical Data capture	1
13	Hi Tech (Laboratories) Ltd.	1
14	Information 1"	1
15	Initial Electronic Security Systems Ltd.	1
16	Integrated Environmental Solutions	1
17	ISIS Ltd.	1
18	Knightridder	1
19	Leake and Spencer	1
20	LOTUS (IBM)	1
21	Mattel Interactive	1
22	MFT Computer Systems	1
23	Microsystems Software	1
24	MIKROFAX	1
25	Network Associates	1
26	Network Designers	1
27	Network Unlimited Network Products Ltd.	1
28	NICO MAK Computing	1
29	NISS	1
30	Northern Realisations Ltd.	1
31	Novell	1
32	Dell[1]	1
33	Vodafone[2]	1
34	Global Crossing[3]	1
35	Oracle	4
36	Peoplesoft	1
37	Progressions Ltd.	1
38	QAS Systems Ltd.	1
39	Quality Forum	1
40	Raxco Software	1
41	Research Group	1
42	Sanderson MSL Ltd.	1
43	SPSS	8
44	Surf Control plc	1
45	Trustmarque Solutions	1
46	Videoconferencing Worldwide	1
47	Xansa plc	1
	Total number of contracts	60

[1] via Office of Government Commerce GCAT 2 Catalogue
[2] via Office of Government Commerce GTM Catalogue
[3] via Office of Government Commerce MTS telecoms service

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times Ministers in her Department have travelled abroad at taxpayers' expense since March 2001; what countries they visited; and what the total cost of each visit was. [47118]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 552W.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 722–3W, on statutory instruments, what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of each of the statutory instruments listed in the document placed in the Library. [50017]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 81W, regarding end year flexibility, if the remaining sum was spent in 2001–02. [50333]

Estelle Morris: £530 million of the underspend remained available on 3 December 2001. £130 million of this amount has been drawn down for use in 2001–02 and the remaining amount will be carried forward for use in 2002–03 or later years.

NVQ Level II Funding

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of the 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 902W, regarding NVQ level II funding, what steps her Department has taken with the Department of Health to ensure that all those individuals who qualify for *(a)* grants and *(b)* funds have knowledge of and access to them; and if she will make a statement. [50564]

Mr. Timms: This Department and its partners such as the Learning and Skills Council, education and training providers, local authorities and the Connexions Service take a wide range of steps to ensure that individuals have knowledge of, and access to, grants and funds to pursue education and training at all levels. Examples include: local marketing strategies developed by partners to reflect local needs and priorities; national leaflets on financial support while studying; other national and local marketing and careers material; advice and guidance from the Connexions Service and other information and guidance services; and the national learndirect telephone help-line.

The Learning and Skills Council and other partners are working with the Department of Health, the Training Organisation for Social Care (TOPSS) and social care employers to ensure that the maximum number of care staff receive supported NVQ training.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 902W, regarding NVQ level II funding, what *(a)* funds and *(b)* grants are available to individuals over the age of 24 years to obtain NVQ level II. [50560]

Mr. Timms: The Government provide 75 per cent. of the standard national course costs to the Learning and Skills Council to pass on to colleges. Additionally, students in further education can seek financial help towards the additional costs associated with study, ie transport, fees, books and equipment, and exam costs

from the discretionary Access Fund, if they can demonstrate particular need. It also helps with short-term child care and, to a limited extent, emergency payments for living expenses. The Childcare Support Fund offers help to lone parents and others who are on low incomes with the cost of registered child care while studying. Career development loans are also available to individuals undertaking vocational courses, to cover the cost of fees and associated costs which are not supported from other sources. However, colleges at their discretion may remit some or all of the tuition fee for adults where there is financial hardship or they may offer access to a college hardship fund.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

High Court Judges

Lady Hermon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures are being taken in Northern Ireland to ensure that more women and more members of the ethnic minorities become High Court judges. [46368]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Arising from recommendations in the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice Review, the Lord Chancellor, in December of last year, appointed Mr. John Simpson as Commissioner for Judicial Appointments for Northern Ireland. The Commissioner will oversee the development of a strategy of equal opportunity and outreach designed to broaden the pool of potential applicants for judicial office. Particular emphasis will be placed on the introduction of measures designed to encourage applications from sectors of the community that have been historically under-represented or where applications have been disproportionately low. All appointments, however, will continue to be made on merit and merit alone. The Commissioner will publish his first annual report to the Lord Chancellor early next year.

Marriage and Relationship Support

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money was awarded under the Government's marriage and relationship support programme to *(a)* National Marriage Week, *(b)* the Family Matters Institute and *(c)* the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, in the two most recent annual rounds. [48859]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Total funding under the Marriage and Relationship Support Grant Programme was £4.5 million in 2001–02 and is £5 million in 2002–03.

National Marriage Week 2001–02 was supported through the grant of £31,500 paid to Oasis Media (the PR company employed by Futureway Trust). Oasis Media and Futureway also received advisory support and guidance from officials in the Lord Chancellor's Department. The bid for 2002–03 did not score sufficiently highly against the published grant criteria to receive funding.

The Lesbian and Gay Foundation was supported for the first time in 2002–03 with a grant of £48,000.

Family Matters Institute has never received funding from the Marriage and Relationship Support Grant. It applied this year, but did not score sufficiently highly against grant criteria.

Court of Protection

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about delays at the Court of Protection; whether they derive from the recent re-location of that service; and whether its filing systems have been affected by the move. [48734]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Court of Protection, which is the Judicial 'arm' of the PGO, continues to deal with any work that it receives very speedily. In 2001–02, over 90 per cent. of submissions received from the PGO were processed within five working days. However, there have been recent delays in the PGO (which provides the administrative support to the court) which have impacted on the overall service delivery received by the court's clients.

It is correct to say that the recent relocation of the court and the PGO, which is now complete, has been a contributing factor to the cause of the delays. The PGO is very conscious indeed of the need to improve its services and reduce delay and much work is being done to address this.

All 25,000 plus case dossiers were moved from the PGO's old location to Archway and the new filing system has taken some time to bed down. A pilot of an electronic file scanning system, using bar codes, is about to start which it is hoped will considerably improve the ability to manage records more effectively. This will be a precursor to the development and implementation of the new electronic case record management system ('MERIS') which is due to be operational within the next 18 months and will ultimately reduce reliance on paper dossiers.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46810]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department's communications functions were incorporated into a new group in 1998. The annual costs for arrangements before 1998 are no longer available. The total cost of press office activity for FY 2001–02 which includes indirect costs to 31 December 2001, salaries and other staff costs, and expenditure on press office services is £503,135.

This figure does not include the costs of any work undertaken in other parts of the communications group on publications, internal communications and the staff journal, the LCD website and general administration activities.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42486]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department and agencies have always benefited from generous flexible working and leave arrangements, and have been able to take unpaid leave and career breaks with the agreement of local managers. We have incorporated the employer's obligations under the

Parental Leave Directive in our flexible working policies, and staff are able to take up their entitlement under the directive. We keep no separate record of this and therefore have not recorded costs separately.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42427]

Ms Rosie Winterton: *(a)* 2,291 staff currently work reduced hours, a large proportion of whom are engaged on a job-share or job-split arrangement.

(b) While some staff may arrange to work term times only, we keep no separate central records for staff working that particular arrangement, as it would be recorded centrally as an individual working reduced hours.

(c) There are a number of other alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up under the Department's work-life balance policies, such as flexi-time, home working and compressed hours. The flexibility of the pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work. Other than those working reduced hours (see *(a)* above), no central records are kept of these arrangements.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42570]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has incorporated age into its equal opportunities policies, and is reviewing its employment policies in line with the recommendations in the Performance and Innovation Unit Report, "Winning the Generation Game".

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take steps to improve the response time to parliamentary questions. [47716]

Mr. Wills: In its response to the Public Administration Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–2001 on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Government made clear its commitment to providing prompt and accurate answers to Parliamentary Questions. This continues to be the Government's position.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Development Agency

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have for the role of the London Development Agency in promoting a model of economic growth that would discourage further in-migration from *(a)* the regions of the UK and *(b)* overseas into London. [50051]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

None. The London Development Agency is a functional body of the Greater London authority, reporting to the Mayor of London. It is for the Mayor to approve and publish the London Development Agency's strategy, which sets out the agency's objectives and regional priorities.

TREASURY

Forms P85 and P85S

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many completed versions of forms *(a)* P85 and *(b)* P85S the Inland Revenue has received in each of the last five fiscal years; and if he will make a statement. [38261]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret the production of such statistics in a form which would enable me to say how many completed versions of forms *(a)* P85 and *(b)* P85S the Inland Revenue has received in each of the last five fiscal years would involve disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many special advisers were employed by the Treasury *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41255]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 115W and 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 857W, and the answer given to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 11 May 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46943]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families have applied for the children's tax credit; and how many of these applications have *(a)* been successful and *(b)* failed. [42518]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have invited claims for the children's tax credit from PAYE taxpayers. They have received about 3.7 million forms to date and it is estimated that 3.3 million taxpayers have CTC in their tax codes. The latest survey data suggest that around

3.7 million families might be expected to claim through PAYE and that an additional 900,000 taxpayers will be expected to claim the CTC later, via self-assessment.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are in receipt of the children's tax credit, broken down into *(a)* those who receive the full credit, *(b)* those who receive a partial credit because they have a comparatively small tax liability and *(c)* those who receive a partial credit because they earn too much to receive the full credit. [46472]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that about 3.3 million taxpayers have the children's tax credit (CTC) in their 2001–02 tax codes. On *(c)* about 0.1 million have a reduced value in the code adjustment because it is estimated that they are on the CTC taper. On *(b)*, it is not known for how many families the CTC eliminates the tax deducted from their earnings; this depends on their total earnings in the year.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are expected to apply retrospectively for the children's tax credit for 2001–02 because they are self-employed. [46473]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that there are about 0.8 million families with income from self-employment who will benefit from the children's tax credit.

Landfill

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider changes to the landfill tax to support the achievement of the Government's waste policy. [47161]

Mr. Boateng: The landfill tax contributes to the achievement of the Government's waste targets by making waste producers take account of the environmental costs they impose when they discard waste to landfill.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49639]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer is not responsible for any non-departmental public bodies that set their own efficiency savings targets.

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many different questionnaires were sent out to *(a)* UK companies, *(b)* manufacturing companies and *(c)* distribution and services companies by the Office for National Statistics in 2001. [48926]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Whittingdale, dated 17 April 2002:

As National Statistician I am responding to your recent question concerning statistical questionnaires sent to businesses by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). (48926)

Of the 1.57m forms issued to UK companies in 2001, 29% went to the manufacturing sector and 66% to the distribution and services sector.

Sector definitions have been based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)(92)).

Taxation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual loss to the Exchequer arising from *(a)* tax avoidance and *(b)* tax evasion in offshore jurisdictions. [49296]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49105]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the President of the Council and Leader of the House gave him on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Press Conferences

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 10W, on departmental events, if he will list the press conferences which have taken place on departmental premises in each of the last five years; and what was the purpose of each of them. [50547]

Ruth Kelly: Information in the format required could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Offshore Investments

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated total of UK assets invested in offshore jurisdictions. [49295]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Wanless Report

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he received the final Wanless report. [50664]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Derek Wanless formally submitted his final report to the Chancellor on 15 April. The report was published this morning.

Annuities

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses he has received to his consultative document "Modernising Annuities"; and if he will list those who responded and place copies of the responses in the Library. [50021]

Ruth Kelly: The number received up to 12 April was 615. Responses are still arriving. The list of respondents and copies of the responses will be placed in the Library in due course.

Structural Funds

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and *(b)* representations he has received from the National Assembly for Wales, regarding securing (i) the full amount of European Structural Funds for the National Assembly for Wales above the Welsh block grant and (ii) full public match funding for the projects over and above the Barnett formula during the period of the next Comprehensive Spending Review. [49813]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers hold discussions with their ministerial colleagues on a variety of matters, and receive representations from the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues. Funding decisions taken in this year's spending review will be announced in due course.

Westfield Shopping Centre Company

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has received from the Westfield shopping centre company since 1997. [48809]

Mr. Andrew Smith: HM Treasury can find no trace of any representations from Westfield shopping centre company since 1997.

Non-domicile Status

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been granted non-domicile status by the Inland Revenue in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [38259]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on jobs in the City of London of a change in the taxation arrangements of those who reside in the United Kingdom but who are domiciled overseas; [49472]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on the Baltic Exchange of a change in the taxation arrangements for those who reside in the United Kingdom but who are domiciled overseas; [49474]

(3) if he will make a statement on taxation arrangements for those who reside in the United Kingdom but who are domiciled overseas. [49475]

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the potential effect on inward investment were the UK to cease to grant non-domicile status to UK taxpayers; and what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* reviewed in respect of this matter; [49291]

(2) how many UK residents enjoyed non-domicile status for tax purposes in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1997 and *(f)* 1987; [49286]

(3) on how many occasions since 1992 the Inland Revenue has *(a)* rejected and *(b)* approved an application by a UK resident to be given non-domicile status; [49289]

(4) how many UK taxpayers have enjoyed non-domicile status for *(a)* more than five years, *(b)* more than 10 years and *(c)* more than 20 years; and for each category, what percentage of those enjoying non-domicile status this constitutes; [49287]

(5) what estimate he has made of the potential income tax revenue lost in each of the last five years as a result of the granting of non-domicile status to some UK taxpayers; and what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* reviewed in respect of this matter; [49290]

(6) how many UK taxpayers with non-domicile status were *(a)* born in the United Kingdom and *(b)* carry British passports; and for each category what percentage of those enjoying non-domicile status this constitutes. [49288]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answers 15 April 2002]:* We announced today as part of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement that we are reviewing the residence and domicile rules as they affect tax liabilities of individuals. I refer to Chapter 5 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2002, paragraph 5.83.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the target for the percentage of days on which all cheques of £100,000 or more are banked on the day of receipt by the Accounts Offices of the Inland Revenue was met in 2000–01; [49049]

(2) if the target for the number of inquiries taken up in relation to individuals, as referred to on page 13 of the Inland Revenue's report 2001, was met in 2000–01; [49055]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to have identified annual savings of at least £5 million per year on estate spending by 31 March was met; [49087]

(4) how much assessed and self-assessed tax was overdue for over three months in 2000–01; [49063]

(5) what percentage of *(a)* assessed and *(b)* self-assessed tax due was collected in 2000–01; [49059]

(6) if the target for the percentage of Inland Revenue inquiry centre callers without appointments attended to within 15 minutes was met in 2000–01; [49091]

(7) if the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to further the electronic procurement programme has now been met; [49045]

(8) what assessment he has made of the performance of the Inland Revenue against its Public Service Agreement target to ensure the effective transfer of staff from the Benefits Agency to deal with the extra claims for tax credits arising from the introduction of the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit; [49067]

(9) if the target for the percentage of self-assessed cases dealt with accurately by the Inland Revenue was met in 2000–01; [49051]

(10) if the targets for the percentages of notifications of National Insurance contributions recorded by *(a)* 31 December and *(b)* 31 March, as referred to on page 14 of the Inland Revenue's 2001 report, were met in 2000–01; [49057]

(11) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to review at least 60 per cent. of its services by value by March was met; [49089]

(12) what the meaning is of the performance indicator Quality-% score on page 13 of the Inland Revenue's 2001 report; [49061]

(13) if the target for the percentage of repayment claims in Inland Revenue offices processed within 20 working days was met in 2000–01; [49093]

(14) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to deliver cumulative efficiency savings of at least 10 per cent. of the 2001–02 Departmental expenditure limit by 31 March was met; [49085]

(15) if the target for the percentage of compliance inquiries/reviews worked to a satisfactory or better standard, referred to on page 13 of the Inland Revenue's 2001 report, was met in 2000–01; [49053]

(16) if the target for the percentage of non self-assessed schedule E work dealt with accurately by the Inland Revenue was met in 2000-01; [49050]

(17) if the target for the number of reviews taken up in relation to employers, as referred to on page 14 of the Inland Revenue's 2001 report, was met in 2000–01; [49056]

(18) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to increase the availability of electronic communications between taxpayers and the Department to at least 30 per cent. of potential dealings by 31 March was met; [49088]

(19) what the target was for reduced sickness absence in the Inland Revenue in 2000–01; and if it was met; [49064]

(20) if he will make a statement on the PAYE in year weighted target for percentage employer payments as referred to on page 13 of the Inland Revenue report for 2001; [49060]

(21) if the target for the percentage of calls answered at Inland Revenue switchboards within 30 seconds was met in 2000–01; [49092]

(22) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to reduce staff sickness absence by 2003 will be met; [49084]

(23) if the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to increase the proportion of key designated procurement postholders with or working towards, a graduate level procurement qualification has now been met; [49041]

(24) if the target for the percentage of self-assessed tax returns received by 31 January 2001 was met; [49052]

(25) if the target for decisions in five working days on completed applications for working families tax credit was met in 2000–01; [49058]

(26) if the target for the percentage of post fully dealt with within 15 working days by the Inland Revenue was met in 2000–01; [49090]

(27) if the PSA target for the Inland Revenue's prompt payment of undisputed invoices has been met; [49044]

(28) if the target for the number of inquiries taken up in relation to companies, as referred to on page 13 of the Inland Revenue's 2001 report, was met in 2000–01; [49054]

(29) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the Inland Revenue to achieve a roll out of at least 50 per cent. of the call centre strategy contained in the overall agreed programmes by 31 March was met; [49086]

(30) if the target for the percentage of days on which 99 per cent. or more of all cheques are banked on the day of receipt by the Accounts Offices of the Inland Revenue was met in 2000–01. [49048]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on PSA performance and against targets generally is set out in the Inland Revenue Annual Reports 1999–2000 (Cm 5029) and 2000–01 (Cm 5304). Information on progress against PSA targets in 2001–02 will be published in the Revenue's forthcoming spring Departmental report. Full details of performance in 2001–02 will be contained in the Revenue annual report which will be published later this year.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Amusement Machine Licence Duty (Medium-Prize Machines) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50167]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Insurance (Fees) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50147]

(3) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (General) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50179]

(4) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits Scheme (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 2) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50128]

(5) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credit Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50117]

(6) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 Regulated Activities Order; and if he will make a statement; [50124]

(7) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Capital Gains Tax (Annual Exempt Amount) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50119]

(8) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Climate Change Levy (Registration and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50163]

(9) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Aircraft Operators (Accounts and Records) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50180]

(10) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Consideration for Fuel provided for Private Use) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50154]

(11) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Air Passenger Duty (Designated Region of the United Kingdom) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50150]

(12) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the National Savings Bank (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50143]

(13) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security Contributions (Amendment No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50122]

(14) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Passenger Vehicles) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50153]

(15) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Recognition Requirements for Investment Exchanges and Clearing Houses) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50162]

(16) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Finance Act 1989, Section 178(1) (Appointed Day) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50132]

(17) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Inheritance Tax (Indexation) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50158]

(18) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Income Tax (Indexation) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50159]

(19) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Personal Equity Plan (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50139]

(20) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Retirement Benefits Schemes (Indexation of Earnings Cap) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50118]

(21) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Markets and Insolvency (Settlement Finality) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50160]

(22) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Business Gifts of Small Value) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50155]

(23) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Lottery Duty (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50169]

(24) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Capital Allowances (Corresponding Northern Ireland Grants) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50149]

(25) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services Act 1986 (Exemption) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50165]

(26) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Electronic Communications) (Incentive) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50182]

(27) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Industrial and Provident Societies (Fees) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50146]

(28) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Protective Helmets) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50156]

(29) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 (Modification of Section 10(7)) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50137]

(30) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Excise Duty (Payments in Case of Error or Delay) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50173]

(31) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 (Modification of Section 10(7)) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50136]

(32) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Building Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50145]

(33) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Gaming Duty (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50177]

(34) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Individual Savings Account (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50141]

(35) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50126]

(36) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credit Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50115]

(37) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 (Investment by Devolved Administrations) (Public-Private Partnership Business) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50151]

(38) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Cider and Perry (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50176]

(39) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50171]

(40) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Industrial and Provident Societies (Credit Unions) (Fees) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50144]

(41) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment No. 1) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50133]

(42) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Buying Agency Trading Fund (Amendment) (Change of Name) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50140]

(43) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50135]

(44) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Stamp Duty Reserve Tax (Investment Exchanges and Clearing Houses) (The London Stock Exchange) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50130]

(45) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Finance Act 2001 (Commencement No. 2 and Saving Provision) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50172]

(46) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services Act 1986 (Electricity Industry Exemption) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50121]

(47) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Air Passenger Duty (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50181]

(48) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Aggregates Levy (Registration and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50168]

(49) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Stamp Duty and Stamp Duty Reserve Tax (Definition of Unit Trust Scheme and Open-ended Investment Company) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50138]

(50) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Income Tax (Cash Equivalents of Car Fuel Benefits) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50120]

(51) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credit Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50129]

(52) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Credit Unions (Increase in Limits on Deposits by Persons Too Young to be Members and of Periods for the Repayment of Loans) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50148]

(53) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 1) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50125]

(54) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Collective Investment Schemes) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50164]

(55) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Freeing of Funds) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50134]

(56) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Investment Trusts (Approval of Accounting Methods for Creditor Relationships) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50127]

(57) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tobacco Products Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50178]

(58) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50116]

(59) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the General Betting Duty Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50174]

(60) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Excise Duty Points (Duty Suspended Movements of Excise Goods) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50175]

(61) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50123]

(62) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Increase of Registration Limits) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50157]

(63) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Vehicles Designed or Adapted for Handicapped Persons) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50152]

(64) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50184]

(65) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Statistics of Trade (Customs and Excise) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50170]

(66) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50183]

(67) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Prescribed Markets and Qualifying Investments) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50161]

(68) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Promotion of Collective Investment Schemes) (Exemptions) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50166]

(69) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Friendly Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50142]

(70) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50131]

(71) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No.8) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50728]

(72) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50725]

(73) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 8) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50727]

(74) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 9) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50723]

(75) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Interim Provisions) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50719]

(76) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Official Listing of Securities) (Amendment) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50721]

(77) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commencement No. 6) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50720]

(78) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 9) (Northern Ireland) Regulations; and if he will make a statement; [50724]

(79) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Controllers) (Exemption) (No. 2) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50718]

(80) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50722]

(81) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Air Passenger Duty and Other Indirect Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment) Order; and if he will make a statement; [50717]

(82) what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Gibraltar) Order; and if he will make a statement. [50726]

Dawn Primarolo: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A Regulatory Impact Assessment is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Libraries of the House and have been available on departmental websites from 1 January 2001.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49621]

Ruth Kelly: None has contained sunset clauses applying to the Bill as a whole. Section 107 of Finance Act 2001 incorporates a sunset clause (sub-section (5)) applying to that section alone. The need for any such provision would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

WALES

Consignia

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what correspondence he has had with Consignia in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on what was discussed; [49324]

(2) what meetings he has had with Consignia in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on what was discussed at these meetings. [49737]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have not received any correspondence or held any meetings with Consignia in the last 12 months.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49104]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to you today 17 April 2002 by my right hon. Friend Robin Cook, Leader of the House.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* site visits and *(b)* official openings (i) he and (ii) the Under- Secretary of State for Wales have attended in each month since July 1999. [49329]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since July 1999 both my hon. Friends the Parliamentary Under-Secretaries and I have undertaken a wide range of visits and official engagements in Wales. These have included site visits and official openings as well as equally important visits to local authorities, police authorities, farms, tourism outlets, universities and voluntary organisations.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have had in the National Assembly for Wales since 17 March. [49330]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since my Department has offices in the National Assembly building at Cardiff Bay, my hon. Friend and I meet regularly there both with Assembly Members and with other people.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what planned meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have not attended in the National Assembly for Wales in the past month; and if he will state the reasons for non-attendance. [49331]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Both myself and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary attend a large number of formal and informal meetings in the National

Assembly. However we are both aware that there will be an enormous number of meetings held in the Assembly and we are only invited to a small fraction of them.

Foreign Trade Missions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many foreign trade missions *(a)* he and *(b)* the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have attended in each month since July 1999. [49332]

Mr. Paul Murphy: One, a mission led by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary Member to the Czech Republic. The reports of this visit from those companies accompanying my hon. Friend were very positive. The companies concerned have reported many new contacts made during the mission, which have directly resulted in some cases in requests for business partnerships and quotations for work in the Czech Republic.

Structural Funds

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he had with the Treasury on ensuring that *(a)* the full amount of European Structural Funds is drawn down to the National Assembly for Wales above the block grant and *(b)* full public match funding for the projects over and above the Barnett formula is provided during the next period of the next Comprehensive Spending Review. [49812]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Member to the answers I gave the House on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 9.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44825]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since my Department came into existence in July 1999 such costs have been de minimis.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

University Students

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what percentage of the British population attended *(a)* Oxford or Cambridge universities, *(b)* independent schools and *(c)* both, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 822W, on permanent secretaries in the Home Civil Service, what steps are being taken to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for appointment to senior posts; and if he will make a statement. [48702]

Mr. Leslie: The figures are not available in the form requested. However, in 2000 2.4 per cent. of students in higher education were studying at Oxford or Cambridge University, and 7 per cent. of pupils aged 14 were attending assisted or independent schools. Also in 2000, 45 per cent. of the 5,900 students entering Oxford or Cambridge University came from independent schools.

All appointments to senior posts, as with all permanent civil service posts, are made on the basis of merit and an individual's ability to do the job.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 821W, regarding the use of external consultants, if he will list each of the projects, and the purpose for which external consultants were used, in each of the last four years. [50392]

Mr. Leslie: In the last four years my Department has used external consultants on a number of projects and assignments, which have included work on: e-Government; Y2K; civil service and public sector reform; the new civil service pensions scheme; social exclusion; and domestic IT systems.

Details of individual projects are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50291]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office does not currently have any PFI projects for which contracts have been signed.

Engineering Technology Board

Mr. Page: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants have member status of key institutions which are represented on the Engineering Technology Board. [49299]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Levy

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister what are the official title and responsibilities of Lord Levy. [49890]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) on 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 350W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister how many Government press conferences Lord Levy has attended in his capacity as a representative of the Government. [49893]

The Prime Minister: Lord Levy has attended press conferences when accompanying me or the Foreign Secretary.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister whether Lord Levy is obliged to report gifts, hospitality and services he receives in the course of his duties to a *(a)* permanent secretary and *(b)* representative of the Cabinet Secretariat. [49892]

The Prime Minister: Lord Levy passes any gifts of value to my office, which handles them according to the usual procedures for Government gifts. Any hospitality and services provided to Lord Levy in the course of his duties as my envoy are known to the FCO and the UK diplomatic missions involved.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister if Lord Levy adheres to the Ministerial Code. [49891]

The Prime Minister: Lord Levy is not a Minister.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* each foreign visit that Lord Levy has undertaken acting as a representative of the Government and *(b)* the cost of each trip to public funds since 23 October 2001. [49895]

The Prime Minister: Lord Levy has visited Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan, France and Germany in his role as the Prime Minister's envoy since 23 October 2001. Lord Levy received no remuneration and travels at his own expense. The FCO and diplomatic missions overseas provide him with practical support, the cost of which is not separately itemised.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the speeches that Lord Levy has made since his appointment as a representative of the Government; [49894]

(2) if speeches by Lord Levy on foreign policy issues are cleared by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of State. [49897]

The Prime Minister: Yes. Lord Levy has given one public speech in his capacity as my envoy, to the Foreign Affairs and Finance Committees of the Venezuelan National Assembly during his visit to Venezuela in November 2000.

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister if Lord Levy informs the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of State before making any foreign visit on behalf of the Government. [49896]

The Prime Minister: Lord Levy's foreign visits as my envoy are agreed in advance by the Foreign Secretary and me.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what Her Majesty's Government's requirements are of Iraq to avert the threat of military action. [49809]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to hon. Members at Prime Minister's Questions, and to the statement I gave to the House on Wednesday 10th April.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what Her Majesty's Government's requirements are of Iraq for the lifting of economic sanctions. [49810]

The Prime Minister: The international community's requirements for lifting sanctions on Iraq is clearly laid out in UNSCR 687 (a copy of which can be found at www.un.org/Departments/unmovic/documents/docslist.htm).

Free Travel and Accommodation

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions since 1997 he has accepted free travel and accommodation from overseas Governments. [48783]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments to provide hospitality for official visits by Foreign Heads of State who come as guests of Her Majesty's Government.

It has also been the policy of successive administrations that when Prime Ministers and Ministers make official visits abroad some accommodation and travel arrangements may be provided for by foreign Governments. Wherever costs to HMG occur they are laid out in the lists of overseas visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers. These were placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report* on 17 June 1999, columns 196–97W; on 28 July 2000, column 969W; and on 20 July 2001, column 467W.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the "Ministerial Code" and "Travel by Ministers", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

With regard to my private visits all occasions have been registered in the Register of Members Interests.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

6. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what link the Government make between UK aid to Ethiopia and improved implementation of rights for women there. [46045]

Clare Short: We are developing a partnership with Ethiopia to help reduce the very high levels of poverty there. It is impossible to reduce poverty without empowering women and educating girls. Because, as Kofi Annan said, poverty has a woman's face and 70 per cent. of the poor of the world are female.

Uganda

7. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about progress in reducing international debt in Uganda. [46046]

Hilary Benn: Uganda became the first country to benefit under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, receiving $347 million dollars worth of debt relief in April 1998. Under the enhanced HIPC framework agreed in 1999, Uganda received additional debt relief of $656 million dollars when it reached its second Completion Point in May 2000, bringing its total HIPC relief to $1 billion dollars in net present value terms.

Zimbabwe

8. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's future aid projects in Zimbabwe. [46047]

Clare Short: The people of Zimbabwe face a bleak future under President Mugabe's policies. We are working with the international community to urge policy changes in order to halt the catastrophic decline in agriculture, the economy, and social services. We are also providing

humanitarian assistance through the UN and non-governmental channels, and helping to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic that affects one in three adults.

17. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. [46056]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe is likely to worsen later this-year. The maize harvest in April and May is forecast to meet only 30 per cent. of national needs and the Zimbabwe Government has no credible plan to source food for its people. Drought has compounded the already serious problems caused by mismanagement of the economy, farming, and food markets. The UK is one of many urging policy changes on the part of the Zimbabwe Government, while providing emergency assistance through international and non-governmental channels.

Tanzania

9. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on aid to Tanzania. [46048]

Clare Short: We work with the Government of Tanzania to promote growth and reduce poverty. Britain is one of Tanzania's major development partners. Our bilateral assistance programme stands at £80 million for 2002–03. This goes towards strengthening economic and political governance, improving public services including health and education, and helping to provide key infrastructure such as water and roads in rural areas.

12. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make statement on her policy on aid to Tanzania. [46051]

Clare Short: DFID works with the Government of Tanzania to promote growth and reduce poverty. Britain is one of Tanzania's major development partners. Our bilateral assistance programme stands at £80 million for 2002–03. This goes towards strengthening economic and political governance, improving public services including health and education, and helping to provide key infrastructure such as water and roads in rural areas.

Afghanistan

10. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made on the implementation of the Bonn agreement with respect to women's human rights. [46049]

Clare Short: The inauguration of the Afghan Interim Authority laid the foundations for progress on realising women's rights in Afghanistan. This includes the formation of a Ministry for Women and the announcement of the procedures for the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002, which will include 11 per cent. women.

13. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid has been given to Afghanistan by the Government since the conflict began. [46052]

Clare Short: My Department has committed over £60 million since September 2001 to support both the Afghan Interim Authority and the United Nations-led humanitarian and recovery effort. This assistance is being channelled through United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and non-Governmental organisations. In addition, at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, we pledged £200 million from the DFID budget over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

14. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made to ensure that humanitarian aid is reaching those in greatest need in Afghanistan. [46053]

Clare Short: Despite three years of drought and 23 years of conflict, and the recent insecurity and population displacement, widespread famine in Afghanistan has been averted by the early and effective actions of the humanitarian community. Over 6.6 million people have been provided with food aid over the past six months, as well as other essential relief supplies such as tents, clothing and cooking equipment. Pockets of need remain in isolated or insecure areas, but agencies are using every means available to deliver assistance to those in need.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [46060]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation remains fragile in Afghanistan. After 23 years of conflict and three years of drought, as well as continued limited access to some areas of Afghanistan, our assessment is that significant needs will remain for at least the coming year in challenging and volatile operating conditions. The latest assessment by the United Nations and the Afghan Interim Administration estimates that approximately 9 million Afghans, including over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), will be in need of assistance in Afghanistan in 2002.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the multilateral institutions regarding the development of a PRSP for Afghanistan. [48794]

Clare Short: My Department is in contact with the multilateral institutions about Afghanistan's reconstruction, and is also providing support to the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority, which developed the recently announced National Development Framework, to develop its capacity to manage the process of reconstruction. There are no immediate plans for the development of a PRSP for Afghanistan. However, the design and implementation of a National Development Framework could pave the way for a PRSP in due course.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much of the money committed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan over the next two years at Tokyo will be invested in the long-term funding of a civilian police force and judicial system; [48762]

(2) how much of the money committed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan over the next two years at Tokyo will be invested in *(a)* police training programmes and *(b)* demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants programmes. [48761]

Clare Short: The UK is closely engaged with the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) and international partners to develop an integrated framework for security sector reform encompassing the police, military and judicial systems. This includes discussions with Germany, who are acting as the national lead on police training programmes in Afghanistan. We have so far allocated £7 million to the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which will be used to fund recurrent costs of the AIA's budget, including the civil police force, judicial system and the re-integration of combatants into society.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the money committed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan over the next two years in Tokyo has been contributed to UN agencies working on the ground in Afghanistan, broken down by *(a)* agency and *(b)* amount. [48760]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan in January 2002, my Department committed £200 million over the next five years (from 1 April 2002) towards the country's reconstruction and humanitarian needs. The specific allocation of these resources is currently being finalised.

Since September 2001, we have contributed over £40 million to UN agencies working in Afghanistan. We intend to continue to contribute to humanitarian and recovery programmes implemented by UN agencies, as well as channelling funds through the new World Bank-run Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, to which we are making an initial contribution of £7 million this financial year.

Sustainable Development

11. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the UK's contribution to the three preparation committee for the world summit on sustainable development. [46050]

Clare Short: The Government's strategic objective for the World Summit is "to make globalisation work for sustainable development, especially for the poorest". We see the Summit as part of a broader process that includes the Millennium Declaration, the WTO Doha Development Agenda and the agreement reached at the Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey. Priority areas for action at Johannesburg include fresh water, sanitation and energy.

Officials from DEFRA, the Cabinet Office, DTI, FCO, the Scottish Executive and my Department attended the 3rd Prep Com in New York from 25 March to 5 April. The UK worked closely within the EU and in discussion with other countries in pursuit of our objectives. We will continue to do so in the run up to the Ministerial PrepCom in Indonesia from 27 May to 7 June.

Africa

15. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the future of the new partnership for African development. [46054]

Clare Short: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is an African owned and led initiative that the UK Government strongly supports. Its central principle is that it is Africa's responsibility to advance African development. NEPAD has identified as initial priorities the areas of peace and security and political and economic governance, which include an African peer review mechanism. I am placing in the Library of the House a recent speech outlining my views on priorities for NEPAD.

24. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what policies her Department is pursuing to reduce poverty in Africa. [46064]

Clare Short: We are pursuing a wide range of policies to reduce poverty in Africa, including more and better aid and greater coherence among policies which affect African nations.

Bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa stands at over £630 million a year and is increasingly provided in the form of assistance to reforming Governments—to enable them to implement nationally-owned poverty reduction strategies. Bilateral aid to Africa has almost doubled since 1997 and is set to rise further.

The UK has been at the forefront of efforts to set up a system for providing debt relief to countries with unsustainable debt levels. So far 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have reached decision point on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and are receiving interim debt relief and three have completed the HIIPC process and are receiving full debt relief; we are working with African countries and with the international community to tackle conflict in the continent, including seeking resolution of existing conflicts as well as finding ways to prevent future disputes; working with the international community and partner countries to tackle key development challenges, including fighting HIV/AIDS, investing in health and education, investing in rural economies and infrastructure, promoting private investment and sustainable development, improved information and communications technology, and improving governance and service delivery; promoting changes in policies of wealthy countries which impact on Africa's development, such as trade and market access, agricultural subsidies, arms proliferation, corruption and bribery by international companies; working with African leaders and institutions to promote closer partnerships between Africa and the rest of the world, and supporting African owned development strategies, including the New Partnership for Africa's Development; and providing funds to, and working with, multilateral bodies such as the World bank, International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, the African Development bank, United Nations agencies, and others.

25. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the future of the new partnership for African development following the election results in Zimbabwe. [46065]

Clare Short: The situation in Zimbabwe highlights the need for African nations to improve standards of economic and political governance in the struggle to eliminate poverty. The proposed African peer review system has an important role to play. These proposals are being developed under the New Partnership for Africa's Development. It is clear that the Zimbabwe elections did not meet the standards already laid down by the Southern Africa Development Community.

28. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the new partnership for African development. [46068]

Clare Short: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is one of the most important initiatives that has come from Africa in recent years. It represents a consensus among African countries that Africa should take responsibility for African development. NEPAD countries have identified economic and political governance and peace and security as their initial priorities.

Nigeria

16. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of progress towards better governance and curbing corruption in Nigeria. [46055]

Clare Short: Nigeria has a history of poor governance and very high levels of corruption which is the major cause of very high levels of poverty in this oil rich country. Nigeria transferred from military to civilian rule in 1999 amidst considerable optimism for reform. Improvements in the performance of Government and impact on corruption have been slow.

Freedom of speech has generally been observed but on corruption the Government have not done enough. The introduction of anti-corruption legislation and an anti-corruption commission are important but not sufficient. Strong implementation is needed.

My Department has expanded its involvement in Nigeria significantly since 1999. We are focused on improved governance at federal, state and local level but Nigeria is a difficult place to work and progress is slow.

Sierra Leone

18. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the actions of her Department to help strengthen democracy and economic recovery in Sierra Leone. [46057]

Clare Short: Much of our work in Sierra Leone aims to strengthen democracy and promote economic recovery. We are providing technical assistance to the National Election Commission to help ensure that May's Presidential elections are free and fair. We are providing long-term support for wide-ranging public sector reforms, working with the police, the Ministry of Defence, the judiciary and the Anti-Corruption Commission to promote democratic values, including greater transparency, accountability and the rule of law. A copy of my speech in Sierra Leone in February outlining our priorities for action will be placed in the Library of the House.

Economic recovery is one of the two main planks of the Sierra Leone Government's interim poverty reduction strategy. We are providing technical support to develop this into a full strategy, guiding Government policy and expenditure over the next few years to promote growth and poverty reduction. And we have been successful in pressing for early relief on Sierra Leone's unsustainable international debt under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, a key step towards attracting renewed foreign investment.

Mozambique

19. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's priorities are for Mozambique within the context of the new development plan for Africa. [46058]

Clare Short: Our priority in Mozambique is to support the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government of Mozambique's own Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty, known as the PARPA. Many of the central themes of the New Partnership for African Development, including the need for local ownership of development processes and for sound policies, better governance and accountability to citizens, are strongly reflected in the PARPA.

The New Partnership for African Development also calls for donors to re-examine their ways of working and, in particular, to focus their resources on agreed priorities and to ensure that funds are increasingly channelled through Government's own systems. In Mozambique, DFID and other key donors have established a common mechanism for disbursing aid funds via the Government's central budget, supported by measures to improve capacity. This is vital to improve accountability and the effectiveness of aid, by ensuring that funds are allocated via the budget to the priority areas set out in the PARPA, and we are committed to increasing the proportion of our Mozambique programme which is channelled in this way.

Sudan

21. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards Sudan. [46061]

Clare Short: Sudan needs peace above all else. The UK is playing an increased part in the international effort to bring about peace. We have appointed a UK Special Representative for Sudan who will head a Unit made up of DFID and FCO staff. Their task will be to co-ordinate the UK contribution to the international efforts for peace in as many ways as possible.

In the meantime we continue to address urgent humanitarian needs arising from conflict and drought, and we have provided over £40 million of humanitarian assistance to Sudan through NGOs and UN relief agencies since 1997. A more substantial UK development programme depends on an end to the war.

22. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to promote peace in Sudan. [46062]

Clare Short: Since my visit to Sudan in January my Department, in consultation with the FCO, has endeavoured to raise the profile of the peace process in Sudan within the international community, and identify areas where the UK can play a key role in promoting peace.

We are making some progress and our influence is growing, particularly through the recent appointment of a Special UK Representative for Sudan, Alan Goulty. He will be supported by a joint FCO/DFID-staffed unit responsible for co-ordinating and participating in dialogue between both sides in the Sudanese conflict. The new unit

will also ensure continuing links with other important international partners who share our wish for lasting peace in Sudan.

Angola

23. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Angola. [46063]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation in Angola has deteriorated further over the last 12 months. The humanitarian suffering as a result of the internal conflict has been huge and millions of people are living in life-threatening conditions. NGOs are providing some basic services, but their capacity is heavily over-stretched.

I hope that the recent peace agreement between the Government and UNITA will lead to an early improvement in the humanitarian situation in Angola. Some benefits are already apparent. Aid agencies have been able to use roads which have been unsafe for many years to get food to the needy. Easier access to the worst affected areas could dramatically ease the humanitarian crisis facing the country.

I recently visited Luanda and discussed the humanitarian situation with the Government and the need to follow up the peace agreement with urgent measures to assist all displaced people, and to help them return to their homes as rapidly as possible.

Somalia

26. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has recently given to Somalia. [46066]

Clare Short: My Department continues to provide humanitarian assistance to Somalia in response to International Agency appeals and in support of NGO initiatives. We have provided over £3 million of assistance in the past year.

The pursuit of a lasting peace agreement in Somalia remains a priority. We, with the international community, continue to support regional and national efforts to promote dialogue and political reconciliation in Somalia.

Cameroon

27. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what effect the Monterrey talks will have on reducing poverty in Cameroon. [46067]

Clare Short: The Monterrey meeting did not discuss the situation in specific. Whether Cameroon will benefit from the extra development assistance pledged at Monterrey will depend on the degree to which the Government of Cameroon implements a strong poverty reduction strategy.

Older People

29. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to help older people living in developing countries. [46069]

Clare Short: My Department's aim is the elimination of poverty in poorer countries. Older people are often among the poorest.

We adopt a rights-based approach. We seek to ensure that poor people are consulted on policies and decisions that affect them and use participatory methods to understand people's perception of their rights and the obstacles they face in accessing entitlements.

We are supporting the African Union's leadership in promoting and guiding national policies on aging in their membership, working to strengthen Government and civil society capacity for addressing aging issues, and assisted the policy development process in the preparations for the Second World Assembly on Aging earlier this month.

Palestine

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects in the West Bank and Gaza have received financial support from her Department during the last five years. [49912]

Clare Short: The following table lists the projects funded since 1997, the start date, and the total allocation.

Project	*Allocation (£)*
1997	
Birzeit Food Quality Control Unit	425,872
Group Guaranteed Lending	1,820,000
Assistance to the Education Sector	3,225,700
Population Census	80,000
Newcastle University—Hydrology	715,000
Primary Health Care	950,000
Gender and Law	1,628,128
VAT Audit Training	102,000
1998	
Economic Protocol	730,281
Southern Area Water Appraisal	45,000
Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy	775,000
Rural Water Schemes Appraisal	110,000
Legal Sector Assistance—Phase 2	70,252
Health Management Strengthening	3,600,000
1999	
Bethlehem 2000 Doha Sewerage	1,400,000
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Dura	1,678,092
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Jabalia	908,905
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Anabta	1,610,859
Unification and Development of Legislation	775,000
Assistance to the Negotiations Affairs Department	4,200,000
Tele-Cardiology (Peres Centre)	850,000
Sustainable Management of West Bank and Gaza Aquifers	1,971,308
Gaza Midwifery	545,000
Hebron Water Access and Storage	513,572
Economy and Trade Policy Development	495,057
Save the Children Fund Water and Sanitation Project—Rafah	2,013,836
Census Reports	92,500
Legislative Council Library	353,700
2000	
Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees Women's Health	987,000
Public Administration Institutional Development	1,900,000
Primary Health Care Management—Phase 2	1,550,000
2001	
Participatory Poverty Assessment	500,000
Utilisation of Census Data	700,000
Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees Emergency Response	520,000
World Bank Employment Generation Programme	1,500,000
OXFAM Humanitarian Grant	34,000
Mental Health and Trauma Counselling	450,000
World Food Programme Appeal	500,000

Project	Allocation (£)
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Grant	300,000
Supporting Literacy	290,000
Child Health Development	1,215,000
World Bank NGO Project—Phase 2	4,500,000
Reducing the Impact of Violence on Palestinian Children	517,000
Palestinian Hydrology Group—Water Sector Grant	250,000
Economic Policy Programme—Phase 3	1,015,000
Hebron Water Access and Storage—Phase 2	5,000,000
2002	
World Bank Emergency Services Support Programme (March)	5,000,000
Centre for European Policy Studies' Middle East and Euro-Med Research Programme	135,500

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects in the west bank and Gaza have received financial support from the European Union during the last five years. [49911]

Clare Short: The European Commission (EC) has compiled a table of its assistance provided to the Palestinians since 1994. I will place a copy in the House of Commons Library. The UK contributes 19 per cent. of the EC budget.

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about bushmeat. [48152]

Clare Short: DFID staff meet regularly with DEFRA staff for Inter-Departmental Conservation Co-Ordination meetings. They have not held formal discussions about bushmeat.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Government of South Africa regarding the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [46059]

Clare Short: On 4 April, I held discussions in Johannesburg with Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu, President Mbeki's Economic Adviser, who chairs the Steering Committee of the New Partnership for African Development. I also gave a speech titled "Can Africa Halve Poverty by 2015?—the challenge for NEPAD" to which Professor Nkuhlu replied.

Poverty Diseases

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information she has received on how the European Union budget line B7–6211 on the fight against poverty diseases is to be spent. [48994]

Clare Short: The 2002 European Community budget includes euro 25.2 million for budget line B7–6211 (HIV/AIDS Policies and Programmes). Euro 20 million is intended to support specific projects with a focus on programmes targeting HIV prevention in youth. Euro 5.2 million will support a number of specific initiatives including the Barcelona HIV/AIDS conference, the Asia-Pacific Leadership Forum and the AIDS Vaccine Preparedness Project (with International AIDS Vaccine Initiative and the World bank).

The Commission have tabled a draft regulation to cover the diseases of poverty (HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis) which sets out how it is proposed to spend the funds in budget line B7–6211 in 2003–06. This draft regulation is currently under consideration and is being discussed by UK officials with other member states.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much expenditure has been committed for this year of budget line B7–6211 (fight against poverty diseases) in the European Union; and what the projected spending under this budget is for this financial year. [48995]

Clare Short: Allocations for budget line B7–6211 (Aid for poverty-related diseases) for 2002 are:

Commitments—euro 26,123,000

Payments—euro 18,080,000.

In addition, euro 60 million allocated to this budget line in 2001 will be paid to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria in 2002. There is no 2002 payment outturn projection available but by the end of February euro 0.8 million had been spent.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the 2002 Departmental Report will be published. [49590]

Clare Short: DFID's Departmental Report 2002 will be published on 24 April.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50281]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50420]

Clare Short: The overall cost of the pay increase 2001–02 was 4.75 per cent. for staff below the senior civil service and 4.6 per cent. for senior civil servants. The overall cost of the 2002–03 increase for staff below the senior civil service will be 3.9 per cent. We are unable to confirm the overall increase in 2002–03 for senior civil servants at this time as we are still assessing the impact of the new senior civil service pay system. The Department is not responsible for any agencies or non-departmental bodies.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50305]

Clare Short: We do not pay a salary to any of the members of our public bodies; they receive reimbursement of travel expenses.

As from December 2001 an honorarium of £5,000 was paid to the Chair of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and from January 2002 and honorarium of £200 per meeting was paid to members who take part in a Scholarship Selection Committee.

One of my civil servants holds an ex officio post on the Overseas Service Pensions Scheme Advisory Board. His salary costs, estimated as a percentage of the amount of time spent dealing with the work of the board, are as follows:

	£
2001–02	898.67
2000–01	878.92
1999–2000	1,059.23
1998–99	1,034.00
1997–98	971.96

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W, on the new deal for young people, how many people have been employed by her Department under the scheme in each of the last four years. [50425]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

1998 and 1999: nil

2000: two

2001: two.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W, on the New Deal, how many people employed on the scheme in each of the last four years have subsequently found subsidised employment for more than 13 weeks. [50424]

Clare Short: None.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 887W, on correspondence, for what reasons 13 per cent. of letters from hon. Members and 10 per cent. of letters from members of the public were not answered within the target period. [50342]

Clare Short: Delays occurred for a variety of reasons. These include, while seeking agreement across Whitehall on a reply when more than one Department had an interest, when letters were transferred between Departments when the lead responsibility to reply was unclear and while waiting for an agreed standard line to campaign letters. Less frequently replies were not sent within the target period because the information required was not immediately available, for example when seeking information from sources overseas.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 888W, on crèche facilities, what the costs are of the holiday playschemes at East Kilbride and London. [50423]

Clare Short: Further to my answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 888W, on créche facilities, the costs of the holiday playschemes for our staff in East Kilbride and London are as follows:

East Kilbride

£10 annual registration fee for first child and £5 for each additional family member plus £8.50 per child per day, paid wholly by the parents.

London

£26 per child per day of which the parent and DFID pay £13 each. For 2001, the cost to DFID on subsidising DFID parents' use of the Whitehall Holiday Playscheme was £1,373.56.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the management of the Natural Resources System Programme. [49256]

Clare Short: The programme was most recently assessed last year. We concluded that the management is cost-effective and that good progress is being made towards achievement of the programme's objectives.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Local and Regional Government Institutional Strengthening Project in the Ukraine. [49204]

Clare Short: DFID awarded the contract for the management of the Local and Regional Institutional Strengthening Project in 1999 and value for money was a key consideration when selecting the management agents by competitive tender. A comprehensive review of the performance of the project was conducted by the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Department in October 2001. The review team concluded that the project is successfully assisting central and regional government to deliver local services more efficiently and represents good value for money.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Gansu Basic Education Project in China. [49160]

Clare Short: The Gansu Basic Education Project began implementation in December 1999 and currently is scheduled to end in December 2005. Regular monitoring visits are carried out by our Education Adviser in the DFID Beijing office. We also assess progress and value for money through six-monthly project reports and through our consultants. Specific annual review missions are also carried out by a DFID London and Beijing team to assess progress against the project purpose and outputs.

The last annual review took place in October 2001. Good progress has been made. There has been an improvement in net enrolment rates. Drop-out rates have reduced and there has been an improvement in transfer rates from primary to junior middle school. A number of reform-orientated innovations piloted in the project have been noted by the Education Ministry and adopted by other western provinces (eg. participatory teacher training in Shaanxi), donors (eg. school development planning by UNICEF) and NGOs working in China (eg. Plan International). The next annual review will be the project's mid-term review in October.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods pilot project in Russia. [49183]

Clare Short: DFID awarded the contract for the management of the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Pilot Project in 1999 and value for money was a key consideration when selecting the management agents by competitive tender. A mid-term review of the performance of the project was undertaken by a team of officials from DFID's Eastern Europe and Central Asia Department, accompanied by representatives from the World Bank and Russia's Federal Ministry of Agriculture in October 2001. The review team concluded that the Project was influencing policy making at both the regional and federal level, making a very useful contribution to the implementation of the land reform policy in Russia, helping with market reform in the rural sector, and represented good value for money.

Reproductive Health

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on steps that have been taken in the European Union to strengthen the administration of reproductive health programmes; what staffing provisions are in place to deal with reproductive health programmes; and what the budgeted amount for this financial year is for such programmes. [48997]

Clare Short: One of my Department's objectives for EC reform has been to improve the mix of skills in the Commission in order to strengthen the EC's contribution to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The Commission's central staffing for health issues has significantly increased over the past year. Within DG Development there are now four (and soon to be five) full-time health professionals, and a seconded UK health expert has a specific remit to lead on reproductive health. Within EuropeAid there are approximately 20 staff working exclusively on health.

EC expenditure on reproductive health is provided both from a specific budget line (B7–6312) and—the majority—through country programmes in the form of projects and budget support. Budget line B7–6312 is intended to support innovative approaches and the development of new knowledge. Work is underway to link EC expenditure to specific categories but at present the Commission do not have full details of their overall spending on reproductive health. The allocations for budget line B7–6312 in the 2002 budget are:

commitments[1]—8,584,000 euros

payments—9,141,900 euros.

[1] Commitments made in one year are usually implemented, ie paid, over a series of subsequent years.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about *(a)* the budgeted amounts in the European Union for reproductive health spending in each of the past five years, *(b)* the actual spending and *(c)* steps being taken to ensure that budget allocation and expenditure match each other in the future. [48993]

Clare Short: EC expenditure on reproductive health is provided both from a specific budget line (B7–6312) and—the majority—through country programmes in the form of projects and budget support. Budget line B7–6312 is intended to support innovative approaches and the development of new knowledge. Work is under way to link EC expenditure to specific categories but at present the Commission do not have full details of their overall spending on reproductive health.

Commitments and payments information for budget line B7–6312 is readily available only for the past four years.

Reproductive health budget[1]

euro million

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[2]
Commitment allocations[3]	24.5	19.9	22.0	8.6
Commitment outturn	9.3	23.0	21.3	—
Payment allocations	15.6	23.9	24.4	9.7
Payment outturn	10.7	20.7	8.2	1.9

[1] HIV/AIDS included prior to 2001.

[2] Outturn data as at end February 2002.

[3] Commitments made in one year are usually implemented, ie paid, over a series of subsequent years.

The EC are taking steps to increase their efficiency through a programme of reforms begun in 2000. The reforms include restructuring the Directorates General responsible for external actions and development, simplifying internal procedures and strengthening the capacity of country offices.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on what assessment she has made of whether the European Union is adequately organised and staffed to spend budget line B7–6312 on reproductive health. [48992]

Clare Short: My Department has not made any formal assessment of the Commission's organisation and staffing in relation to budget line B7–6312 (Aid for population and reproductive health care). However, we understand that three health professionals (one in DG Development and two in EuropeAid) have specific responsibility for management of this relatively small budget line[1], and that during the evaluation of proposals they are supported by additional external technical experts.

[1] Commitments allocation of euro 8.5 million for 2002.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the performance of the European Union has been in spending this year's budget line B7–6312 of 8.6 million euros on reproductive health. [48991]

Clare Short: The EC financial year runs from 1 January. As of 28 February, no new commitments from the euro 8.6 million budgeted had yet been approved but euro 1.9 million of a possible euro 9.7 million payments had been spent.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31779]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on the 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1130W.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to amend the Housing Benefits (General) Regulations 1987. [37302]

Malcolm Wicks: Work has already begun on consolidating the housing benefit regulations and we plan to lay consolidated regulations before the House as soon as practicable.

Technical amendments will also be made to reflect changes to other benefits. These include:

Consequential changes that support the introduction of the loss of benefit provisions (known as Two Strikes) as contained in the Fraud Act 2001 and the Loss of Benefit Regulations 2001. Two Strikes is designed to be a deterrent against continued abuse of the benefit system by introducing a benefit sanction for those convicted separately of two benefit offences; housing benefit and council tax benefit are both covered by the Two Strikes provisions.

The phased introduction from April 2002 of provisions under the Fraud Act 2001, including the powers for authorised officers from DWP and local authorities to require information from prescribed organisations such as banks and building societies. The information-gathering powers are covered by a statutory Code of Practice, which has been subject to a three-month public consultation and has been laid before both Houses of Parliament.

With the introduction of the pension credit, we are making changes to remove the need to re-claim HB every year for pensioners aged 65 and over. For those over 65, we will be making awards for five years. The HB income threshold will also be raised by the maximum amount of the pension credit savings reward, to an expected level of £113.80 for single pensioners in 2003 and we will treat pensioners' capital more generously.

In addition, the following amendments are also planned:

Amendments to the regulations governing the eligibility of child care cost in the calculation of housing benefit;

Amendments to bring the income related benefit provisions for war widowers' pensions in line with those for war widows; and

Annual uprating student disregards and student rent deduction.

These proposed changes have been considered by local authority representatives in the Housing Benefit Regulation Scrutiny Group.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39829]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department has outsourced catering services and the suppliers are responsible for sourcing products sold to staff. A review of the sale of fair trade products with the primary catering supplier on 13 March (during Fair Trade Fortnight) confirmed that fair trade products, such as coffee and tea, are sold in the Department. This review also confirmed that, while the supplier currently operates ethical, environmentally appropriate procurement policies, they are also working to develop and introduce a specific fair trade strategy. The Department supports this initiative and will monitor progress closely.

Mr. Tom Mann

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the practice of sessional doctors sitting on tribunals with the European Convention on Human Rights, following the complaint lodged with the officer of the Benefits Agency by Mr. Tom Mann; and if he will make a statement. [39413]

Maria Eagle: My noble Friend the Lord Chancellor appoints appeal tribunal members. The qualification requirements are set out in regulations and do not exclude sessional doctors. The regulations preclude doctors from hearing an appeal in which they have previously given advice to a decision maker in the Department or prepared reports on a claimant's medical condition.

Maternity Benefit

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many UK employees were in receipt of maternity benefit in each of the last five years. [44366]

Maria Eagle: There are two maternity payments available to expectant mothers in work; statutory maternity pay (SMP) paid by employers to their employees, and maternity allowance (MA) paid by the Department to employees who do not qualify for SMP, the self-employed and those women who have recently left their jobs.

It is estimated that around 0.3 million[1] women in Great Britain will have received SMP from their employer in 2001–02.

The available information on maternity allowance awards to employees is in the table[2].

	Number[1,2]
5 April 1999 to 1 April 2000	28,000
6 April 1998 to 3 April 1999	29,000
7 April 1997 to 4 April 1998	25,000
1 April 1996 to 5 April 1997	28,000

[1] The estimated number of SMP cases in 2001–02 is derived from case load estimates underlying forecast expenditure on SMP but may be subject to revision once information from the National Insurance Records System 2 is available.

[2] Maternity allowance figures for 2000–01 are due to be released on 25 April.

[3] Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[4] Figures for Northern Ireland are not included. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Source:

1 per cent. samples of the benefit computer system. The data excludes late notifications to the system, a small number of cases held clerically and is subject to a degree of sampling error.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of those who left the gateway of the New Deal for Young People without proceeding to any of the options were in full time employment 12 months later. [44897]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to the end of December 2001, 68 per cent. of the young people who had left the New Deal for an unsubsidised job at the Gateway stage had not reclaimed jobseeker's allowance within 12 months.

Source: New Deal Evaluation Database.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people leaving the new deal for young people who were in sustained jobs (i) six and (ii) 12 months later. [44900]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to the end of December 2001, of the 264,100 new deal leavers who had moved into jobs, 214,700 (81 per cent.) had not reclaimed jobseeker's allowance within six months and 180,600 (68 per cent.) had not reclaimed it within 12 months.

Note: The figures include those leavers who have been in employment for less than 6–12 months, but who have not yet returned to JSA.

Source: New Deal Evaluation Database

Welfare Bill

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the total welfare bill was spent on those living on below 60 per cent. of median income in each year since 1997. [45285]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

ONE Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the four ONE pilots will cease to run after March. [46100]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In October 2001 the ONE pilots in south-east Essex, Calderdale and Kirklees and part of the Clyde Coast and Renfrew pilot became Jobcentre Plus pathfinders. All of the remaining ONE pilots will continue to operate after March 2002 and will be converted to Jobcentre Plus offices in due course.

Lone Parents

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the New Deal for Lone Parents advertising campaign. [46470]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Advertising is one of the methods used to make sure that lone parents are aware of the help and support available through the new deal for lone parents (NDLP) to help them move into work.

So far, over 300,000 lone parents have volunteered to participate in NDLP and over 130,000 of these have found work.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under remit of his Department in the last 12 months; and what plans he has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made. [47934]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Comprehensive details of financial redress paid in cases where the Parliamentary Ombudsman has completed an investigation and issued a formal report are not held centrally. However, based on such records as are available, payments amounting to £155,866.51 have been agreed in 94 cases during the 12 months to 31 March 2002. This figure excludes cases where a statutory resolution has been found.

Each case is judged on its individual merits. Where the Ombudsman finds that maladministration has occurred and that financial redress is appropriate, the general principle adopted is to provide redress which is fair and reasonable in the light of all the facts and circumstances of the case. Where the complainant has suffered actual financial loss as a result of the maladministration, or faced costs which would otherwise not have been incurred (and which are reasonable in the circumstances), the general approach is to restore the complainant to the position he or she would have enjoyed had the maladministration not occurred. Where there is not an actual financial loss or cost, careful judgment is used to decide whether financial redress is appropriate and, if so, what constitutes fair and reasonable financial redress. There are no plans to alter these principles.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the new CSA rules to come into force for new cases. [47818]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

Action Teams for Jobs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which locations Action Teams for Jobs are in operation. [47926]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The 63 Action Teams for Jobs are in the following locations.

Barnsley and Rotherham
Birmingham North
Birmingham South
Blackburn with Darwen
Blaenau Gwent
Brent
Brighton and Hove
Caerphilly
Chester-le-Street
Cornwall
Doncaster
Dundee, City of
Easington
East Ayrshire
Greenwich
Glasgow Central
Glasgow North
Glasgow South
Glasgow West
Hackney
Halton
Hartlepool
Haringey
Highlands and Islands
Islington
Kingston-upon-Hull
Knowsley
Lambeth
Lewisham
Liverpool Central
Liverpool North
Liverpool South
Manchester Central
Manchester North
Manchester South
Merthyr Tydfil
Middlesbrough
Neath Port Talbot
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Newham
North Lanarkshire
North West Wales
Nottingham, City of
Pembrokeshire
Plymouth
Redcar and Cleveland
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff
Salford
Sefton
Sheffield
South Tyneside
Southwark
St. Helens
Stockton-on-Tees
Sunderland
Thanet
Tower Hamlets
Waltham Forest
Wansbeck
West Dunbartonshire
Wales Objective One[1]
Wirral
Wolverhampton

[1] Covers areas of Wales with European Social Fund Objective One status which are not part of another Action Team. Includes selected wards in Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Torfaen and Swansea.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47178]

Mr. Nicholas Brown [holding answer 10 April 2002]: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Medical Assessment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to harmonise and disseminate national definitions of disability for statistical and policy purposes. [48815]

Maria Eagle: Different definitions of disability and conditions of entitlement are in use within UK legislation and for relevant schemes and services. There are no plans to seek to harmonise these because they serve different purposes and reflect the fact that disability affects people in many different ways and to greatly differing degrees.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to enhance input by psychologists into the vocational rehabilitation service. [48820]

Maria Eagle: Jobcentre Plus employs approximately 80 occupational psychologists in its disability service. Their role is partly to help clients with disabilities who have particular problems in finding or keeping suitable employment, and partly to assist the network of disability employment advisers and access to work advisers. The psychologists' work has been reviewed over the past three years. As a result improvements have been introduced, especially to their work with clients who have mental health problems, dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities and with people who have sustained head injuries.

Job Retention

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a progress statement on the job retention pilot studies. [48821]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Nine organisations were funded to develop and test the feasibility of their proposals for the job retention pilot studies during the three months ending on 15 March 2002. The detailed bids are currently being considered, together with a report on the evaluation methodology.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter dated 4 March from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding his constituent, Mr. Light, of Banffshire. [50072]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I am currently considering the matters raised by the hon. Member as they more appropriately fall within my responsibility and will write to him shortly.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the rise in the minimum income guarantee has been since 1997 after taking account of inflation. [45913]

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to the reply, 10 April 2002, c. 228W]:* The minimum income guarantee was introduced in 1999. Since 1999, annual rises in the minimum income guarantee have been linked to earnings. The rises, after taking into account inflation increases and the differences in the premiums paid, are shown in the table.

Percentage increase

	Single	*Couple*
April 1997	n/a	n/a
April 1998	0.0	0.0
April 1999	4.4	4.5
April 2000	3.0	3.0
April 2001	15.9	13.7
April 2002	4.8	4.9

Departmental Projects

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48400]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* In line with the Government's commitment in its response to the Sixth report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, details on individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 will be disclosed in Departmental annual reports.

HEALTH

Public Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he has had and representations he has received, by date and subject, from Members of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Executive, regarding the increased use of private sector funding on delivering public services, broken down by date and subject. [43219]

Mr. Hutton: No meetings have been held with Members of the National Assembly for Wales, or the Welsh Assembly Executive, nor representations received from them regarding the increased use of private sector funding on delivering public services.

Advertising

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on advertising by his Department in each of the last five years: and if he will give a breakdown of the largest items of expenditure in each year. [37607]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 February 2002]:* Major advertising campaigns commissioned by the Communications Directorate are in the table as follows.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*[1]2001–02*
Nurse and other staff recruitment	1.43	1.30	4.90	4.21	4.90	6.00
Organ and blood donation	0.38	0.62	2.47	[2]0.69	0.43	0.18
Mental health	—	—	—	—	—	0.18
Smoking cessation	—	—	—	[3]6.18	8.97	[4]7.79
Anti-fraud	—	—	0.38	—	0.18	0
Flu immunisation	—	—	—	—	2.01	1.45
NHS Direct	—	0.12	0.78	1.24	0.28	1.25
Appropriately prescribed medicine (ie antibiotics)	—	—	—	0.91	—	0.44
Others	0.58	—	—	2.08	4.20	2.52
Total	2.39	2.04	8.53	15.31	20.97	19.81

[1] Planned (to be updated).
[2] The Department's spend on blood donation advertising reduced in 1999–2000 because most of this activity was funded directly by the National Blood Authority, who took over full responsibility for this expenditure on 1 April 2000.
[3] Prior to 1999–2000 advertising on smoking was undertaken by the Health Education Authority (HEA).
[4] Including Asian specialist press.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39101]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to an answer I gave the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) today, which listed, with costs the major advertising campaigns run by the Department for the period in question.

The table shows the purpose and method of evaluation for each campaign.

Campaign and purpose	*Evaluation*
Antibiotics To encourage the public not to over use antibiotics and thus reduce their effectiveness	Pre and post tracking research of advertising campaign
Blood donation[1] To encourage more members of the general public to become blood donors	The number of people registering to give blood, calls to the blood donation helpline and amount of blood given
CALM To promote the CALM mental health helpline to young men on the onset of depression	Feedback from regional co-ordinators in the active zones, calls to the helpline, pre and post launch campaign research
Drugs To publicise services provided by National Drugs Helpline	Calls to the helpline monitored
Flu To advise general public that those at risk (people 65 and over and others suffering from specified illnesses) should see their GP for a free flu jab	Returns from health authorities on immunisation take up among the target age group. Pre and post campaign tracking research

Campaign and purpose	*Evaluation*
Mind Out Campaign to reduce the stigma associated with all those with mental health problems	Quality and quantity of editorial coverage generated; assessment of attitude shifts identified by key campaign partners
NHS including nurse recruitment To encourage new recruits to apply for training in nursing and other professions in the NHS and those who are qualified and have left to return to the NHS	Volume and analysis of helpline response. Pre and post campaign tracking, analysis of volume and quality of recruitment and retention related editorial. Returner recruitment assessed through report from regional offices
NHS Direct Promotion of 24-hour nurse led health advice telephone service	Pre and post tracking research of advertising campaign and number of calls to helpline
Organ donation To encourage more people to enlist on the Organ Donor Register	Pre and post campaign tracking research of advertising campaign and calls to the Organ Donation Literature Line
Prescription fraud Advertising, publications and helpline to inform service providers and users about the new penalty charges enforced for fraudulent claims for free or reduced costs of treatment	Analysis of helpline response
Preventing teenage pregnancy National campaign aimed at halving the rate of teenage conceptions among under-18s by 2010 and lower the incidence of STIs among 13 to 18-year-olds	Pre and post advertising tracking research, calls to Sexwise helpline and visits to the related websites
Adult sexual health To decrease the rates of sexually transmitted infections among 18 to 30-year-olds and raise awareness and understanding, providing information so people can make informed choices about their own sexual health	Analysis of calls to helpline, visits to related website and some pre and post advertising tracking research
Social work recruitment National advertising and marketing campaign to encourage applications to be a social worker	Volume and analysis of helpline response, qualitative and quantitative analysis of recruitment related editorial generated. In the long term assessment of impact on the number of applications
Smoking[2] To encourage smokers to give up smoking	Pre and post tracking research of advertising campaign and calls to the NHS Smoking Helpline
Walk in centres To raise awareness of a new health care choice	Number of visitors to centres measured constantly to track changes. Patients asked how they found out about the service on arrival at centres. Street poll of 5,000 patients outside four NHS walk in centres to discover views on service conducted 2000–01
Winter To encourage the general public to make appropriate use of NHS services and other sources of health advice including NHS Direct	Pre and post tracking research of advertising campaign and number of calls to NHS Direct

[1] The National Blood Authority (NBA) took over full responsibility of this campaign on 1 April 2000.
[2] Prior to 1999–2000 advertising on smoking was undertaken by the Health Education Authority.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of staff by each individual campaign. However the numbers of staff employed in the project management of advertising campaigns and publicity campaigns on 1 January each year are as follows:

1 January 1999: 15

1 January 2000: 21

1 January 2001: 28[1]

1 January 2002: 31.

[1] The Department took on direct control for a number of public health campaigns including Smoking Cessation with the closure of the Health Education Authority on 31 March 2000.

Children's Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole time equivalent NHS *(a)* consultant child and adolescent psychiatrists, *(b)* clinical psychologists working with children and *(c)* psychotherapists worked with children in each year since 1997. [41717]

Jacqui Smith: Whole time equivalent numbers for child and adolescent psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and psychotherapists are shown in the tables. Information is not collected about the numbers of clinical psychologists and psychotherapists who work with children.

Hospital medical staff within the child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy specialties

Whole time equivalent

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England at 30 September					
All staff	640	650	670	710	700
of which					
Consultant	390	400	420	420	420
Psychotherapy					
All staff	140	130	120	120	120
of which					
Consultant	80	90	90	80	80

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff in the specified areas of work

Whole time equivalents

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England at 30 September					
Clinical psychology	3,380	3,660	3,760	4,050	4,400
Psychotherapy	320	350	360	410	470

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Heroin Addicts

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated number of heroin addicts is in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* coalfield constituencies. [41807]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not available in the form requested. The information available for users presenting to drug misuse agencies (including both doctors and other agencies), with heroin as their main drug of misuse in the six-month period ending 31 March 2001 is given in the table.

Number of people presenting for treatment at drug agencies, with heroin reported as the main drug, during the six-month period ending 31 March 2001

Area of treatment	*Number of users*
Great Britain	26,424
England	22,431
Health authorities in England classified as "coalfields"	3,669

Notes:

1. The data are derived from the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases for six months ending March 2001".

2. The Office for National Statistics have derived an area classification of health authorities for Great Britain which includes the category "coalfields" published as "The ONS classification of local and health authorities of Great Britain: revised for authorities in 1999—ISBN 1 85774 355 5".

Intermediate Care

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the allocation of funds for intermediate care planned for each financial year; and if he will list the commitments to spend made by each *(a)* health authority, *(b)* health trust and *(c)* Government office region. [42951]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan announced an extra £900 million annually by 2003–04 for new intermediate care and related services to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people.

Further details are in HSC 2002–01, LAC (2001) 01, published in January 2001, a copy of which is in the Library.

Spending commitments for future years are not available by health authority (HA), trust and region. However, annual performance monitoring within a given financial year provides details of expenditure by HA and region and projections to the relevant year-end.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the number of parliamentary questions yet to be answered by his Department; how many members *(a)* are waiting for replies to parliamentary questions and *(b)* have suffered delays of six months or more in waiting for responses to parliamentary questions; and how many parliamentary questions tabled before the Christmas Recess 2001 have yet to be answered by his Department; [44448]

(2) if he will make a statement on the investigation into the falsification of answers to parliamentary questions within his Department; what measures he will take to ensure that parliamentary questions are replied to promptly; and what measures he will take to ensure that falsification of answers to parliamentary questions does not recur. [44449]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Milburn) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 756–59W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to WPQ numbers *(a)* 9416, *(b)* 9403, *(c)* 8710, *(d)* 10282, *(e)* 10262, *(f)* 11000, *(g)* 10998, *(h)* 11957, *(i)* 12914, *(j)* 12918 and *(k)* 13108. [17827]

Ms Blears *[pursuant to the reply, 5 March 2002, c. 275W]:* Replies to the hon. Member's questions were given as follows:

WPQ number	*Date*	*Official Report column*
9416	21 January 2002	665W
8710	21 January 2002	665W
9403	20 November 2001	242W
10262	15 January 2002	248W
10282	18 January 2002	530W
11000	23 November 2001	568W
10998	5 December 2001	363W
11957	25 February 2002	938W
12914	12 March 2002	992W
12918	25 February 2002	934–36W
13108	31 January 2002	560W

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff at his Department are Justices

of the Peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become Justices of the Peace. [44547]

Ms Blears: The Department does not record details of civil service staff who are Justices of the Peace.

Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) requires employers to allow their staff reasonable time off for public duties. The Civil Service Management Code (paragraph 9.2.5) also requires Departments to allow time off for attendance required by section 50 of the ERA 1996.

Special leave policy rests with individual Departments and agencies who are free to decide on the amounts of special leave, the circumstances for which it is granted and whether such leave is paid or unpaid.

As part of its commitment to encouraging staff to be active in the community, the Department has a special leave policy that allows staff who are Justices of the Peace an annual limit of 18 days paid leave as well as reasonable time for travelling to permit up to 26 attendances.

Mental Health

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the pledged *(a)* secure beds, *(b)* 24-hour staffed beds and *(c)* assertive outreach teams with patient access available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for those with complex mental health needs are in place; and how many he estimates there will be by April. [46285]

Jacqui Smith: The targets set in the NHS Plan for April 2001 were all achieved on time. These included over 500 additional secure beds, over 320 additional 24-hour staffed beds, 170 assertive outreach teams and access to services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for all those with complex mental health needs. At April 2002 the latest forecast figures show that there will be:

199 assertive outreach teams in operation

4,435 24-hour staffed beds.

Forecast figures for the number of secure psychiatric beds at April 2002 have not been collected. The outturn figure for beds at various levels of security for 2000–01 was 4,860. Current monitoring arrangements for secure beds do not include provision of forecasts. The mental health service mapping provides numbers of secure beds as at September 2001, and the bed availability and occupancy annual returns provide bed occupancy rates by ward classification, of which "secure unit: other ages" is a mental illness ward classification.

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money was lent under the NHS brokerage system in each of the last five years; and *(a)* by whom and *(b)* to whom; [45846]

(2) how much money is owed and *(a)* by whom and *(b)* to whom, under the NHS brokerage system; [45847]

(3) how much money was repaid under the NHS brokerage system in each of the last five years; and *(a)* by whom and *(b)* to whom. [45845]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library. All brokerage within the national health service is managed centrally and not between individual health bodies. Information for 2001–02 is not yet finalised.

Correspondence

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the target time is for his Department to reply to letters from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public; and what the time is that it has been taking his Department to reply to letters from (i) hon. Members and (ii) members of the public in the last six months. [46972]

Ms Blears: Information is published annually by the Cabinet Office on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Ministers and agency chief executives, Departments' and Agencies' handling targets, and their performance in meeting these targets. The report for 2001 is due to be published shortly.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Leominster dated 17 January, concerning the payment of widows' pensions under the NHS Pension Scheme. [48694]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's Ministerial Correspondence Unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Cottage Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the cottage hospitals which have been *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed since 1997. [47019]

Ms Blears: Information on hospital closures ceased to be collected in 1991 following the introduction of the national health service internal market and trusts.

Community and cottage hospitals play an important role in providing care closer to home, for example in carrying out day surgery, minor procedures and caring for patients in the recuperative phases of recovery from illness or accident. These hospitals will help us meet our target of introducing an additional 5,000 intermediate care beds by 2004, of which more than 2,400 are already in place.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in cottage hospitals there were in each of the past five years. [47029]

Ms Blears: The information is not collected centrally.

Data on bed numbers are collected annually at national health service trust level, rather than by individual hospital site. Information on bed availability and occupancy is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

New Hospital Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra NHS beds have been introduced in *(a)* total, *(b)* general and *(c)* acute wards since the publication of the national plan. [47828]

Mr. Hutton: In the general and acute sector in England, the number of beds available in 2000–01 increased by over 700 to 135,794 compared with the year before. This represents a third of the target of 2,100 extra general and acute beds set out in the NHS Plan. Further information is shown in the table.

Average daily number of available beds by certain sectors, England, 1999–2000 to 2000–01

	Available beds		
Sector	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Net change*
All ward types	186,290	186,091	−199
Acute	107,218	107,956	738
Geriatric	27,862	27,838	−24
General and acute (acute plus geriatric)	135,080	135,794	714

Source:
Department of Health form KH03

Hospital Food

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unannounced inspections of the quality of hospital food have taken place since the introduction of the NHS National Plan. [47004]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan said that there would be unannounced inspections of the quality of hospital food.

These inspections have been undertaken by patient environment action teams (PEATs) as part of the wider assessment of the quality of the environment in which patients are treated.

The programme of PEAT visits commenced in 2000, and a further round of inspections is currently in process. To date a total of 1,060 unannounced inspections of the quality of food have been carried out, this figure will rise to 1,172 by the end of the current round of PEAT inspections.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many requests for each category of snack boxes there have been, expressed as a percentage of the overall number of requests; [47030]

(2) what percentage of hospitals make the full range of snack boxes available 24 hours of the day. [47031]

Ms Blears: The requirement for hospitals to introduce a 24-hour catering service was included in the NHS Plan. The better hospital food programme, launched on 8 May 2001, set out details of the 24-hour service which should include a ward kitchen service, a snack box service and, by 2004, a light bite service. £4 million was issued to NHS trusts in January 2001 to assist in setting up 24-hour services.

The implementation pack issued to all national health service trusts in support of the better hospital food programme included three examples of snack boxes. However hospitals are not required to introduce these exact versions—each hospital should determine the types of snack box(es) used, and their precise contents, taking into account patient-mix and the advice of catering managers, nursing staff and dietitians.

Information relating to the types of snack boxes in use, and the numbers of requests, is not collected centrally.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role dieticians play in *(a)* advising and *(b)* checking on nutritional values in food in the NHS. [47006]

Ms Blears: The better hospital food programme, announced in the NHS Plan, is a long-term initiative designed to improve the quality, availability of and access to food in NHS hospitals. It is supported by the investment of £38.5 million over four years.

It is increasingly being recognised that ensuring patients, many of whom enter hospital malnourished or over-nourished, receive and can benefit form adequate and appropriate nutrition plays a key part in the overall healthcare they receive and can lead to speedier recovery, reduced length of stay, reduced incidence of post operative complications such as pressure sores and poor wound healing and may lead to reduced expenditure on drugs, particularly antibiotics, used to combat these.

Hospital dieticians have a crucial role to play in ensuring that these benefits are realised through: advising on the formulation of hospital menus to ensure that nutritional standards are delivered for all patients, including those with specific dietary need; monitoring the nutritional intake of patients, particularly those at greatest risk; and advising individual patients on the nutritional values of foods, in order to help them make informed choices about their food intake to meet both their dietary needs and those of their clinical condition.

To this end NHS Estates has been working closely with representatives of the British Dietetic Association who are developing a consensus statement on "Food Service and the State Registered Dietitian" which will cover standards for the professions in a number of key areas: nutritional analysis of recipes and menus; diet coding definitions and standard glossary of terms. This will be a key document enabling standard criteria to be applied across the NHS.

Additionally, an ad hoc working group which includes nutritional experts, representatives of the British Dietetic Association, NHS dietitians and nurses is devising principles for nutritional screening which will facilitate the measurement of both under and over nutrition on entry to hospital. This will allow early intervention of clinical and dietetic staff to address problems which, unchecked, may lead to prolonged ill health. In addition research will be undertaken to establish the clinical outcomes of improved nutrition and to provide a tool to ensure that the nutritional aims of the better hospital food programme are taking effect.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS trusts have introduced a 24-hour catering service. [47829]

Ms Blears: The requirement for hospitals to introduce a 24-hour catering service was included in the NHS Plan. The better hospital food programme, launched on 8 May 2001, set out details of the 24-hour service which should include a ward kitchen service, a snack box service and, by 2004, a light bite service. £4 million was issued to national health service trusts in January 2001 to assist in setting up 24-hour services.

The most recent returns from acute NHS trusts shows that 69 per cent. of hospitals have introduced ward kitchen services and 66 per cent. provide snack boxes. No figures are yet available regarding the number that have introduced light bite services.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of hospitals have successfully adopted the new NHS menus. [47024]

Mr. Hutton: The Better Hospital Food programme, which was launched in May 2001, is supported by the provision of £38.5 million over four years. It is a longer term initiative designed to improve the quality, availability of and access to food in hospitals.

The programme has set a number of targets for the national health service to achieve, including the incorporation into menus of dishes designed for the NHS by a team of leading chefs.

Latest returns from acute hospitals show that by the end of April two thirds of hospitals will include at least three of the 'leading chef' dishes in their menus.

The majority of those hospitals which are still working towards this target are those which use external suppliers. NHS Estates are working closely with the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency and the external manufacturers to increase the availability of 'leading chef' dishes from these sources so that hospitals with delivered meals services can move swiftly to incorporate them in their menus.

Toothbrushes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many free toothbrushes have been handed out under the Brushing for Life campaign; and what has been the cost per toothbrush. [47837]

Mr. Hutton: To date 186,050 packs have been distributed as part of the Brushing for Life scheme. Each pack contains a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste and a leaflet.

The toothbrushes in the packs cost 44 pence each.

Cystic Fibrosis

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason adult cystic fibrosis sufferers are not entitled to free prescriptions. [47863]

Ms Blears: No adult is entitled to free prescriptions unless they fall within one of the following groups:

people aged 18 who are in full-time education;

people aged 60 and over;

people who hold an exemption certificate on maternity or medical grounds;

people who get, or whose partner gets, income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, full tax credit or credit reduced by £72.20 or less;

people who are named on an HC2 charges certificate issued under the NHS low income scheme.

Cystic fibrosis sufferers who fall into these categories will be entitled to free prescriptions, but cystic fibrosis is not one of the conditions which, of itself, can lead to the issue of a medical exemption certificate. These conditions are set out in the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000/620).

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1291W, on cystic fibrosis, what plans to has to reduce the number of conditions which entitle the sufferer to free prescriptions. [47129]

Ms Blears: We have no plans to reduce the number of conditions which entitle the sufferer to free prescriptions.

Cleanliness

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the board member nominated to take personal responsibility for monitoring hospital cleanliness will be held responsible for any failure; [47008]

(2) what percentage of NHS trusts have not nominated a board member to take responsibility for monitoring hospital cleanliness. [47007]

Ms Blears: It was a requirement of the NHS Plan that every national health service trust should nominate a board member to take responsibility for monitoring hospital cleanliness and report to the board following regular check-ups. Each NHS trust board takes collective responsibility, and overall accountability rests with the chief executive. The new national standards of cleanliness for the NHS, issued by NHS Estates in April 2001, set out clearly what is required.

There have been no reported instances where a trust has failed to nominate a board member to monitor hospital cleanliness.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the National Standards of Cleanliness for the national health service applies to the cleanliness of individual patients; and if he will make a statement. [48890]

Mr. Hutton: The National Standards of Cleanliness for the national health service apply to buildings in which health care is delivered, not patients.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been waiting over 15 months on the in-patient waiting list for *(a)* each quarter since March 1997 and *(b)* each month since January 2001. [47856]

Mr. Hutton: The data requested are shown in the tables. Table 1 provides quarterly statistics from March 1997 onwards and table 2 provides monthly statistics from January 2001 onwards.

Table 1: Quarterly statistics—number of patients on the in-patient waiting list waiting over 15 months on the last day of the period: England (HA based)

Year/quarter	*15 months plus*
1996–97	
4	6,000
1997–98	
1	11,000
2	15,000
3	18,000
4	17,000
1998–99	
1	18,000
2	15,000
3	14,000
4	10,000
1999–2000	
1	12,000
2	12,000
3	13,000
4	12,000

Table 1: Quarterly statistics—number of patients on the in-patient waiting list waiting over 15 months on the last day of the period: England (HA based)

Year/quarter	*15 months plus*
2000–01	
1	13,000
2	13,000
3	13,000
4	11,000
2001–02	
1	12,000
2	10,000
3	4,000

Source:
DH QF01 return

Table 2: Monthly statistics—number of patients on the in-patient waiting list waiting over 15 months at the end of the period: England (HA based)

Year/month	*15 months plus*
2000–01	
January	13,000
February	13,000
March	11,000
2001–02	
April	11,000
May	11,000
June	12,000
July	11,000
August	11,000
September	10,000
October	8,000
November	4,000
December	4,000
2002–03	
January	3,000
February	2,000

Source:
DH monthly waiting list returns

NHS Funding

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in relation to the £120 million in his Department's spring supplementary estimate 2001–02 designated for take-up of end year flexibility, how much relates to *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* other NHS bodies; and which trusts, health authorities and other bodies received end year flexibility and the amount involved in each case. [46412]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The £120 million end year flexibility related to the Department's unallocated provision and was not allocated to individual NHS bodies in 2000–01. It did not form part of the end year flexibility arrangements for NHS bodies.

Adjustments to health authorities resource limits in 2001–02 as a result of health authorities and NHS trusts underspending in 2000–01 are set out in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. There were no adjustments for other NHS bodies.

Appointments

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of appointments were booked electronically in the last year. [47002]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not currently available centrally.

The NHS Plan states that there will be electronic booking of appointments for patient treatment by the end of 2005. Implementing electronic booking systems is being taken forward as a long-term, four-year, implementation project as part of the NHS Modernisation Agency's National Booked Admissions Programme. Monitoring arrangements for electronic booking are being developed as part of the implementation project work programme.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP appointments were missed in each year since 1997; and how his Department plans to reduce this. [47542]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* These data are not collected or held centrally. However, we are concerned by the impact of missed appointments on primary care services and have funded "Doctor/Patient Partnership" campaigns on this since 1997. In addition, the national primary care development team is now working with general practitioners to help them to offer more responsive and timely access for patients. For participating practices this approach has led to substantial reductions in missed appointments.

Ophthalmology Waiting Times

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average outpatient ophthalmology waiting times have been for each quarter of the last five years. [47866]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Average (median) waiting times for first out-patient appointment following general practitioner referral: ophthalmology

Year/quarter	*Median (weeks)*
1996–97	
4	8.24
1997–98	
1	8.19
2	8.39
3	8.24
4	8.46
1998–99	
1	8.64
2	9.12
3	9.10
4	9.62
1999–2000	
1	9.32
2	9.89
3	9.99
4	9.95

Average (median) waiting times for first out-patient appointment following general practitioner referral: ophthalmology

Year/quarter	*Median (weeks)*
2000–01	
1	9.08
2	9.58
3	9.39
4	9.39
2001–02	
1	8.53
2	8.90
3	8.90

Source:
DH QM08 form

Marfan Syndrome

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many post mortems revealed Marfan syndrome in each of the last 10 years for which records are available. [48843]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 17 April 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning how many post mortems revealed Marfan's syndrome in each of the last 10 years for which records are available. (44843)

The figures requested are given in the table below. The data are only available in this form from 1993 onwards.

Number of deaths where a post mortem was carried out and Marfan's syndrome was subsequently noted on the death certificate, England and Wales, calendar years 1993 to 2000[1,2]

	Number of deaths where Marfan's syndrome was:	
Calendar year	*The underlying cause of death*[3]	*Mentioned on the death certificate only*[4]
1993	12	3
1994	12	4
1995	20	4
1996	14	3
1997	15	5
1998	14	1
1999	13	2
2000	8	2

[1] Data relate to deaths occurring per calendar year.
[2] No inference can be made from these data as to whether Marfan's syndrome was diagnosed before or after death.
[3] The underlying cause of death is the disease or condition that initiates the train of morbid events leading directly to death.
[4] When a disease or condition was not the underlying cause of death but was noted on the death certificate but not coded to the underlying cause.

Psychiatric Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 811W, on ward refurbishment, which hospitals and institutions will have their psychiatric wards refurbished as a consequence of the dedicated budget established in 2001–02. [47443]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The £15 million total consists of two separate funding sources. £10 million additional funding for mental health was allocated to regions on a weighted capitation basis for the refurbishment/redecoration of psychiatric wards; updating information technology; the provision of alternatives to acute admissions; and voluntary sector support. Details of how this funding was allocated locally are not held centrally.

The remaining £5 million was the first tranche of a special budget of £30 million over two years and those NHS trusts which benefited from this are listed.

Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust (St. James Hospital)

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust (Fairmile Hospital)

Avon and Wiltshire Partnership Mental Health Trust (Barrow Hospital)[1]

East London and City Mental Health Trust (St. Clements)

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust (St. Anne's)

County Durham and Darlington Priority Services NHS Trust (the Gables and County Hospital, the Pierremont Unit)

Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust (St. Lukes, Middlesbrough)

Worcester Community and MH NHS Trust (Redditch, Bromsgrove, Worcester and Kidderminster)

Coventry Healthcare Trust (Caludon Centre)

Shropshire Community NHS Trust (Telford and Wrekin, Shrewsbury)

North Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust (Small Heath)

South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust (Queen Elizabeth Hospital)

Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Trust (Lister and QE2 Hospitals)[1]

Rotherham Priority Health Services NHS Trust (Rotherham)

Doncaster and South Humber Healthcare Trust (Scunthorpe)

North Sefton and West Lancashire Community NHS Trust (Ormskirk and District General)[1]

Tameside and Glossop Community and Priority Services NHS Trust (Wards 35–36)

St. Helen's and Knowsley Hospital NHS Trust (Whiston Hospital).

[1] Scheme spans more than one year and full allocation not spent in 2001–02.

Firework-related Injuries

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* steps are being taken and *(b)* investment is being made, to reduce firework-related injuries. [47841]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The comprehensive measures introduced by the Firework (Safety) Regulations 1997 and actively enforced by Trading Standards Departments are supplemented by robust and targeted safety campaigns to warn consumers of the dangers of misusing.

Prescriptions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of prescriptions were issued electronically in the last year. [46999]

Ms Blears: The proportion of prescriptions produced by computer and issued electronically by general practitioners in the last year was between 60 and 80 per cent. dependent on which health authority area the GP was situated.

Mixed-sex Wards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether newly constructed hospitals comprise *(a)* wards assigned solely to either male or female patients and *(b)* subdivided bays. [47839]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance on the requirements for new accommodation is given in Health Building Notes and Design Guides HBN 4 "In-patient accommodation—options for choice". The guidance provides national health service trusts with design solutions to meet the requirements of privacy, dignity and safety. Additional guidance on achieving single sex accommodation "Enhancing Privacy and Dignity" has been issued.

Out-patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients awaiting their first out-patient appointment have been waiting over six months. [47830]

Mr. Hutton: Information regarding the total stock of out-patient waiters is not collected. However, published out-patient activity statistics show that 5 per cent. of patients referred by general practitioners who were seen during the period October to December 2001 had been waiting longer than 26 weeks.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he expects primary care trusts to devolve control of budgets to practice level. [47865]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts (PCTs) may develop indicative budgets at practice or locality level to make explicit resource use within a PCT, encourage fairer more transparent allocation of resources and enable primary care to lever strategic change within local health communities.

Incentive schemes created in conjunction with the development of indicative budgets encourage general practitioners to understand and reflect on their current practice and innovate. PCTs in consultation with practices and through the development of a local health improvement and modernisation programme should develop and agree a commissioning plan for the PCT as a whole, reflecting the health needs of local communities. This two-way dialogue allows PCTs to secure services for their populations that general practitioners and other primary and community health professionals identify as being necessary. Work is in hand to scope how PCTs and practices could be supported to develop indicative budgets at practice level. This could be through developing a national framework or local models of good practice.

Learning Disabilities

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of village communities for people with learning disabilities. [47503]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy on services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers is set out in the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" published in March 2001. This was supplemented by guidance to local authorities and the national health service in August 2001.

Our objective for housing is to enable people with learning disabilities and their families to have greater choice and control over where and how they live. People with learning disabilities can live successfully in different types of housing including small-scale ordinary housing, supported living and village and residential communities as well as residential care. We expect local authorities to ensure that all housing options are considered when they are exploring the future housing, care and support needs of people with learning disabilities and their families.

Councils should respect the preferences of individuals and their families, wherever the preferred options will meet individuals' assessed needs and are affordable. Where there is limited demand for a particular option, councils and housing authorities may need to consider joining with neighbouring authorities to encourage the development of a greater range of provision.

Learning disability partnership boards have been set up in each local authority area to oversee and advise on implementation of the Valuing People programme. Boards have been asked to produce local housing strategies for people with learning disabilities by winter 2002–03. The Department and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions will issue shortly guidance about this for learning disability partnership boards.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure on the NHS was as a proportion of the GDP of England in the last 12 months; and to what extent he collates information about NHS expenditure in Scotland as a percentage of Scottish GDP in order to assess his progress towards meeting his targets. [46917]

Mr. Hutton: The gross domestic product (GDP) for England is not yet available for 2001–02. The latest available GDP for England is for 1999 and is published by the Office of National Statistics in 'Regional Trends' which is available in the Library. Figures for later years are available on a United Kingdom basis only.

The Government's target for health care investment is for the whole of the United Kingdom. NHS expenditure in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is therefore collected by the Department in order to calculate total national health service expenditure in the United Kingdom.

Planned NHS expenditure in the United Kingdom for 2001–02 was 6.3 per cent. of GDP. This means that total healthcare expenditure, including private healthcare, as a percentage of GDP last year was 7.3 per cent. rising to 7.6 per cent. by 2003–04 based on latest expenditure plans.

Woodside Adolescent Unit

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed closure of the Woodside Adolescent Unit at West Park Epsom. [47498]

Ms Blears: The changing need for child and adolescent mental health services is expected to render the in-patient service at Woodside Unit unviable, in its current form, from April 2003.

Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust is continuing to work with the health authority and local primary care trusts to explore options for the reprovision of services, retaining locally accessible services where possible. This will be linked to continuing work to develop local care models with alternatives to hospital admission.

Drugs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what drugs approved by NICE are unavailable nationwide; and if he will make a statement; [48669]

(2) what regulations apply to *(a)* local community care trusts, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* hospital trusts regarding the prescription of drugs accepted by NICE; and if he will make a statement; [48670]

(3) what powers doctors possess to prescribe drugs in contravention of local authority policy; and if he will make a statement. [48671]

Ms Blears: Health authorities and primary care trusts are under a statutory obligation set out in Directions to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). The Directions were made using powers in the National Health Service Act 1977 and came into force on 1 January 2002. The Directions were introduced as part of the Government's strategy to ensure consistency of access to treatments recommended by NICE and deemed appropriate by clinicians for their individual patients. Funding is provided in baseline allocations to meet these commitments.

Brain Injury

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of its research budget is allocated for research into traumatic brain injury rehabilitation. [48812]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC supports a large amount of basic underpinning work on how the brain responds to injury of all types and on neural regeneration, which will inform research on rehabilitation after traumatic head injury. The MRC's expenditure specifically on rehabilitation after traumatic head injury (i.e. excluding the underpinning work) was £835,000 in 2001–02.

The Department commissions research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department has directly funded projects relating to brain and head injury, some of which are on rehabilitation, with total estimated expenditure of about £125,000 for 2001–02. The Department funded a major project on rehabilitation of brain injured adults, which was completed in 1997, at a total cost of approximately £1.2 million.

In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support for research commissioned by charities and the MRC that takes place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported in this way is devolved, and expenditure at project level is not held centrally.

Details of ongoing and recently completed research projects taking place in, funded by, or of interest to, the national health service are available on the National Research Register (NRR) at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm. The NRR shows that there are considerable number of research related to brain and head injury.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the publication of NICE guidelines on the handling of brain-injured patients; whether the guidelines will include long-term rehabilitation issues; and if he will make a statement. [48824]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence provisional publication date for their Head Injury Guideline is February 2003. I understand that the guideline will not address the rehabilitation or long term care of patients with a head injury, but the guideline will provide criteria for the early identification of patients who will benefit from rehabilitation.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the proposed National Service Framework for long-term conditions will include those arising from head injury; and what interim action will be taken to improve rehabilitation services before publication of that framework. [48814]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers will decide the scope of the National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions shortly. The Government's response to the Health Select Committee third report, "Head Injury: Rehabilitation", states that the NSF is expected to set standards for the care and treatment of people with long-term conditions, including head injury. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is producing a clinical guideline for the initial assessment, management and first referral of patients with head injury, which is likely to inform the development of standards for the NSF.

In the meanwhile we will continue to work with the voluntary and professional organisations to identify and consider how to address shortfalls in rehabilitation services for people with head injury.

NHS Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1289W, on assaults on NHS staff, when he expects to complete the analysis of the reported violent incidents on NHS staff; when he expects to publish the report; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [50079]

Mr. Hutton: The analysis of data collected on the levels of reported violent incidents, together with data on the levels of reported accidents and sickness absence should be complete by the end of May and a copy placed in the Library.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 172W, on nursing care, when he expects to publish the core contract; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [50075]

Jacqui Smith: The model contract was issued to the national health service on 8 March. A copy is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/freenursingcare.htm. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

No Secrets Guidance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 941W, regarding no secrets guidance, when he expects the Centre for Policy on Ageing to conclude its analysis; and if he will put this document in the Library. [50500]

Jacqui Smith: We expect that the Centre for Policy on Ageing is to conclude its analysis by the beginning of July 2002 and it will be placed in the Library. At that time we will consider what good practice issues have emerged and decide whether some dissemination of the findings would be beneficial.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on contracting with the private sector to undertake functions of NHS Professionals; and if he will make a statement. [39682]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* The aim is that NHS Professionals will be used by all NHS organisations as the primary supplier of all temporary staffing requirements for the NHS with, as and when necessary, contracts agreed with commercial agencies to meet any surplus demand.

Plans are currently being developed regarding the undertaking of framework agreements across regional and national boundaries for a number of staff groups.

Hospital Repairs

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the hospital repairs backlog is; and what his estimate is of the cost of eliminating it. [46110]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The NHS Plan made clear our objectives of improving the patient environment and announces further significant investment in the national health service estate.

The currently available figure (2000–01) for the total backlog maintenance cost to bring NHS Trust property in England up to an acceptable condition is £3.16 billion.

The cost required to eliminate this backlog depends on a number of factors, including the extent to which major capital investment and disposals of property impact upon the amount of additional capital required. Since investment plans are currently under review it is not possible to provide a cost for the elimination of backlog costs at this point in time.

Health and Safety

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS estate is compliant with health and safety requirements. [46117]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* In 1999, we set targets for the reduction in health and safety backlog within national health service trusts in England one of which required health and safety backlog costs to be reduced by 90 per cent. by 31 March 2002. In addition, we planned to invest £7 billion in the NHS estate to bring the quality and safety of NHS buildings up to acceptable levels.

We have an ongoing monitoring and performance programme to support the NHS in delivering these targets. The speed at which NHS trusts are meeting these targets depends on a number of factors, including the pace of investment and disposals, and figures are constantly changing.

Health Services (Barnet)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of out of hours health services in *(a)* Barnet and *(b)* Hendon. [45828]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* General practitioner (GP) out of hours services are provided in Barnet and Hendon by three GP co-operatives and by two commercial deputising services. Out of hours health services are also provided by NHS Direct and by local accident and emergency departments, as well as by the urgent treatment centre at Edgware hospital.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the capacity and *(b)* the performance of London Ambulance Service answering 999 calls in Barnet at night; and if he will make a statement. [45819]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The borough of Barnet is principally served by three London Ambulance Service (LAS) stations—Friern Barnet, Barnet and Mill Hill. The LAS will always send the nearest available ambulance to every call, so resources based at these stations will sometimes also be supported by vehicles from other areas.

Between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am the LAS always plans to have at least four ambulances covering the area—one each running out of Barnet and Friern Barnet and two from Mill Hill. Three other ambulances are also operated until the early hours, finishing between midnight and 2 am. As well as these and ambulances based in other local boroughs, the service also runs an extra ambulance, deployed by Central Ambulance Control, to provide additional operational cover where it is most needed in any area of the LAS north-west sector.

During the month of February LAS performance in Barnet between 11 pm and 7 am was above the London average for LAS performance.

Efficiency Gains

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what, in equivalent percentage terms, the

efficiency and other value for money gains in the operation of his Department were in *(a)* 1999–2000, (b)2000–01 and (c) 2001–02. [45724]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested, as direct comparisons in percentage terms would not be meaningful. Since 1999, the Department's work has altered significantly in the light of the changes set out in the NHS Plan and a subsequent review of the Department's operation.

Over the period in question, the Department has made the savings necessary to deliver its business plan within the running costs limits agreed in the comprehensive spending review. The Department's activities have been refocused on delivery of the NHS Plan. In addition, efficiency savings have been achieved through improved purchasing procedures to deliver improvements in value for money, improved project management, and reviewing accommodation use to improve the utilisation of space.

Contractor Fraud

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list over the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02 the savings that were made on action on contractor fraud broken down by *(a)* cash recoveries and *(b)* prevention savings. [45722]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The answer is set out in the tables:

Pharmaceutical contractor fraud outputs—Prevention[1]

	£
December 1998 to March 1999[2]	52,882
April 1999 to March 2000	2,103,119
April 2000 to March 2001	3,189,111
April 2001 to March 2002	3,972,342
Total	9,317,454

Pharmaceutical contractor fraud outputs—Recoveries

	£
December 1998 to March 2000	[3]2,251,815
April 2000 to March 2001	3,097,676
April 2001 to February 2002[4]	2,130,260
Total	7,479,751

[1] Figures relate to the prevention of continuing fraud.
[2] Progress tracked since December 1998 when PSA targets on pharmaceutical contractor fraud for the period to the end of 2001–02 were published.
[3] Figure relates to all recoveries December 1998 to March 2000.
[4] Recovery figures for March 2002 not yet available.

NHS Targets

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts as to their ability to achieve NHS Plan and NSF targets in 2002–03. [45930]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The annual planning cycle provides opportunity for dialogue between the national health service and the Department in relation to delivery of priorities, financial pressures and the management of risk. The process of agreeing service and financial frameworks involves a round of negotiations through which we aim to agree, in aggregate terms, a plan for the NHS to maximise performance while identifying the contribution of individual health systems.

From April 2002 onwards the responsibility for performance management of the NHS is being devolved to 28 new strategic health authorities (StHAs). Chief executives of the new StHAs will be accountable for delivery of national priorities as part of 3-year franchise agreements. StHAs will hold the ring for NHS organisations in their respective patches and need to ensure that the commitments to which they will be held to account for delivering are achievable.

Invoice Payment

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of undisputed invoices were paid by his Department within 30 days or the agreed contracted terms otherwise specified in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [45725]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The number and proportion of bills paid within 30 days by the Department were as follows.

	On Time		*Late*		
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Total*
2001–02 (to Feb)	324,006	96.24	12,666	3.76	336,672
2000–01	324,566	96.08	13,233	3.92	337,799
1999–2000	374,413	95.83	16,297	4.17	390,710
1998–99	374,787	94.5	21,646	5.5	396,433
1997–98	n/a	95.3	n/a	4.7	n/a

n/a – not available

NHS Direct

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the annual cost of providing NHS Direct over the last two years for which figures are available. [46719]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The table states the costs incurred in 2000–01 on a cash basis, and an estimate for the cash outturn for 2001–02 for comparative ease. The actual outturns have not been finalised yet.

The costs include the full running costs of all NHS Direct activity, all set-up costs for establishing the call centre environment, developing and setting up new

projects, the development and maintenance of the national clinical decision support system, and costs incurred centrally.

	£ million
2000/01	90.1
2001–02[1]	110.9

[1] Estimate

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been received from callers to NHS Direct about the service they received. [46716]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In the Financial Year 2000–01, 148 written complaints were received about NHS Direct in England. This equates to one complaint in over 20,000 calls made to NHS Direct. Details of all written complaints can be found on the Department website: www.doh.gov.uk/nhscomplaints.

National surveys conducted between December 1998 and January 2001 have consistently shown caller satisfaction levels between 90 and 97 per cent. This compares well with performance in private sector call centres and with similar services within the National Health Service despite the particularly demanding nature of NHS Direct's work.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls NHS Direct received between 24 December 2001 and 3 January. [46701]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Between 24 December 2001 and 3 January 2002, NHS Direct handled 205,000 calls, 20 per cent. more calls than the same period in 2000–01.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls NHS Direct received in each of the last two years for which figures are available. [46699]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Between 2000–01 and 2001–02, calls handled by NHS Direct increased by over 50 per cent. In the 2000–01 financial year, NHS Direct handled around 3,400,000 calls. In 2001–02, NHS Direct handled around 5,270,000 calls.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS Direct nurses came from *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* accident and emergency departments. [43551]

Mr. Hutton: Specific information, such as the previous employment of NHS Direct nurses, is not collected centrally.

Hospital Patients

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many routine NHS patients were treated in English NHS hospitals in the last quarter of *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 1997. [46708]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number of elective admissions to National Health Service hospitals from October to December 1997 was 1,236,609. The figures are not yet available for 2001, but for the same period in 2000 there were 1,352,035 elective admissions.

Edgware Urgent Treatment Centre

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact the proposed overnight closure of Edgware UTC will have on *(a)* public confidence and support for the NHS in Hendon and *(b)* the willingness of the public to participate in NHS consultations and as lay representatives on consultative bodies; and if he will make a statement; [46879]

(2) what assessment he has made of the outcome of the public consultation exercise over the proposed night-time closure of Edgware Hospital UTC, indicating *(a)* the number of responses, *(b)* those supporting the closure and *(c)* those opposing the closure; and if he will make a statement. [45824]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 25 March and 10 April 2002]:* In the light of the representations received, I have asked that the decision to close the overnight service at Edgware UTC be reviewed by the newly formed North Central London Strategic Health Authority.

The review will be conducted in discussion with local stakeholders about how the best interests of patients and the NHS locally can be met.

Pending the outcome of this review and Ministers' decisions, the UTC night time service will be maintained.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of people attending the Edgware Hospital UTC and walk-in centre *(a)* in total and *(b)* between 10 pm and 7 am who are not registered with a GP; and if he will make a statement. [45825]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* We do not collect information on patients not registered with general practitioners. The national health service walk-in centres are not open between 10 pm and 7 am. On average, around 10 patients a night attend the urgent treatment centre after 10 pm.

Agencies (Maladministration)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments have been made to individuals following findings of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department in the last 12 months; and what plans he has to review the powers to increase the level of awards that can be made in the last 12 months. [47980]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There have been three payments totalling £33,100 for findings of maladministration made by the Department's agencies in the last 12 months. The judgments were all made by the pensions ombudsman.

We have no plans to review the agency chief executives' delegations, which give them the powers to incur expenditure in this area. The pensions ombudsman's awards are binding and only subject to the Court of Appeal on a point of law. We have no powers to increase these awards.

NHS Estate

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the value of the NHS Estate is less than 15-years-old. [47824]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The current available percentage of the national health service estate, by value, that is less than 15-years-old, as established by the Valuation Office Agency in their survey carried out in the year 2000, is 11.5 per cent.

Implementation of the planned capital investment in the NHS of around £7 billion by 2010 should see the achievement of the NHS Plan target of 40 per cent. of the NHS Estate, by value, being less than 15-years-old by the year 2010.

Elective Surgery

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals in England and Wales regularly use their operating theatres for elective surgery over weekends. [47454]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Figures on the numbers of national health service trusts who use their operating theatres at the weekend are not collected centrally for England. Information relating to health services in Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Drugs (Theft)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, on drugs theft, what the cost to the NHS has been of damage to property due to theft and fraud in each year since 1997. [47536]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Figures on the cost to the NHS of damage to property due to theft and fraud are shown in the table.

Year	*£000*
1997–98	1,662
1998–99	1,204
1999–2000	1,270
2000–01	1,383

Internal Fraud Investigators

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many internal fraud investigators his Department employs; and what plans he has to increase this number. [47555]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department has recently expanded the remit of the national health service counter fraud service to cover internal fraud within the Department. The number of staff needed to carry out this work is under consideration.

Patient Consultations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 938W, on patient consultations, what plans he has for a GP work load survey to be conducted by his Department to measure GP average consultation times. [47535]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Previous surveys have been conducted jointly by the English, Welsh and Scottish Health Departments and the British Medical Association. A further joint work load survey is planned once the new GP contract has been agreed.

Hospital Cleaning Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department holds a central list of recommended cleaning contracting companies that local health authorities work from when awarding hospital cleaning contracts. [47548]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department does not hold such a list. Contract cleaning services are procured by NHS trusts against the new national cleaning standards. Trusts will procure this service through advertisements placed in the *European Journal*. Health authorities are not involved in awarding contracts for cleaning NHS hospitals, only for their own administrative premises. A trust will award contracts on best value, taking into account operational and economic issues.

Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the London Regional Office will conclude its review of the Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust in respect of its management of in-patient waiting lists; and if he will publish the findings. [32665]

Mr. Hutton *[pursuant to his reply, 12 February 2002, c.334W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows.

Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust validates both its active and suspended list on a regular basis and is confident that their waiting lists are robust and accurate. A further validation was carried out by the trust themselves as a result of being identified as having a suspension rate greater than 10 per cent. Epsom and St. Helier was not identified as having adjusted inappropriately their waiting list figures.

The regional office conducts robust validation of waiting list data from trusts and health authorities including following up any irregularities. The regional office does not consider that there is any reason to review waiting list information at Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust. In the light of the National Audit Office report on 'Inappropriate Adjustment to NHS Waiting Lists' the Department of Health has asked the Audit Commission to introduce spot check of individual trust's waiting list and waiting time information during 2002. Details are still being finalised, but the work is scheduled to begin early in the new financial year.

Long-term Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 817W, on long-term care, what is the maximum length of time which payment of proceeds arising from the sale of a house can be deferred after entrance into residential care. [47130]

Jacqui Smith: The deferred payments scheme does not have any time limit that is set for a property to be sold. During their stay in residential accommodation the resident is the only person who can end the deferred payment. If a resident passes away then the deferred payment agreement is terminated, but their estate is not obliged to pay the amount owed to the council for a further 57 days.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 April 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the provision of a catering service for the British Library by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49670]

(2) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Corporate Bibliographic Service for the British Library by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative; [49663]

(3) what estimate she has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Pembroke Lodge for the Royal Parks Agency by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49664]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Yeovil (David Laws), of 20 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 741, and also to my letter to him of 18 November 2001, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49106]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49148]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council yesterday *Official Report,* column 929W.

"Pride of Place"

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of the publication of the Arts Council's publication "Pride of Place" was. [48875]

Dr. Howells: "Pride of Place" cost the Arts Council £78,000. I understand that this figure includes authors' fees, photography, production of the accompanying CD, design and print. The Arts Council have produced 7500 copies of the report in partnership with the media company August at a cover price of £12. Complimentary copies have been offered to all the projects who received an award under the first capital programme.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 574–76W, on statutory instruments, what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of each of the statutory instruments listed. [50325]

Mr. Caborn: Of the statutory instruments listed, a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) was published for the Regulatory Reform (Special Occasions Licensing) Order 2001. Copies were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 28 June 2001. The text can also be viewed on the following website at: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/act/made2.htm#Special as Annex C to the Explanatory Document.

RIAs were not required for the other statutory instruments and an assessment of the cost effectiveness of each could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

National Lottery Distribution

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average amount of Lottery money awarded to constituencies was in the last 12 months. [50592]

Mr. Caborn: According to the National Lottery database, which is based upon the data provided to us by the Lottery distributers, the average amount awarded to UK constituencies is currently around £15.2 million. This includes large-scale projects of national and international significance. The median level awarded to constituencies is £7.1 million to date.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and the areas which it is used in; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50476]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* My Department does not currently make any use of smart card technology.

Smart cards are used in a number of the areas for which my Department has responsibility as membership cards and payment cards among other things. My Department has also been involved in the establishment of the Connexions Card, a DfES initiative, which provides a range of services for 16 to 19-year-olds in England.

Any plans which my Department may develop in the future will obviously take account of the smart card framework developed by the Office of the e-Envoy.

I have not had any discussions with private companies about the use of smart card technology within my Department.

ITV Digital

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on

the discussions she has had with football authorities on the impact on Nationwide League football clubs of ITV Digital's entry into administration. [50675]

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the football authorities on the financial impact on Nationwide Football League clubs of ITV Digital's entry into administration. [R] [50846]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have stayed in close touch with both the Nationwide League and ITV Digital throughout the negotiations. We met the League's chairman, Keith Harris, and chief executive, David Burns, yesterday evening (17 April).

PPS 17

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what involvement her Department and Sport England have had in the redrafting of PPS17. [50979]

Mr. Caborn: Both Sport England and my Department have been extensively involved in the redrafting of Planning Policy Statement 17 (PPS 17). PPS 17 is one of the key mechanisms by which my Department and sports organisations are able to influence planning for sport and recreation, including the introduction of further measures to protect playing fields. The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions will issue the guidance.

Sports Facilities

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to include private sector and schools facilities in the forthcoming national audit of sports facilities in the UK. [50980]

Mr. Caborn: Information on sports facilities in England is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important. My Department is continuing discussions with Sport England on the scope, content and cost of the proposed database and how the project will be taken forward.

Football

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she has made of the economic contribution of Football League football clubs to the *(a)* local and *(b)* English economy; [50667]

(2) what assessment she has made of the financial impact on football clubs playing in the Football League of ITV Digital's entry into administration. [50665]

Mr. Caborn: The 72 Nationwide Football League clubs play significant roles in local economies, both directly by providing employment and indirectly by providing opportunities for local businesses. Collectively, the Nationwide League also adds significantly to football's contribution to the national economy. These wider economic benefits cannot be quantified, but should be considered alongside football's substantial non-financial contribution to society.

The Nationwide League is discussing the future of its broadcasting contract with the Administrators of ITV Digital. While these negotiations continue, it is not possible accurately to forecast the possible financial effects on the League's clubs.

National Stadium

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether she will have received, analysed and based a decision on the advice identified as being necessary to address the four issues to which she referred in her statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 292, by 30 April; [51082]

(2) pursuant to her oral statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 292, on the National Stadium, if she will make a statement on the four points to be addressed by the FA and WNSL, with special reference to a decision to build the stadium at *(a)* Wembley and *(b)* Birmingham; and what deadline she has imposed for receiving answers on the four points. [50929]

Tessa Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 309W.

School Sport (Bristol)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on the provision of sports in schools in Bristol; [51076]

(2) how many letters Ministers in her Department and officials have received about the provision of sports facilities at Cotham School, Bristol. [51075]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has received 50 letters about the provision of sports facilities at Cotham School. Bristol City area recently received a provisional allocation of just under £4.5 million from the New Opportunities PE and Sport Programme. It is for the local education authority, working with partners and schools, to determine the priorities for this funding in Bristol, based on its assessment of greatest need. The New Opportunities Fund will be assessing the strategies and initial portfolio of projects submitted to it by the LEA to ensure they are based on local consultation and evidence of local need.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date she *(a)* received the first report from the Digital Television Action Plan project and *(b)* will publish it. [51070]

Dr. Howells: I receive regular reports on progress by Government and digital television stakeholders in delivering the tasks set out in the Digital Television Action Plan. With Douglas Alexander, I chaired the first quarterly meeting of the Digital Television Steering Board on 10 April. This meeting reviewed progress to the end of March, and

considered future developments. An updated version of the Action Plan recording progress will be available on the digital television website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk shortly.

PRIVY COUNCIL

"Continuing the Reform"

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when he will respond to the report from the Public Administration Select Committee, 'Continuing the Reform'; and if he will make a statement. [50862]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government have today sent a memorandum to the Public Administration Select Committee with an interim response to their report 'The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform'.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which of the services of her Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services Initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [50321]

Clare Short: Four out of seven service functions have been reviewed as part of our BQS programme. The remainder, for accounts, internal audit and office services, are expected to be reviewed during 2002–03. The timing and scope of future BQS work are currently under consideration.

Reproductive Health

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the impact of the withdrawal of United States funds for reproductive health services in the developing world; and what steps have been taken to make up any shortfall. [48998]

Clare Short: Despite the decision of the US to withhold funds from certain organisations, the US remains a major source of support for services aimed at improving reproductive health.

Sexual and reproductive health care in developing countries continues to be a key priority for my Department. Achieving universal access to reproductive health for all by 2015 underpins our approach. Good reproductive health is of course also vital to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to lowering maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS. We are working in partnership with national Governments and key organisations to strengthen the capacity of health systems to deliver good reproductive health care and services.

My Department's total bilateral expenditure on sexual and reproductive health activities, including HIV/AIDS, has risen from £38.4 million in the financial year 1997–98 to £206.6 million in 2001–02. We also provide significant levels of funding to UNFPA, UNAIDS and WHO to support their work to improve the quantity and availability of reproductive health services.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development under the Global Health Fund for fighting AIDS, what role the provision of comprehensive reproductive health services will play. [48996]

Clare Short: The Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria will consider applications against the principles, scope and purpose laid out in its framework documents, which can be found at www.globalfundatm.org.

The UK believes the fund should support applications for funding for reproductive health services only where these are clearly focused on preventing or treating one or more of the three diseases. It will be important for the fund to focus on supporting interventions where global financing will be most effective and where it can add most value to existing national and international efforts. Other channels of support will be more appropriate for wider efforts against the three diseases and for support to reproductive health services more broadly.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the adequacy of supplies of condoms in fighting AIDS in the developing world; and what steps are being taken to improve the supply. [48999]

Clare Short: Ensuring the accessibility of affordable condoms is a key priority for my Department. The UK is one of the leading bilateral providers of condoms and other forms of contraceptives in developing countries. We are also supporting a number of condom social marketing programmes which aim to make condoms accessible and affordable to the poorest. It is important that efforts meet the current and increasing need for condoms and to promote demand for condom use.

We are working closely with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to help them develop a global strategy to help governments strengthen their capacity, to ensure that by 2015 all primary health care and family planning facilities are able to provide the widest achievable range of safe and effective family planning and contraceptive methods, including condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS.

In January 2001, we provided UNFPA with a grant of £25 million to help meet immediate needs for reproductive health commodities, including condoms, in a range of countries facing shortages.

Iraqi Refugees

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving UNHCR for anticipating the arrival of refugees from Iraq to Iran. [48728]

Clare Short: We are not currently providing any support to UNHCR for this purpose. No appeal has been launched by the UNHCR. We will give consideration to any appeal as and when one is launched.

Afghanistan

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the flow of refugees out of Afghanistan into Pakistan; in which areas this is occurring and at what

level; what the reasons for this are; and what is being done by the international community to counteract this. [49004]

Clare Short: While voluntary returns to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran continue to gather momentum, some Afghans continue to leave their country. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that approximately 40,000 Afghans are gathered in the Killi Faizo transit camp at the Chaman border crossing between Balochistan Province in Pakistan and Kandahar Province in Southern Afghanistan. Many of the group have been in the area since late February 2002. The majority of Afghans at Chaman are fleeing the effects of drought, while others are ethnic Pushtuns claiming to have been targeted by bandits or other armed groups in the north of Afghanistan, where they are a minority group. UNHCR are in discussions with the Pakistani authorities to urge them to allow those seeking refuge and assistance to be registered and transferred to existing refugee camps in Pakistan. At the same time, UNHCR and its partners are working to improve conditions—including water and sanitation and health facilities—in the waiting area; and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) are carrying out distribution of emergency food supplies.

Pakistan

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action is being taken by the Government of Pakistan and representatives of the international community to address tensions between local residents and refugees in the Balochistan area of Pakistan. [49005]

Clare Short: Balochisan has suffered a prolonged drought and refugee crisis. The Government of Pakistan and international donor are working to alleviate both aspects of this crisis.

The UK has provided support to both refugees and host communities. UN agencies are assisting with the voluntary repatriation of refugees, and are currently considering packages of assistance to help Balochistan and NWFP with the post-refugee rehabilitation effort. The Asian Development bank and the World bank have provided assistance to alleviate the impact of the drought, and the World Food Programme has just launched an appeal for Balochistan.

Overseas Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Technical Co-operation Training Services: India 1999–2000 project in India. [49178]

Clare Short: Between 1999 and 2000, individual programmes under the Technical Co-operation Training (TCT) Programme in India were evaluated following DFID's normal project review procedures, including assessments of the overall performance of each programme. DFID and the Government of India jointly undertook the last review of the India Technical Co-operation Training Programme in November 1997. This focused on public administration training and addressed impact as well as value for money issues.

Based on the review and individual programme assessments, it was agreed with the Government of India that the TCT Programme should be phased out by March 2002 on the grounds that it was not sufficiently poverty focused. We have since agreed with the Government of India to provide more strategic capacity-building support for government initiatives aimed at improving public policies and services. Such support would fit well with the Government of India's recognition that fundamental improvements in governance are a pre-requisite to effective poverty eradication.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Support for the Environment and Management Project in Egypt; [49168]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Project Co-ordinator Support for Environmental Assessment and Management Project Phase 2 in Egypt. [49184]

Clare Short: The Support for the Environment and Management Project (SEAM) project, which will continue until spring 2004, aims to improve environmental planning and services for the poor in Egypt. A full economic and financial justification was prepared for the project prior to the second phase of the project being approved in 1999. Since then the project has been monitored on a regular basis with the next Review planned for May 2002.

Reviews to date have shown that the project is having a significant impact.

Methodologies for environmental planning piloted under the project have been adopted as the model at a national level in Egypt. Focusing on community participation the project has also enabled cost effective environmental services such as solid waste management to be developed that respond directly to the needs of poor people.

The performance of the Project Co-ordinator on the Support for the Environment and Management Project (SEAM) is regularly monitored and assessed as part of the regular reviews of the whole SEAM project. He has played a key role in ensuring the positive impact of the project to date.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Public Administration Institutional Development Project in the west bank and Gaza. [49198]

Clare Short: The Public Administration Institutional Development project began in February 2000. Activities were put on hold in December 2000 following the outbreak of the intifada. An inception phase had been successfully completed. The environment since has not been conducive to progressing towards the project's objectives. We will explore ways to recommence activities once the circumstances permit.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the long-term interim technical assistance to Centenary Rural Development Bank in Uganda. [49176]

Clare Short: An independent project review of DFID's support to the Centenary Rural Development Bank was undertaken in August 2001. It reported that the bank had achieved all the goals set out in the project in terms of business growth (loans outstanding; value of deposits; reduced arrears). Outreach to rural areas had also increased through additional branches, and a positive relationship established between growth of the private sector through prudent lending and a reduction in poverty.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the community forestry development project Phase II in Cameroon. [49206]

Clare Short: The community forestry development project phase two (CFDP II) has been monitored regularly by DFID and the Government of Cameroon against its objective of supporting community based forest resource planning and management. Studies have shown that community forestry provides significantly higher benefits to local communities than existing systems.

Recent reviews have concluded that the project has been instrumental in helping establish the legal basis for communities to manage their forests, and in making the community forestry process more accessible. The project has also provided training for the Ministry of Environment and Forest and helped integrate community forestry training into the curriculum at the university of Dschang.

Part of the project completion work, to be undertaken prior to the end of the project (December 2002), will be to conduct a formal cost-benefit analysis of project inputs.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Support to Rural Feeder Roads Project in Ghana. [49192]

Clare Short: My Department's support for feeder roads in Ghana commenced in December 1999 and a review of the project is scheduled to be undertaken in mid-May. Implementation of the physical works of the project has only recently commenced and was delayed while a new Roads Prioritisation method for Ghana's feeder roads was developed. This method involves full community participation and takes into account both social and economic factors leading to a cost-benefit analysis of the roads being considered for construction and repair under this project.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Shapla: Organisation and Management, Human Resource and Hospital Management projects in Bangladesh. [49172]

Clare Short: There are three components of our support for the Government of Bangladesh's health sector reforms. They are subject to on-going monitoring by our Bangladesh office and have in addition had two independent external reviews, one in May 2000 and one in May 2001. The costs of the inputs are highly competitive and the standard of work is consistently high. DFID is thus satisfied that they are achieving good value for money and have produced demonstrable results, despite the high-risk nature of this kind of work.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Agricultural Service Innovation and Reform Project in Bangladesh. [49174]

Clare Short: This project is intended to re-orientate agricultural extension services to better meet the expressed needs of farmers. It started in July 1999. In addition to regular monitoring by DFID, biannual Joint Supervision Missions with the World bank and the Government of Bangladesh have taken place throughout the project. The most recent review was undertaken in November 2001.

The main findings of the November 2001 review noted that substantial progress had been made and institutional strengthening activities have improved management structures and procedures. DFID has, in addition, recently conducted a detailed review of project financing, inputs and expenditures as part of the preparation for an 18-month extension.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the Strengthening and Modernising Value Added Tax Administration Project in Bangladesh. [49164]

Clare Short: The objective of this project is to contribute to increasing VAT income by helping the Government of Bangladesh to establish a more effective VAT system. The project commenced in November 1999.

In addition to close monitoring by the DFID office in Bangladesh, it is subject to annual review, the last of which was carried out in January 2002. The review carried out a detailed review of project financing and expenditures and concluded that the project has made excellent progress in its first two years. Although many activities are still on-going it is reasonable to predict that the project purpose is likely to be substantially achieved.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the construction of Bhairab bridge Phase 2 project in Bangladesh. [49190]

Clare Short: This project supports the construction of a major crossing at Bhairab, over the river Meghna on the main road between Dhaka and Sylhet. The bridge will replace the existing ferry crossing, which currently acts as a major constraint in the efficient transport of goods to and from the north-east and the rest of the country. DFID funding of a total of £21 million out of a total expected cost of the bridge of £71 million, including the cost of land purchase and resettlement of project affected persons.

At the mid-term review of the project carried out in May 2001, it was confirmed that the objectives of the project were expected to be achieved and construction will be completed by mid-September 2002, compared to a completion date set at the commencement of the project of 4 August 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the value for money achieved by the fourth fisheries project in Bangladesh. [49181]

Clare Short: This project is jointly funded with the World bank with the objective of supporting sustainable and equitable growth in the benefits generated from increased fish and shrimp production. It started in September 1999. In addition to monitoring by DFID, biannual joint review missions have taken place with the World bank and the Government of Bangladesh. The most recent review was undertaken in November 2001. This review noted that there have been significant achievements in project implementation, with 93 per cent. of a target of villages and beneficiaries having so far been reached.

The report concluded that the project would largely achieve its overall objectives but continues to face significant challenges. It is too early to revisit the issue of cost-effectiveness but this will be addressed in a major review to be undertaken in May 2003.

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49119]

Clare Short: DFID staff are not encouraged to work long hours and every effort is made to avoid overtime working and to help staff balance work and private life. No member of staff has been asked to opt out of the limits prescribed by the working time regulations.

Where overtime working is unavoidable, staff generally have the choice of overtime payments or time off in lieu. Overtime payments vary according to when overtime is worked and the grade of the staff concerned—payments are normally at plain time, time and a half or double time, depending on the circumstances and whether staff wish to take time off in lieu. The rules are complex and we are currently in the process of simplifying them. Two groups of staff are presently not entitled to overtime payments—senior civil servants and staff in Band A1 (equivalent to Senior Principal). We propose to review overtime entitlements for Band A staff by March 2003.

Smart Card Technology

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the use of smart card technology in her Department and in the areas for which it is responsible; and what discussions she has had with private companies about the use of smart card technology within her Department. [50472]

Clare Short: My officials keep under constant review the progress with smart card technology and in early 2001 they held extensive discussions with a range of private companies in preparation for introducing appropriate systems to our office. We installed and commissioned a fast lane smart card system in November 2001 in our 1 Palace street office and will be utilising the same technology following an upgrade of our Abercrombie House office in East Kilbride, which will commence later this year.

We keep under review expansion of our systems to take advantage of the potential benefits that smart card technology can bring.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Berlin Embassy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Berlin Embassy by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49659]

Mr. MacShane: The PFI contract for the construction of the Berlin Embassy delivered a cost saving of £1.2 million over the public sector comparator.

Gibraltar

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last requested the Spanish Government to produce evidence of smuggling between Gibraltar and Spain; what evidence was supplied by the Spanish authorities; and what assessment he made of the Spanish evidence. [49984]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), the Minister for Europe, to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 633W.

Afghanistan

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being given to the Afghan interim administration in halting the drugs trade. [50514]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has taken the lead in co-ordinating international efforts to assist the Afghan Interim Administration to tackle drugs. Sustainable drug control in Afghanistan will require a range of measures, including the creation of alternative legal livelihoods, the reconstruction of infrastructure and the establishment of effective law enforcement and good governance. We have also been working with the interim administration to implement the decree banning opium production issued by Chairman Karzai on 3 April. We have been encouraging other members of the international community to provide similar support.

Israel

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authorities to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention and the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 governing wartime and occupation. [48951]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* We support the ICRC's call for all parties to respect international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. We have made clear to the Israeli Government that we expect medical and humanitarian organisations and Consular staff to have uninterrupted access to those in need. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stressed our concerns to Israeli Foreign Minister Peres in a telephone call on 10 April. We have called

for an immediate and full Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian towns in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1402.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government to uphold the terms of the Geneva Convention with reference to *(a)* attacking civilian populations and *(b)* destroying objects indispensable to their survival. [48950]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer of 15 April 2002]:* We have grave concerns for the safety of civilians and about the destruction of property and infrastructure in the Occupied Territories. We have called repeatedly on the Israeli authorities to comply with the terms of the Geneva Convention and to take all necessary precautions to spare civilians and civilian property.

Kosovo

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Kosovo. [50588]

Mr. MacShane: Much progress has been made since the elections to a Kosovo Assembly took place on 17 November 2001. On 4 March 2002, Kosovo's first freely-elected and multi-ethnic provisional self-government was formed and Dr. Irahim Rugova was elected President of Kosovo. The majority of governmental functions are being transferred from the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to the government, with the exception of powers reserved under the terms of the 2001 Constitutional Framework, such as external affairs, security and law and order. These will remain in the hands of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative. Most of the Ministers are now in place, and are establishing their departments and defining their priorities.

All of Kosovo's minorities are represented in the Assembly, and one Ministerial post has already been filled by parties representing the non-Serbian minorities. A further Ministerial post has so far been left unfilled, pending a nomination by the Serbian minority. Following positive recent statements from their representatives and the Belgrade government, I hope that this will soon be filled.

Yasin Malik

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the arrest of Yasin Malik, Chairman of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, on 25 March at Srinagar. [50998]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have received a number of reports about the detention of Yasin Malik. We have raised our concerns about the condition of Yasin Malik's detention with the Indian Government. We will continue to monitor the case closely.

Lakshmi Mittal

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he sought advice from HM ambassadors to *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* Kazakhstan in connection with the takeover of Sidex by LNM/Ispat. [50455]

Peter Hain: Neither my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary or I sought advice from either ambassador.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50288]

Mr. MacShane: No PFI projects have been subject to refinancing.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43250]

Mr. MacShane: The table sets out revised Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets since the publication of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2001 departmental report.

Old target	*Revised target*	*Reason*
Increase in the global audience of the BBC World Service to 153 million by 2002 and then maintained throughout the period.	Increase in the global audience of the BBC World Service to 157 million by 2004.	Original target was subject to final confirmation; subsequent discussions between BBC World Service and FCO resulted in a higher target being set. Target refers to weekly radio audience and is calculated annually from independent surveys.

The upward revision of this target was published on the FCO website last year.

No new PSA targets have been set for the FCO since the publication of the 2001 departmental report.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49139]

(2) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49097]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council office, on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

TREASURY

Finance Bill

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Finance Bill will be published; and if he will make Explanatory Notes on the Bill's clauses available to hon. Members. [51627]

Dawn Primarolo: It is expected that the Finance Bill will be published on Wednesday 24 April, the day after the conclusion of the debate on the Budget Resolutions. Explanatory Notes on the Bill's clauses will be available in the Vote Office and the Libraries of both Houses on that day. Members of the public will be able to obtain copies of the Explanatory Notes from the Treasury; these will also be available on the Treasury's website http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51120]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Income Tax (Indexation) (No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51118]

(3) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Friendly Societies (Modification of the Corporation Tax Acts) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51107]

(4) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments and Savings) (Industrial Assurance) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51094]

(5) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Partly Completed Procedures) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51089]

(6) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Individual Savings Account (Insurance Companies) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51108]

(7) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Stamp Duty Reserve Tax (UK Depository/Interests in Foreign Securities) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51115]

(8) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Law Applicable to Contracts of Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51085]

(9) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Savings, Modifications and Consequential Provisions) (Rehabilitation of Offenders) (Scotland) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51098]

(10) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Personal Equity Plan (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51117]

(11) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Prescribed Markets and Qualifying Investments) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51126]

(12) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51111]

(13) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Misleading Statements and Practices) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51096]

(14) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51091]

(15) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments) (No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51112]

(16) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Variation of Stamp Duties Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51123]

(17) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51087]

(18) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments) (Taxes) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51100]

(19) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51125]

(20) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Friendly Societies Act 1974 (Seal of The Financial Services Authority) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51124]

(21) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51122]

(22) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Friendly Societies (Provisional Repayments for Exempt Business) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51109]

(23) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions and Savings) (Information Requirements and Investigations) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51095]

(24) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Bankruptcy (Financial Services and Markets Act 2000) (Scotland) Rules 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51090]

(25) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Protection of the Euro against Counterfeiting Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51110]

(26) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Market Act 2000 (Scope of Permission Notices) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51119]

(27) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Dissolution of the Board of Banking Supervision) (Transitional Provisions) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51086]

(28) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions and Savings) (Business Transfers) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51099]

(29) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Value Added Tax (Cars) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51121]

(30) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Control of Business Transfers) (Requirements on Applicants) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51102]

(31) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51113]

(32) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51084]

(33) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Money Laundering Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51097]

(34) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments and Repeals) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51092]

(35) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Enterprise Management Incentives (Gross Asset Requirement) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51114]

(36) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Confidential Information) (Bank of England) (Consequential Provisions) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51093]

(37) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51088]

(38) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Individual Savings Account (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51116]

(39) what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Control of Transfers of Business Done at Lloyd's) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51101]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him yesterday, *Official Report*, columns 975–82W.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government received advice from legal counsel regarding the eligibility of Arthur Andersen for Government contracts; and if he will make a statement. [32606]

Dr. John Reid: I have been asked to reply.

In February 1997, prior to the general election, the Treasury Solicitor was asked to review the on-going action against Arthur Andersen. Following the report of this review, the Government received advice from counsel on 9 June 1997 on the question of whether, in the context of the action to determine if the case should be heard in New York, it would be beneficial to relax the embargo against Arthur Andersen for Government contracts. The embargo was relaxed on 24 June 1997, and was fully lifted when the final settlement was agreed on 12 November 1997.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are part-time employees. [47196]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W.

New Deal for Young People

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49604]

Ruth Kelly: We do not have this information.

Government Commerce

Valerie Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information was gathered from the Office of Government Commerce e-tendering pilot scheme for a system for use across Government, with particular reference to the Department for Education and Skills. [49928]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The recently concluded pilot covered all the key aspects of an e-tendering system, including the procurement process, functionality and

operational activity. It successfully addressed security issues, which had been a particular concern to both Departments and suppliers.

The Office of Government Commerce is working with Departments to use the information gathered from this pilot and other on-going e-pilots to develop the Government's overall approach to the effective and efficient use of e-tendering.

Although the Department for Education and Skills did not take part in the pilot, it will be able, together with all Government Departments and agencies, to use the knowledge gained when undertaking future e-tendering activity.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 862W, on PFI, what were the changing requirements which accounted for the difference in cost between preferred bidder stage and the final contract price. [50327]

Ruth Kelly: The changing requirements vary from the addition of new properties on the portfolio PFI (STEPS) to changes in the service specifications on the single site PFIs.

Consultants

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many contracts HM Treasury has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50836]

Ruth Kelly: The effort required to establish the current contracts the Treasury has with consultants would incur disproportionate costs.

The level of indemnity insurance is not fixed. The value and nature of the contract and the size of the company/firm employed to carry out the work are taken into consideration when determining the level of indemnity insurance required.

There have been no recent discussions with other Government Departments about professional indemnity insurance.

Solar Panels

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Government buildings owned by his Department have solar panels installed. [51189]

Ruth Kelly: None.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Plastic Bags

2. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for reducing the use of plastic bags; and if she will make a statement. [46510]

Mr. Meacher: Packaging waste, including plastic bags, is covered by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997, which include incentives both to reduce the amount of packaging handled by businesses and to increase the amount of packaging reused. I am aware that the Irish Government have recently introduced a levy on plastic bags from supermarkets and of the effectiveness of this approach.

Peak District (Access)

10. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of progress in implementing the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in the Peak District. [46519]

Alun Michael: On February 11, the Countryside Agency concluded consultation on a draft map of open country and registered common land in the lower north-west, including the Peak District. The Agency is now considering comments made on the draft map, and plans to issue a provisional map in September this year.

Badgers

16. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on steps she has taken to combat cruelty to badgers, with specific reference to the protection of setts. [46526]

Mr. Morley: It is an offence under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 to interfere with a badger sett without an appropriate licence. The maximum penalty for such an offence under the 1992 Act is a fine of £5,000 or six months' imprisonment, or both.

The protection provided under the 1992 Act, which is unique for an unendangered animals, reflects the concern which is felt by the Government about the gratuitous acts of cruelty to which badgers have been subjected to all too often in the past.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates have been made of how many badgers there were in each constituency in each of the last 20 years. [48548]

Mr. Morley: No annual data on the number of badgers exist either at county, constituency or national level.

Based on two surveys the number of badgers in Great Britain is estimated to be between 300 and 400 thousand. The latest survey which was conducted in the mid-1990s revealed an increase in badgers numbers of around 70 per cent. compared with the first survey which was undertaken in the mid-1980s.

Veterinary Surgeons

17. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinary surgeons will be employed by the State Veterinary Service in 2002–03; and what the equivalent figures were in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [R] [46527]

Mr. Morley: As at February 2001, 301 veterinary surgeons were employed, of which 261 were field veterinary staff.

As at 31 March 2002, 311 permanent veterinary surgeons were employed, of which 275 are field veterinary staff.

No further recruitment of veterinary surgeons is expected to take place in 2002–03.

Footpaths (Lincolnshire)

18. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the reopening of footpaths in Lincolnshire. [46528]

Alun Michael: We received a number of comments which suggested that Lincolnshire was slow or reluctant to reopen footpaths despite the fact that there were no cases of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the county. The amount of correspondence was low with four letters from members of the public in favour of reopening footpaths and one against. There was one letter from an hon. Member early in the outbreak, urging strict enforcement of access prohibitions. Lincolnshire county council wrote last July objecting to my decision to revoke remaining blanket rights-of-way closures. That decision was taken in the light of the veterinary risk assessment which showed that the risk of walkers spreading FMD was extremely small and the fact that a small number of local authorities were being over cautious without good reason. The FMD outbreak demonstrated the importance of rights of way to tourism in rural areas in England, and most local authorities were keen to reopen them as soon as it was safe to do so.

Farm Diversification

19. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance her Department is giving farmers to diversify their businesses. [46529]

Alun Michael: The Department provides grants for farmers in England seeking to pursue good diversification projects under the Rural Enterprise Scheme and the Vocational Training Scheme, which form part of the England Rural Development Programme. DEFRA also offers assistance in the form of free planning consultancy advice to farmers who intend to pursue an eligible RES diversification project. Funds are also available from the regional development agencies to renovate redundant farm buildings. Technical assistance is provided by the Rural Development Service and through the Farm Business Advice Service.

Llama Trekking

20. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ease the restrictions upon llama trekking businesses. [46530]

Alun Michael: A licensing scheme for llama trekking was introduced on 28 March 2002 which allows treks to take place, while minimising the risk of disease spread. Controls are needed over this activity, as llamas are susceptible to foot and mouth disease and could become infected or could infect other susceptible livestock by crossing grazing land.

British Beef (Import Ban)

21. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the French ban on imports of British beef. [46531]

Mr. Morley: The ban is illegal and the European Commission have written formally to the French Government. This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further European Court case against France.

Genetically Modified Plants

22. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the Royal Society's updated report on GM plants. [46532]

Mr. Meacher: To assist the screening of non-GM and GM food, research should continue to develop technologies to define the 'normal' composition of conventional plants.

That the Government and the European Commission should ensure that current regulations and guidelines for infant formulas and follow on foods and GM foods complement each other.

That the current decision-making process for screening conventional and GM foods should be expanded to encompass inhalant as well as food allergies.

The Government are taking the following steps to address these issues.

On the first recommendation, the Food Standards Agency has undertaken a research programme which is looking at new and emerging techniques to define the normal composition of conventional plants and how these techniques can be applied to refine the current safety assessment of GM foods.

On the second recommendation, the FSA shares the Royal Society's view that GM and infant formulae regulations should be complementary. The FSA is pursuing this issue in Europe as these are EU regulations.

And on the third recommendation, the Royal Society acknowledges that, at present there is no evidence that commercially available GM foods cause allergenic responses. The safety assessment for all applications for bringing GM foods on to the market includes a detailed risk assessment with consideration of all aspects of allergenicity including through inhalation.

Sustainable Development

23. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's priorities for the Johannesburg summit on sustainable development. [46533]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's overarching strategic objective is to make globalisation work for sustainable development, especially for the poorest. These priorities are: poverty eradication, emphasising capacity building and education; the opportunities presented by resource productivity including the application of science and technology; energy; freshwater and oceans; and sustainable development initiatives for Africa.

Combined Heat and Power

24. **Richard Younger-Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on steps her Department is taking to address the recent reductions in electricity generated from combined heat and power; and when she will publish her Department's report on CHP. [46534]

Mr. Meacher: The Government believe that the major factor impacting on the economic position of CHP is relatively high gas prices combined with relatively low electricity prices. Under DTI's lead, it is continuing to pursue its strategy to address high gas prices. The Government are also aware of continuing concerns about the impact of the new electricity trading arrangements on smaller generators, including CHP. On 4 April 2002, DTI published the Government Response to its consultation on NETA and smaller generators which identifies action to help smaller generators operate more effectively under NETA. A draft Government CHP Strategy will be published for consultation shortly.

Climate Change

25. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the impact of global climate change. [46535]

Mr. Meacher: Impact studies undertaken by DEFRA show that by the 2080s, if action is not taken to tackle climate change, global temperatures could rise by about 3 deg C, leading to 3 billion people suffering increased water stress, and around 80 million extra people at risk of flooding each year due to rising sea levels.

Euro

26. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what preparations her Department is making for possible UK entry into the euro. [46536]

Mr. Meacher: Details of changeover planning in the public sector were set out in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published in November 2001. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Foot and Mouth

27. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers who suffered financial losses resulting from the foot and mouth epidemic have not been compensated. [46537]

Mr. Morley: All livestock farmers will have suffered some degree of financial loss as a result of the restrictions imposed on the movement of livestock and other foot and mouth disease related controls. It has been the policy of successive Governments only to pay compensation for the market value of livestock which is compulsorily slaughtered to control the spread of disease. However over the course of the last year the Government made available some £155 million of agrimonetary aid and more than £210 million in payments under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme and light lambs schemes.

29. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will respond to the conclusions of the Northumberland county council inquiry into the handling of the foot and mouth outbreak. [46539]

Mr. Morley: The report of the Northumberland county council inquiry into foot and mouth disease provides a welcome local perspective on what happened during the outbreak. I understand that the county council has sent the report to the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Lessons Learned Inquiry and they will doubtless take it into account in making their report, to which we shall respond fully in due course. The Northumberland inquiry report also outlines a medium term recovery plan for rural Northumberland to be developed within the policy framework of the Rural Action Plan produced by One North East. We have assured the leader of Northumberland county council that DEFRA stands ready to play its part alongside the other players, public, private and voluntary, which need to work together if such a plan is to be successful.

36. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of her inquiries into foot and mouth. [46546]

Mr. Morley: On 9 August 2001 my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced two independent inquiries into the foot and mouth disease outbreak of 2001, namely the Lessons Learned Inquiry and the Royal Society Study. The Lessons Learned Inquiry aims to report by mid 2002. The Royal Society Study should be completed by summer 2002.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money she has applied for from the European Commission in connection with meeting the costs of compensation paid to farmers for the disposal of livestock during the foot and mouth outbreak, and what response she has received from the Commission. [48557]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The total UK claim for reimbursement of the costs incurred in the foot and mouth outbreak is £998 million. The claim includes compensation payments to farmers for animals slaughtered, and destruction of contaminated feeding stuffs of £735 million. The other element of the claim is for cleansing and disinfecting of the farms and transport and haulage and disposal of livestock of £263 million.

The Commission's auditors are auditing the claim. They have not yet issued their audit report. The Department on 28 February 2002 received an advance payment of the claim of £216,904,990 from the Commission.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the basis on which compensation rates for slaughtered animals were calculated during the foot and mouth outbreak. [48559]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Animal Health Act 1981 stipulates that for the purposes of compensation, the value of an animal shall be its value immediately before it became affected with foot and mouth disease or, if not so affected, its value immediately before it was slaughtered. Animals are valued by professional valuers. From 22 March to 30 July

2001 standard valuations were set out in regulations to help ensure rapid slaughter of livestock, but farmers retained the right to request an individual valuation of their stock.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the farming community that officials acting for her Department be given *(a)* greater powers to enter farm property and *(b)* wider scope for ordering the slaughter of farm animals. [12345]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 5 November 2001]:* I have received representations from a range of organisations and individuals from the farming community. Some, including the NFU were not opposed to the principle of officials being given *(a)* greater powers to enter farm property and *(b)* wider scope for ordering the slaughter of farm animals in clearly defined circumstances.

Recycling

28. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress made by local authorities in improving recycling rates. [46538]

Mr. Meacher: Provisional figures from the Department's latest Municipal Waste Management Survey show that the proportion of municipal waste recycled or composted has continued to increase, from 7 per cent. in 1996–97 to 12 per cent. in 2000–01. Local authorities are required to further improve their recycling rates in order to achieve the statutory targets the Government have set for them, to double their recycling rates within three years and treble them in five. The recently announced £140 million fund for waste minimisation and recycling will help them to do this.

Farm Administration

30. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how many forms her Department required on average a farmer in England to fill out in 2001; and what efforts are being made to reduce this. [46540]

Mr. Morley: It is not possible to make such an assessment. The number of forms completed by farmers depends on the nature and size of individual enterprises. As far as statistical forms are concerned, in 2001 more than half of the main holdings in England received no forms and the average number of forms issued to the other 68,638 holdings was 1.39. Only 319 holdings received more than four forms during the year and of the 95,125 survey forms issued more than one third were in respect of voluntary surveys. Many of the forms the Department issues to farmers relate to particular schemes such as CAP subsidy and rural development schemes. The number will vary widely depending on which schemes they participate in.

The Department is committed to reducing paperwork. Electronic forms for IACS applications have already been introduced. The Government's Regulatory Reform Action Plan published in February contained a number of measures which will reduce the burden for farmers. These include for example enabling livestock producers to submit electronic claims for livestock premium schemes and removing unnecessary duplication of information. In the longer term the possibility of a whole farm approach to regulation should enable information required in forms to be rationalised.

Waste Incinerators

31. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals the Government have to control the disposal of ash and other toxic residues from waste incinerators. [46541]

Mr. Meacher: Ash and air pollution control residues which are disposed of from waste incinerators are subject to the waste management controls in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, including the requirement that these wastes are disposed of in accordance with a waste management licence, and handled in accordance with the duty of care.

The Environment Agency is carrying out a thorough investigation into the destinations of solid residues from all current municipal waste incinerators and any implications this may hold for the environment or human health. I am expecting the report to be completed later this month and I will ensure that a copy is placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Diseases

32. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the funding of research into animal diseases. [46542]

Mr. Morley: The Department funds a substantial programme of research into farm animal diseases. The current spend is some £33 million annually. Details of our research projects can be found on the DEFRA website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/research/researchfrm.htm).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her strategy for handling outbreaks of serious animal diseases. [48564]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Strategies for handling outbreaks of serious animal diseases vary in detail according to the characteristics of each disease, notably the means of spread and the species affected. Policies for dealing with the main diseases are set out in EU and UK legislation. Many elements of animal disease control contingency planning are common for a range of diseases. These include surveillance, reporting and investigation procedures; import controls; tracing and diagnosis; eradication options such as slaughter and vaccination; valuation and compensation procedures; controls over animal movements; and the principles of biosecurity, including cleansing and disinfection of premises and vehicles.

The findings of the Royal Society and Lessons Learned Inquiries following last year's FMD outbreak will be taken into account in keeping our strategies for handling animal disease outbreaks up to date and effective.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tests for disease are carried out on live animal imports. [R] [46516]

Mr. Morley: Post import checks are carried out by the State Veterinary Service for a range of diseases according to the species and the country from which the animal originated.

Illegal Foodstuffs (Importation)

33. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on measures in place to restrict the importation of illegal foodstuffs. [46543]

Mr. Morley: The Government published an action plan on 28 March, which has a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk of exotic animal and plant diseases entering the country. The plan takes account of recent discussions the Government has had with stakeholder interests on the priorities and actions for the coming year to tackle the issue of illegal imports. A copy of the action plan will be placed in the House Libraries and it can also be viewed on line at http//www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/int-trde/prod-im/prod-im.htm.

Organic Produce

34. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take to standardise criteria for produce to be described as organic. [46544]

Mr. Morley: Common EU standards for the production and marketing of organic produce are prescribed by Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91. However, the Regulation does not prevent an individual inspection body approved under it from applying more restrictive standards to operators it registers.

Farm Produce (Local Sales)

35. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to assist farmers to sell their produce locally. [46545]

Alun Michael: The England Rural Development Programme provides grant aid for a range of activities that may be of benefit to farmers seeking to sell produce locally. We have also assisted various local projects under the Agricultural Development Scheme as well as supporting the National Association of Farmers' Market's training and accreditation programmes and the development of the South West Food and Drink Organisation.

Through Food from Britain we contribute to the funding of a network of regional food groups which provide trade development services to regional and speciality food producers, some of whom will be farmers. Food from Britain has been active in encouraging supermarkets to stock more local produce.

We have actively encouraged the development of farmers' markets, as has the Countryside Agency which we grant-aid. Farmers may also derive benefit from the Countryside Agency's "Eat the View" programme which seeks to achieve more favourable market conditions for local products that support sustainable land management.

Illegally Logged Timber

37. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to tackle the importation of illegally logged timber. [46547]

Mr. Meacher: The UK has shown leadership under the G8 Action Programme on Forests in promoting bilateral arrangements with timber producing countries whereby countries work together to tackle illegal logging and associated trade. We are currently negotiating the first of these with Indonesia. We hope that bilateral agreements will lead to regional and, eventually, an international agreement that will have a big impact on illegal trade.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many seizures of illegally logged wood have been initiated by her Department in total in the last three years. [48205]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* International trade in some woods is controlled under the terms of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Those species of wood listed in Appendix I & II of CITES, require import permits from the UK before they can be imported. These are issued only where the UK Management Authority (DEFRA) is satisfied that the wood has been legally obtained in the country of origin and has the necessary permit for export from that country. Species listed in Appendix III of CITES do not require import permits. For these species a self-completed import notification form must be presented to HM Customs prior to the arrival of the specimens, together with the relevant export permit(s) or certificate(s) of origin issued by the Management Authority in the exporting country. It is for the Management Authority in the country of origin to decide whether the import has been legally logged. On the basis of these procedures the Department has not initiated any seizures of wood in the past three years.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the percentage of rainforest timber entering the United Kingdom which derives from illegal logging. [48320]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Combating illegal logging requires effort from both timber producing and consuming countries. Timber producing countries are responsible for defining and enforcing the national legislative and regulatory frameworks that define legality.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is working with a number of timber exporting countries to help them improve governance and strengthen forest law enforcement. We are also working to develop capacity for the implementation of timber certification schemes in some producing countries.

Domestically, the UK is working to ensure that the import of endangered timber species is in full compliance with CITES, the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species. We are also implementing a new Government timber procurement policy that seeks to procure forest products only from legal and sustainable sources.

We estimate that of the total UK timber and timber product imports, less then 10 per cent. is from tropical timber. A reliable estimate of rain forest timber entering the UK that is derived from illegal sources can only be made once chain of custody systems are in place in exporting countries that can verify legal compliance. The Government is in discussion with some exporting countries about the introduction of such systems.

Nitrates

38. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's estimate of costs to farmers of the proposed nitrate vulnerable zones regulations. [46548]

Mr. Meacher: The Department's consultation document issued in December 2001 outlines relative costs to farmers of two options for completing implementation of the Nitrates Directive in England.

Total annual cost to English farmers are:

Option 1 (whole of England approach)—£32 million.

Option 2 (targeted NVZ approach)—£23 million.

We are currently considering these figures in the light of responses to our recent consultation. We will publish a revised regulatory impact assessment, containing updated compliance costs, in due course when we are in a position to announce a decision on how the directive is to be implemented.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies she has undertaken into the proportion of nitrates leached from arable land which derive from atmospheric deposition. [48199]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Atmospheric deposition of nitrogen, from the air pollutants nitrogen oxides (mainly from vehicle exhausts and industry) and ammonia (mainly from livestock manure), is measured across the UK by the National Acid Deposition Network.

Most of the nitrogen deposited in arable areas is taken up by crops during the growing season, but in late autumn and winter, a proportion is vulnerable to leaching. Studies at the Institute of Arable Crops Research have shown that atmospheric deposition usually contributes around 20 to 30 per cent. of the nitrate leached from arable land.

Atmospheric deposition is a major cause for concern in upland semi-natural habitats which are naturally adapted to receiving low supplies of nutrient nitrogen. Atmospheric deposition is largest in the uplands, where rainfall is highest. Excessive deposition can lead to adverse changes in plant diversity and, in some cases, to nitrate leaching.

Under the UNECE Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, and the European National Emissions Ceilings Directive, the UK is committed to further significant reductions in nitrogen oxide emissions, and to curbing ammonia emissions, from 2010. Achieving these emission reduction targets will cut the amount of nitrogen deposited onto agricultural and semi-natural land. We will publish a consultation this year seeking views on how to curb ammonia emissions.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will *(a)* determine and *(b)* regulate closed seasons, under the nitrate directive, on a regional basis. [48201]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is as follows.

(a) Determination of closed periods:

Annual closed periods in existing NVZ areas are:

For nitrogen fertilisers:

On arable land—1 September to 1 February

On grassland—15 September to 1 November

For slurries, poultry manures and liquid-digested sewage sludge:

On arable land without autumn sown crop: 1 August to 1 November

On grassland or arable land with autumn sown crop: 1 September to 1 November.

The current Action Programme does not include variations on a regional basis in England. We are considering responses received to our recent consultation on completing implementation of the Nitrates Directive which have raised this issue.

(b) Regulation of closed periods:

The Environment Agency will be responsible for enforcing compliance in the new areas where farmers are required to take action to reduce nitrate pollution, as well as in existing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. The Agency propose to develop a risk based approach to enforcement, for instance by relating the frequency and nature of inspection to the risk of pollution.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy with respect to nitrate vulnerable zones. [46522]

Mr. Meacher: Following the Department's recent consultation on how England should complete implementation of the nitrates directive, I hope to be able to announce a decision in May.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, regarding the estimated cost and value of empty properties, if all surplus empty properties have been sold within the three year guideline set down by HM Treasury. [50335]

Mr. Morley: No. Some surplus properties have been retained for more than three years so that planning issues which significantly enhanced the sale value could be resolved. Disposal of some other properties has been delayed because buyers have not been forthcoming.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1161W, on refurbishment, what her estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department in 2001–02. [50393]

Mr. Morley: Refurbishment work carried out in 2001–02 has an estimated value of £6,198,500 (estimated because final accounts have not yet been agreed on all projects). The largest project undertaken last year was the refurbishment of floors two to six of Ergon House in London (£4,300,000).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1161W, on refurbishment carried out by her Department, what her estimate is of the cost of refurbishment carried out as part of landlord lease obligations in each of the last four years. [50394]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not keep records of work carried out as part of landlords' lease obligations separately from general maintenance work. In many cases the distinction is blurred and it would be difficult to assign the work to one category or the other.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1161W, on refurbishment, for what reason the cost in 2000–01 increased by £655,000 over the previous year. [50397]

Mr. Morley: Refurbishment programmes vary from year to year depending upon departmental needs and available funding. In 2000–01 significant projects were undertaken on behalf of the British Cattle Movement Service in Workington and the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (now part of the Rural Development Service) at Leeds and Wolverhampton.

Surplus Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 240W, how many surplus properties have been sold in each year since 1997–98; and what is the sum of the proceeds to public funds resulting from the sales. [50334]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Number of properties sold	*Total sales income £ million*
1997–98	12	19.5
1998–99	7	7.7
1999–2000	17	15.4
2000–01	10	13.1
2001–02	8	18.0

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [49120]

Mr. Morley: In the Department and its agencies the procedures set out below are followed with regard to overtime:

Prior approval to work overtime must be obtained in all cases;

Managers are asked to make every effort to avoid overtime working and, as far as possible, ensure that it occurs only at times of exceptional pressure of work;

Wherever possible, volunteers are sought and weekend overtime avoided;

A 'long hours culture' is not encouraged nor are regular calls on particular groups of staff; and

As an alternative to payment, time off in lieu may be taken.

Staff in the senior civil service, and those who do not work set conditioned hours, or whose pay already includes payment for working overtime, and fee paid staff are not eligible for overtime payments.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49592]

Mr. Morley: The 2002 departmental reports will be published in spring 2002. The dates will be announced shortly.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she expects the overall cost of the CAP to consumers and taxpayers in the financial year 2001–02 to be higher or lower than the level of 88 billion euros per year specified in the 2001 departmental report. [47908]

Mr. Morley: The estimate in the departmental report is drawn from a range of international sources and recent changes in the operation of the CAP have made it difficult to compare current estimates directly. However latest provisional estimates on a consistent basis show the cost of the CAP to consumers and taxpayers in 2000 was euro 85 billion.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 730W, regarding people employed by her Department under the new deal for young people, what discussions she has had with ministers in the departments of Trade and Industry and International Development regarding central collection of statistics on the destinations of new deal participants. [50426]

Mr. Morley: To date there have been no discussions with Ministers in the Departments of Trade and Industry and International Development regarding central collection of statistics on the destinations of new deal participants.

Industrial Action

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1191W, on industrial action, what assessment she has made of the effect of the lost days on the service provided by her Department to the public. [50553]

Mr. Morley: The main impact of industrial action has been on the Arable Area Payments Scheme where a little over 50 per cent. of payments were made in the first 2 or 3 weeks of the payment window as compared to the normal 60–70 per cent. within that time.

In other areas of DEFRA's work the effects of industrial action on services to the public were more limited. There were however small delays in administration of the National Scrapie Plan and in administration and payments under the Agri Environment, ERDP, livestock and organic farming schemes.

With regard to foot and mouth disease, the action did not significantly jeopardise animal health. PCS agreed local dispensations to allow members employed on the FMD Helpline and Licensing Sections to remain working, although in other sections there were some small delays to payment processing.

Telephone calls to some local DEFRA offices were operated on a reduced service. The Department always took into account the needs of the customers, the taxpayer and the long term working relations in DEFRA.

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many visits have been made by the State Veterinary Service to broiler units since September 2001. [48555]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In the period from 1 September 2001 until 31 March this year, the State Veterinary Service have visited 73 broiler and broiler breeder units.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the welfare of broiler chickens; and if she will make a statement. [48561]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* As part of its inspection programme, the State Veterinary Service visits broiler units to assess all aspects of welfare.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish new recommendations for the welfare of broiler chickens. [48556]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A new welfare code of recommendations specifically for meat chickens and breeding chickens will shortly be presented to Parliament.

River Bailiffs

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future of river bailiffs. [48325]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Environment Agency has advised that it will continue to employ officers with the powers of water bailiffs to meet its statutory duty under the Environment Act 1995 to help maintain, develop and improve salmon, trout and freshwater and eel fisheries.

EC Regulation 2037/2000

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of old fridges which will be shipped to Germany for dismantling in compliance with EC Regulation 2037/2000. [48321]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* So far, the Environment Agency has authorised the shipment of approximately 94,500 units for export to Germany. Of these, approximately 3,275 units have been received in Germany and a further 9,615 are in the process of being shipped to Germany for treatment in compliance with EC Regulation 2037/2000. Further applications for 170,350 units have been received by the Environment Agency and these are awaiting a decision.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the environmental impact of shipping old fridges to Germany for dismantling in compliance with EC Regulation 2037/2000. [48322]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The cost of shipping fridges to Germany is a commercial decision, although costs of £18 to £24 per appliance for export is reasonable. The environmental impact of shipping fridges will be minimal because high standards are imposed at the treatment facilities and the materials are recovered for recycling.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money has been paid to farmers under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. [48546]

Mr. Morley: The total payments made to farmers in each of the years since 1991, when the scheme was introduced by the then Countryside Commission, are as follows:

£ million

	Annual expenditure
1992–93	5.3
1993–94	8.5
1994–95	10.5
1995–96	11.6
1996–97	10.9
1997–98	15.7
1998–99	19.9
1999–2000	23.4
2000–01	28.9
2001–02[1]	47.3
Total expenditure[2]	182.0

[1] Estimated
[2] 1992 to 2002

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring systems have been put in place to ensure that farmers participating in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are managing their land to the standards expected by the programme. [48541]

Mr. Morley: To ensure that farmers in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are managing their land in accordance with their agreements, technical staff from DEFRA's Rural Development Service operate a programme of care and maintenance visits. The programme is structured so that agreement holders are visited in the first year of the agreement and further visits are undertaken where required.

All our agreement holders are in addition subject to compliance monitoring inspections by staff from the Rural Payments Agency. These inspections are carried out to meet EU and our own audit requirements.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46953]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* DEFRA has two special advisers. As regards their salaries, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with regional development agencies regarding environmental issues. [47968]

Alun Michael: I regularly attend meetings with the chairs of regional development agencies and ministerial colleagues and the Department are frequently in discussion with regional development agencies on a range of issues. If my hon. Friend has a particular concern in mind, I shall be pleased to address it.

Television Sets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* analogue and *(b)* integrated digital television sets her Department has purchased in each of the last 24 months; and if she will make a statement. [38176]

Mr. Morley: From information held centrally, since DEFRA's creation on 8 June 2001, the Department has acquired nine analogue television sets. No digital television sets were acquired. In making decisions on television purchases the Department is required to consider whole life cycle costs when making any purchasing decisions. Whole life costs take account of possible future obsolescence.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33235]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* From information held centrally, since DEFRAs creation on 8 June 2001, the Department has acquired nine analogue television sets. No digital television sets were acquired. In making decisions on television purchases the Department is required to consider whole life cycle costs when making any purchasing decisions. Whole life costs take account of possible future obsolescence.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of staff at her Department are justices of the peace; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44550]

Mr. Morley: Available records show that 12 members of staff are justices of the peace.

The Department actively supports its staff in giving more time to their communities. Staff are allowed varying amounts of paid time off for voluntary public duties (for example, serving as magistrates or school governors). We aim to raise the profile of volunteering and make it easier for staff to give their time and effort to voluntary work.

Correspondence

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Minister of State will reply to the letter of 18 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) about the Hampshire Avon, abstraction and the Habitats Directive. [42508]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent on 7 March.

Thames Barrier

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the public cost associated with the collision of the Sand Lite with the Thames Barrier. [49916]

Mr. Morley: The dredger Sand Kite collided with one of the piers of the Thames Barrier and deposited a quantity of gravel on one of the operating gates. I understand that the remedial works costs to date have been reimbursed to the Environment Agency from the vessel's insurers and have not therefore resulted in any public cost. I further understand that there is some additional remedial painting and removal of gravel from inside the gate recess, to be carried out this summer, that may not be covered by the insurers and may result in a public cost of some £100,000. This is expected be met from Environment Agency's operational budget with a contribution from the Port of London Authority.

Council of Ministers (Fisheries Meeting)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who attended the fisheries meeting of the EU Council of Ministers on 27 November 2001 on behalf of the UK; and who led the UK delegation. [51035]

Mr. Morley: I attended and led for the UK, supported by officials from DEFRA, the Scottish Executive and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland.

Landfill Tax Credit

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to launch a consultation on the future of the landfill tax credit scheme. [51626]

Mr. Meacher: The Government published on 17 April 2002 a consultation paper on the future of the landfill tax credit scheme. It seeks views on the priorities for funding from revenue currently spent through the landfill tax credit scheme, the merits of different funding mechanisms

and any transitional arrangements. The results will feed into the decisions to be made as part of Spending Review 2002.

Copies of the consultation paper are available from the House Libraries or from the DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the transfer of responsibility for the movement of nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom from the Director General Equipment Support (Air) to the Warship Support Agency. [51497]

Mr. Ingram: The transfer of responsibility for the movement of nuclear weapons from the Director General Equipment Support (Air) to the Warship Support Agency was completed on 26 March 2002. The Ministry of Defence's commitment to nuclear safety and security was maintained throughout the transfer process.

Medical/Dental Staff Pay

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the pay of medical and dental officers in the armed forces. [51498]

Mr. Hoon: The supplement to the 2002 report of the armed forces pay review body making recommendations on the pay of service medical and dental officers has been published today. Copies of the supplement are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. I wish to express my thanks to the Chairman and members of the review body for their work in producing this supplement.

The Review Body recommends an overall pay increase of 4.6 per cent. for all Defence medical services medical and dental officers with the exception of qualified general medical practitioners who will receive an increase of 6.8 per cent. The review body also recommends a 4.6 per cent. increase to the sustained quality payments for general medical practitioners; an increase in trainer pay and a small increase in the value and numbers of distinction awards. In addition, there is a recommendation, which will be reviewed next year, for the introduction of an out-of-hours supplement of £5,000 applicable to junior doctors.

The additional cost to the Defence budget will be £7.7 million. This will be met within departmental expenditure limits.

The review body's recommendations are to be accepted in full, with implementation effective from 1 April 2002.

Aircraft

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfall is in the number of pilots for *(a)* Sea Harriers and *(b)* RAF Harriers; and what steps the Department is taking to reduce this number. [50869]

Mr. Ingram: The position as at 1 April 2002 is set out in the table.

Force	*Established flying posts*	*Strength*
Sea Harrier	[1]72	48
Harrier GR7	[2]67	63

[1] This reflects the overall commander, lieutenant commander and junior officer requirement for Sea Harriers, including cockpit manning (front line and training), naval broadening within fleet appointments, staff appointments and exchanges for commanders and below.

[2] Comprises wing commander, squadron leader and junior officer posts on front line squadrons, operational conversion units, operational evaluation units and wing appointments. In addition to the established flying posts, fast jet pilots are required for instructional duties within the RAF's flying training system, overseas exchange posts, the RAF Aerobatic Team and a number of ground duties shared by all General Duties Branches.

Addressing the current aircrew shortfalls is a key priority and a number of actions have been taken to reduce the impact of these shortfalls. These include increasing the number of fast jet pilots entering into productive service, returning some middle ranking officers to flying duties and recruiting trained pilots released by the Royal New Zealand Air Force. To improve retention two new financial retention incentives were introduced on 1 April 2002, each linked to a commitment to five years further service.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* FA2 Sea Harriers and *(b)* GR7 RAF Harriers are in service. [50868]

Mr. Ingram: As at 16 April 2002, there were a total of 54 RAF Harrier GR7s and 29 Sea Harrier FA2s in the Actual Operating Fleet. The Actual Operating Fleet is the total number of aircraft available to undertake the defined military task, and may vary day to day.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Harrier force will leave service; when the joint strike fighter will enter service; and how many JSF aircraft will be procured. [50872]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1451–52W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), the Sea Harrier FA2s of Joint Force Harrier will be withdrawn from service by 2006.

The Harrier GR9s of Joint Force Harrier will be withdrawn from service as they are replaced by the future joint combat aircraft (FJCA) and, on current plans, this will be completed in 2015.

The joint strike fighter has been selected as having the best potential for meeting our FJCA requirement and is currently planned to enter UK service in 2012. Work is currently on-going on numbers required, but our current planning assumption is for some 150 aircraft.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the reduction in the number of RAF Nimrod patrol aircraft. [50871]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1452–53W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer).

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of aircraft used by the RAF; and how many of each are operational. [50873]

Mr. Ingram: On 16 April 2002, there were 821 fixed wing aircraft and 162 rotary wing aircraft in the RAF's Actual Operating Fleet. The breakdown of this figure by aircraft type and number is detailed in the following table.

Aircraft type	*Number of aircraft*
Fixed wing aircraft	
BAe 125 ccMk3	6
BAe 146 ccMK2	2
C-17	4
Canberra	5
Chipmunk	2
Dakota	1
Dominie	11
Firefly	45
Harrier GR7	54
Harrier T10	8
Sea Harrier FA2	29
Sea Harrier T8	4
Hawk	115
Hercules C-130J	23
Hercules C-130K	26
Islander	1
Jaguar	43
Jetstream TMk	11
Nimrod MR2	18
Nimrod R1	2
Sentry E-3D AEW Mk1	6
Tornado F3	90
Tornado GR1/4	112
Tristar	9
Tucano Mk1	76
Tutor	99
VC10	19
Rotary Wing Aircraft	
Chinook Mk 2/2a	31
Griffin	9
Merlin Mk 3	9
Puma	35
Sea King Mk 3/3a	25
Twin Squirrel	41
Wessex HC2	12

The RAF also operates the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, which comprises eight fixed wing aircraft. The breakdown of this figure by aircraft type and number is detailed in the following table.

Aircraft type	*Number of aircraft*
Hurricane	2
Lancaster B1	1
Spitfire	5

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Harrier aircraft will operate under the Joint Force Harrier; and what improvements will be made to the GR9 Harrier to allow the separate Harrier forces to integrate. [50870]

Mr. Ingram: I assume my hon. Friend to be asking for the number of Harrier aircraft that will operate under Joint Force Harrier following the withdrawal from service of the Sea Harrier by 2006 and that he is referring to improvements planned to the Harrier GR7 aircraft when he asks what improvements will be made to allow the separate Harrier forces to integrate.

Following the withdrawal from service of the Sea Harrier, the Required Operating Fleet of the Joint Force Harrier is expected to be 51 aircraft. The Required Operating Fleet is the theoretical number of aircraft required by the operational squadrons to undertake the defined military task.

Thirty Harrier GR7 aircraft will be upgraded to GR7a standard by the integration of the Pegasus Mk 107 engine. This will provide improved performance, particularly for carrier borne operation. Furthermore, all Harrier GR7 and Harrier GR7a aircraft will receive avionics and weapons upgrades to provide the aircraft with a much improved capability, in particular the ability to deliver the new generation of smart weapons that are about to enter service. These aircraft will be designated Harrier GR9 and Harrier GR9a.

PFI Programmes

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are employed in connection with MoD PFI programmes. [50789]

Mr. Ingram: There is a small central team with 15 civilian personnel that is responsible for developing policy and best practice for the Ministry of Defence's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) programme and other types of Public Private Partnership. The central team is supported by smaller teams within the Defence Procurement Agency, Defence Logistics Organisation and other management areas, which are responsible for managing the programmes within their own areas.

The management and delivery of the PFI programme also involves managers, both military and civilian, at all levels as members of project boards, scrutiny and approving authorities, commercial advisers and customer representatives. MOD legal and finance staffs are also involved, although they usually do not work on PFI programmes full-time.

PFI projects are run by dedicated integrated project teams, the size of which varies with the size of the project and the stage it has reached in the procurement cycle. The teams can include civilian and military personnel, as well as industry representatives. External consultants may be engaged by project teams. A small number also sit on project boards.

Once contracts have been signed, they are monitored and are managed by MOD personnel, both civilian and military depending on the services concerned. But contractors' personnel deliver the services themselves and it is up to the contractors to determine the size of the civilian workforce necessary to meet our requirements.

A substantial number of civilians within and outside the MOD is employed on MOD PFI programmes, full and part-time, in a variety of roles. Information on the number of civilians employed in managing and delivering the programme and individual projects is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Fleet's fully operational destroyer and frigate strength will be in December 2002, excluding vessels held at states of low readiness. [49759]

Mr. Ingram: In December 2002, on current plans, of the Fleet's 32 Frigates and Destroyers, 26 will be operational or engaged in preparing for service, conducting trials or training. The remaining six will be either undergoing docking periods or refit or held at a low level of readiness.

HMS Fearless

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings will be made from the early withdrawal of HMS Fearless. [49765]

Mr. Ingram: The earlier than previously planned withdrawal of HMS Fearless will accrue savings of at least £2 million. This will be achieved by cancelling a previously programmed assisted maintenance period and through the reduction in operating costs. Moreover, HMS Fearless is nearly 37 years old and is in poor material condition. The unique nature of much of her machinery such as boilers and steam plant make repairs and maintenance difficult and it is highly probable that further unprogrammed and potentially costly work would have been required to maintain her at the previously assumed readiness state.

HMS Illustrious

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the main elements will be in the refit of HMS Illustrious; how long the refit was originally planned to take; and how long it is expected to take. [50874]

Mr. Ingram: The main elements of HMS Illustrious's refit concern maintenance, repair and improvements to ships systems and equipment to overcome obsolescence, meet safety and environmental legislation and enhance capability in command, control and communications systems and in aviation facilities.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 14W which indicated that the refit was originally planned to take about 23 months. Detailed negotiations with the refitting contractor are currently under way, and may result in some programme adjustment.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost of the refit of HMS Illustrious is. [50815]

Mr. Ingram: The refit of HMS Illustrious is estimated to cost approximately £110 million excluding costs attributable to Ministry supplied material and naval manpower.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 14W, on Navy vessels, how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* crew will remain on HMS Illustrious until her refit commences; what their duties will be; how often officers and crew will be redeployed; how many officers and crew will remain with HMS Illustrious during her refit; and what HMS Illustrious's reduced state of readiness will be until October. [50777]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Illustrious remains fully staffed as the Fleet Flagship until 27 May 2002. Following this her role changes to Standby Preservation by Operation. She requires 15 officers and 196 ratings in this role, whose duties will be essential safety checks, low level maintenance and preservation checks at her reduced state of readiness. On commencement of her refit the crew numbers reduce to nine officers and 36 ratings. Personnel will then be employed as required in support of the refit. They will be subject to normal drafting and appointing notice, but as a reduced manned ship will, as far as possible, be protected from short notice movement of personnel. HMS Illustrious will then gradually build up to achieve full manpower by October 2004.

Helicopter Hangars

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans there are to provide temporary helicopter hangars on HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark; [50816]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact the absence of hangars on landing platform docks will have on the serviceability of helicopters. [50817]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no plans to provide temporary helicopter hangars on the landing platform dock (replacement)s (LPD(R)s HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark although these could be incorporated without fundamental modification of the vessels.

The lack of hangars on the LPD(R)s will have an impact on the serviceability of helicopters. This impact was taken into account when the decision about a hangar was made and assessed as manageable. HMS Intrepid and HMS Fearless, which HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark will replace, were not fitted with helicopter hangars.

Future Rapid Effects System

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the Army's Future Rapid Effects System project. [50004]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The Army's Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) is in the concept phase. The operational requirement that FRES is expected to meet is close to being finalised. Initial Gate for the programme is planned for the end of 2002. We continue to review our existing armoured fighting vehicle programmes to ensure that they are coherent with the requirement for 'rapid effect'.

Ammunition Stocks

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what ammunition stocks are held in the UK; [50931]

(2) how the level of stocks of ammunition has changed since 1997. [50932]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has a stockpile of munitions held against the risk of short notice conflicts. The method of calculating the size and composition of this stockpile has undergone significant development in the last three years, and it now reflects more accurately the likely nature of the conflicts that the UK armed forces could become involved in. Specific information relating to ammunition stock levels is withheld under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has classified the secure supply of ammunition as being of strategic importance. [50934]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has always considered security of supply and value for the taxpayer's money to be key criteria in the procurement of safe and reliable munitions for the armed forces. The issue of security of supply was examined in detail by the House of Commons Defence Select Committee in 1999 and the committee recognised that in balancing security of supply against cost, it is likely that there are very few capabilities that must, on strategic grounds, be retained in the UK.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances it is the Government's policy to subsidise ammunition manufacturers in the UK to ensure its supply. [50935]

Dr. Moonie: The framework partnering agreement between Royal Ordnance Defence and the Ministry of Defence provides the company with contracted ammunition requirements for a rolling three-year period, firm requirements for a further two years, and a best forecast up to the 10-year point. The agreement is not a subsidy; it is intended to provide a vital link to industry to help ensure the supply of safe and reliable munitions for our armed forces.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contractual guarantees exist to safeguard the supply of ammunition by overseas manufacturers in *(a)* peace and *(b)* war. [50933]

Dr. Moonie: During the past year the Ministry of Defence has only obtained around 8 per cent. (by value) of its ammunition from overseas manufacturers. Supply and re-supply arrangements are taken into account when letting contracts. There is no difference in contractual arrangements for re-supply in peace or war. The supply of military stores and components for the UK armed forces from overseas is not a new venture, as our many collaborative projects demonstrate. Such contracts can meet both our requirements and demonstrate added value for money.

Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the intake of pilots has been to the *(a)* RAF and (B) Fleet Air Arm in each year since 1997. [49744]

Mr. Ingram: The intake of pilots into the RAF and Fleet Air Arm (FAA) are shown in the table.

Year	*RAF*	*FAA*
1997	110	62
1998	122	50
1999	177	29
2000	157	12
2001	151	41

The FAA figures do not include any Royal Marines pilot entrants who did not enter the FAA.

Decoy Systems

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Active Off-Board Decoy System will become operational on Royal Navy warships. [50787]

Dr. Moonie: The Active Off-Board Decoy System is expected to reach operational service in the Royal Navy from early 2004 once sufficient Active Decoy Rounds have been produced. It will be fitted to all major Royal Navy warships, improving their ability to counter anti-ship missiles.

Surface Torpedo Defence System

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest in-service date for the new Surface Torpedo Defence system is; and if he will make a statement on progress on the programme. [50786]

Dr. Moonie: The planned in-service date for Surface Ship Torpedo Defence is 2004. Following competition, a lead-in contract was placed with Ultra Electronics, Greenford, Middlesex in November 2001. The contract includes an option for the development, manufacture and support of ship systems.

Multi-role Survey Ship

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to place an order for a third multi-role survey ship. [50781]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no plans for a third multi-role survey ship.

Submarines

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which submarines will be fitted with the Submarine Acoustic Warfare Command System; and when the system will be operational. [50785]

Dr. Moonie: The Submarine Acoustic Warfare Command System is planned to be fitted to all Vanguard, Trafalgar and Astute class submarines and those Swiftsure submarines with sufficient remaining life. This capability enables the deployment of defensive countermeasures and will be operational from mid-2002.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the cost was to his Office of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49101]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49143]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his office. [49131]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Romania

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives he has taken since January 2001 to persuade British companies to invest in Romania; and how many letters he has written for this purpose which were published in the United Kingdom. [50463]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Transport Links (Devolved Assemblies)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister which Department has responsibility for maintenance of air and sea transport links *(a)* between those parts of the United Kingdom with devolved Assemblies and *(b)* between those areas and England. [51041]

The Prime Minister: The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions is responsible for air and sea transport policy in the United Kingdom. There is a liberalised air and sea transport market within the European Community and the Government do not normally intervene to maintain services, except in the case of certain economically vital 'lifeline' services which would not be commercially viable without subsidy. Any subsidies paid, subject to state aid rules, are the responsibility of the relevant devolved Administrations or local councils.

Overseas Hospitality

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since May 1997 when he has benefited from the hospitality of an overseas Government *(a)* when on official business and *(b)* otherwise. [51042]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many contracts his Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50837]

Dr. Whitehead: I am unable to give the hon. Member the answer to the first part of this question as this information is not centrally held, and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DTLR's contracts require contractors (including consultants) to take out and maintain such insurance as is necessary to cover their liabilities under the contract. The Department has been involved in interdepartmental discussions with the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), who issued guidance in April 2001 to all Departments. The guidance encouraged a more flexible approach to contractors' (including consultants) total liability when undertaking Government contracts. DTLR has adopted this approach and either sets a realistic cap on liability (relative to the risks involved) when inviting tenders or is prepared to consider caps proposed by tenderers.

Departmental Annual Report

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his Department's annual report; and if he will make a statement on the timing of publication. [48805]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department expects to publish its annual report for 2002; and if he will make a statement. [50905]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49585]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W.

Creches

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 984W, regarding creche facilities, when the review of child care provision in his Department will be concluded; and when its recommendations will be announced. [50398]

Dr. Whitehead: It is expected that the initial stage of the review of child care provision (outlining options) will be concluded during autumn 2002.

Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50297]

Dr. Whitehead: The total salary costs of each non-departmental public body currently sponsored by the Department for each of the last five years is as follows.

£ million

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
NDPB					
Audit Commission	40.36	43.32	55.72	70.63	[1]n/a
English Partnerships[2]	20.58	22.26	14.03	12.21	n/a
Health and Safety Commission	0.23	0.23	0.25	0.27	[3]0.28
Health and Safety Executive	94.56	96.94	100.27	104.37	[3]109.24
Housing Action Trusts:					
Castle Vale	2.30	2.21	2.33	2.27	[3]2.23
Liverpool	2.42	2.47	2.24	2.09	[3]2.03
Stonebridge	1.40	1.65	1.81	1.62	[3]1.24
Tower Hamlets	1.42	0.48	0.39	0.36	[3]0.36
Waltham Forest	0.83	0.35	0.39	0.41	[3]0.36
Housing Corporation	15.42	15.20	16.27	17.51	18.88
Northern Lighthouse Board	5.48	5.17	5.57	5.66	[3]5.92
Standards Board for England	—	—	—	—	0.99
Strategic Rail Authority	—	—	—	13.6[4]	[3]107.00
Trinity House Lighthouse Service	9.50	9.65	9.53	9.63	9.89
Tribunal NDPBs					
Rent Assessment Panels	1.65	1.64	1.68	1.55	1.85
Traffic Commissioners	4.79	4.98	5.30	5.30	5.68
Valuation Tribunals	5.06	4.77	4.47	4.36	4.38

[1] The Audit Commission's financial year ends on 31 October.
[2] English Partnerships is a national body for regeneration and development bringing together the Urban Regeneration Agency and the Commission for New Towns for which salary costs is provided.
[3] Forecast
[4] The Strategic Rail Authority was created on 1 February 2001. The figures also cover the Rail Passengers' Council/Committees and the British Transport police.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49617]

Dr. Whitehead: The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 contains a sunset clause that will make the provisions expire at the end of 2015. The clause also allows for the Act's provisions to be extended, by secondary legislation, if there is a case for doing so in 2015.

In accordance with the Government manifesto commitment, DTLR will continue to explore the possibility of time limiting new regulations where appropriate. We are also looking at other ways of ensuring legislation is kept up to date such as reviewing major legislation after it is implemented.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49636]

Dr. Whitehead: All executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are required to provide information about the performance and efficiency targets agreed with their sponsoring Department and performance against those targets in their annual reports, copies of which are normally available in the library of the House. These details are not available for advisory and tribunal NDPBs.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49099]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49141]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the Leader of the House on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes; [47212]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46839]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The cost of entertainment, expenditure incurred by Ministers, Private Offices, the Permanent Secretary's Office and special advisers was £13,000 for 1999–2000; £16,000 for 2000–01 and £21,000 for 2001–02.

The remainder of the information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years; [46961]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43280]

Dr. Whitehead: At 13 March, there were two special advisers in my office. On cost, I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50290]

Dr. Whitehead: Three of my Department's Private Finance Initiative road contracts have been refinanced. These are listed, together with the value of the share received from the companies concerned.

Project	*Operating company*	*£ million*
A19/A168 Dishforth-Tyne Tunnel	Autolink Concessionaires A19 Ltd.	1.5
M1-A1 Link	Yorkshire Link Ltd.	—
M40 Denham-Warwick	UK Highways Ltd.	1.6

Local Government

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to update the former Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Indices of Deprivation, by local government ward basis. [48856]

Ms Keeble: My Department has just issued an invitation to tender to a number of consultants for a research project to explore updating the Indices of Deprivation 2000. The contract has five broad objectives. These are:

To produce options for strengthening the ID 2000. This will be based on a conceptualisation of how multiple deprivation should be measured. It needs to build on proposed areas for further development identified in the 1999 review. It should include a review of literature on the measurement of deprivation since 1999.

To assess how practical it will be to implement these options by investigating the availability of data that have, or are about to, come on stream since the 1999 review including availability of 2001 Census data.

To assess the potential to provide a general updating both to the current indicators and the 1998 ward boundaries that underpin the ID 2000.

To assess the potential of further developing the ID 2000 to a sub-ward geography.

To revise the ID 2000 as appropriate.

The methodology for indices of deprivation was subject to an extensive review in 1999. This project builds on this review and consideration of methodological issues is focused on introducing new domains or better data and the review of literature on the measurement of deprivation since 1999 which should inform ideas on how the ID 2000 may be strengthened.

Employment Tribunals

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employment tribunal cases have been brought against his Department and its predecessor in each year since 1997; and how much his Department has spent on defending employment tribunal cases in this period. [49446]

Mr. Byers: Information is not held in a manner which would allow the question to be answered without disproportionate expense.

Disciplinary Action

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 982W, how many members of staff have been the subject of disciplinary action as a result of the internal leak inquiry; [49789]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W, if Ian Jones is *(a)* still employed by his Department, *(b)* still suspended on full pay and *(c)* the subject of disciplinary action. [49792]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Staffing and disciplinary matters are handled within the Department in accordance with the DTLR staff handbook. Within that framework personnel matters relating to individuals are a confidential matter between them and the Department.

Former Press Officers

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the contractual position is of his Department with *(a)* Martin Sixsmith and *(b)* Jo Moore. [47033]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement the Permanent Secretary of my Department made on 25 February 2002, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has sought counsel's advice on his Department's position in relation to his Department's employment of Mr. Martin Sixsmith. [49448]

Mr. Byers: It is not the normal practice to disclose whether legal advice has been taken (paragraph 7 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information refers).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* he and *(b)* the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions last met the First Division Association to discuss the status of (i) Jo Moore and (ii) Mr. Martin Sixsmith. [49447]

Mr. Byers: I have had no such discussions. The Permanent Secretary exceptionally described some discussions in his statement of 25 February 2002. It is

not the practice to provide details of any such discussions (paragraph 7 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information refers).

Blue Badge Scheme

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will introduce a temporary blue badge scheme; and if he will make a statement. [50927]

(2) what plans he has to speed up the processing of applications for blue badges. [50926]

Ms Keeble: The administration of the blue badge scheme is the responsibility of individual local authorities. When they have received the information they require to process an application they should be expected to do so without delay.

A comprehensive review of the blue badge scheme is currently being undertaken by my Department, which will look at the administration of the scheme and will also consider the case for temporary badges. Consultation on a discussion paper, which was issued to the main stakeholders, including disability organisations and local authorities, ended recently. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC- our statutory advisers on the transport and mobility needs of disabled people) are considering responses and are due to report their recommendations to the Secretary of State around the end of this month. In the light of those recommendations we aim to decide on the way forward with the scheme over the summer.

Parish Councillors

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many parish councillors have resigned in each month since 1 January. [50604]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not collect information on the number of councillors who resign from local authorities.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what resources his Department make available to local authorities to help them combat drug abuse. [48857]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government provide general grant for revenue expenditure through the local government finance settlement. It is for the local authorities themselves to determine how much of these resources they direct towards combating drug abuse. Government also provides the following ring-fenced grants to local authorities:

A grant to support local Young People's Substance Misuse Planning (set at £4.5 million for 2002–03);

A grant for drug prevention in schools, provided through the Schools Standards Fund (£9.5 million for 2002–03).

The majority of earmarked funding for combating drug abuse is provided to local Drug Action Teams, within which the local authorities have a key role. Details of this funding were given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Anti-Drugs Co-ordination and Organised Crime in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 295–96W.

Vacant Dwellings

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on the housing market of vacant dwellings *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the local area. [50652]

Mr. Byers: In our assessment, in areas where the housing market is functioning well, vacant dwellings may lead to increased pressure on the housing stock and for development on greenfield land. They may also blight neighbouring properties. In areas of low housing demand, where the proportion of vacant dwellings may be more highly concentrated, they can escalate the decline of an area, act as a magnet for crime, vandalism, arson and antisocial behaviour and create negative equity problems for those living in adjacent dwellings.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing the effect of vacant dwellings on the local housing market and for developing strategies to minimise their number, as part of their wider housing strategy.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vacant dwellings there were and how many vacant dwellings were privately owned in each of the last five years, broken down by local authority area. [50653]

Mr. Byers: I have placed the information requested in the Libraries of the House. The table presents data showing the total number of vacant dwellings and how many of these were privately owned at 1 April in each local authority area in England for the last five years (1997–2001).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vacant dwellings that have been *(a)* vacant for more than six months, *(b)* vacant for between three to six months and *(c)* vacant for less than three months, are waiting to be (i) sold, (ii) let and (iii) redeveloped. [50651]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vacant dwellings there were and how many were privately owned in each of the last five years; and how many were vacant *(a)* for more than six months, *(b)* between three to six months and *(c)* for less than three months. [50650]

Mr. Byers: The number of vacant dwellings in England on 1 April in each of the last five years is shown in the table, together with the number that were privately owned.

Number of vacant dwellings in England at 1 April

	Total vacant	*of which: Privately owned*
2001	755,100	622,600
2000	760,500	623,200
1999	767,000	637,000
1998	753,300	623,300
1997	767,200	640,200

Information on the length of time dwellings were vacant is not available in the form requested.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure mobile telephone masts should receive positive planning permission, regardless of their height. [50030]

Ms Keeble: On 22 August last year we introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development. The changes, which included, amendments to the 1995 Order:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;

increased the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

We have no plans to amend further the planning arrangements for telecommunications development.

Sustainable Development

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will define the phrase "sustainable development" as used by his Department. [49723]

Mr. Byers: My Department's approach to sustainable development is consistent with the Government's overall sustainable development strategy "A better quality of life" (Cm 4345) published in May 1999. The strategy has four main aims:

Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;

Effective protection of the environment;

Prudent use of natural resources;

Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 228W, on the cost of rescues by the fire service, what is the most recent guidance he has given to chief fire officers on recording the costs of *(a)* fires attended, *(b)* rescues from road traffic accidents and *(c)* other rescues by their fire authority. [46609]

Dr. Whitehead: Following the introduction of Best Value, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy published revised accounting guidance "Best Value Accounting—Code of Practice" for local authorities. Best Value authorities, including fire authorities, are subject to the revised guidance from 1 April 2001. The Code is reviewed on an annual basis. It contains sections on service expenditure analysis, including one on the provision of fire services.

Shopping Centres

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy *(a)* towards new out of town shopping centre developments and *(b)* on new shopping centre developments within existing towns. [49002]

Mr. Byers: The Government's planning policy for town centres and retail developments, which is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6: Town Centres and Retail Developments (PPG6), seeks to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of our existing city, town and district centres to make them the focus for retail and other investment. The policy contributes to delivering the urban renaissance, securing more sustainable patterns of development and promoting social inclusion.

Proposals for new developments within existing city, town and district centres are not subject to the main policy tests in PPG6. They should, however, be in accordance with an up-to-date development plan and of a scale that is appropriately related to the size and function of centre, and its catchment, that they seek to serve.

Development proposals for new shopping centres outside city, town and district centres, or extensions to existing ones, are subject to the policy tests in PPG6. Where proposals are not in accord with an up-to-date development plan there is a requirement to demonstrate the need for any additional retail provision and to apply a sequential approach to selecting the location, starting with town centre sites, followed by edge-of-centre and only then out-of-centre sites in locations which are accessible by a choice of means of transport. Applicants must also be able to demonstrate that in considering more central locations they have been flexible about the format, scale and design of their development proposals and the amount of car parking.

A shopping centre proposal which a local planning authority is minded to permit and which is not in accord with the development plan for the area should be referred to my Department in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans and Consultation) (Departures) Directions 1999. The Town and Country Planning (Shopping Development) (England and Wales) (No.2) Direction 1993 requires referral of applications for retail proposals above a prescribed size. In the case of referral under either Direction, the Secretary of State will then decide whether the proposal should be called in for his own determination.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to alter planning guidance and regulations relating to shopping centre developments;and if he will list the changes to planning guidance and planning regulations relating to shopping centre developments since 1997. [49001]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* We have no plans to alter planning guidance and regulations relating to shopping centre developments.

There have been no changes to the policy since 1997, but it has been clarified through the following official statements and documents:

the Government Response (July 1997) to the House of Commons Environment Committee's report, "Shopping Centres" (1996–97), which reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the policy in PPG6;

the parliamentary answer of 5 December 1997 (Hansard Vol. 302, columns 401–402) by the Minister for Planning, clarifying that extensions to existing retail developments would be subject to the same policy tests as new development;

the statement of 11 February 1999 by the Minister for Planning, clarifying that the need for new retail development should be taken into account in assessing development proposals; and

the Government Response (May 2000) to the House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report on "The Environmental Impact of Supermarket Competition" (1999–2000), which among other issues, clarified how the sequential approach should be used to assess new retail development.

The revision of PPG13: "Transport", published last year, supports PPG6 in identifying preferred locations for key town centre uses, including offices. It introduced maximum parking standards for shopping and other town centre developments.

The Town and Country Planning (Development Plans and Consultation)(Departures) Directions 1999 reduced the floorspace threshold under which local planning authorities are required to refer to the Secretary of State planning applications involving retail and other commercial uses, from 10,000 to 5,000 square metres.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a list of shopping centre planning applications that have been called in by his Department and the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions since 1997. [49003]

Mr. Byers: Since 1997, 30 shopping centre applications have been called in for the Secretary of State's determination. These are listed by region. For the purposes of the question shopping centres are developments involving 5,000 square metres or more of floorspace, including factory outlet centres. They do not include retail warehouse parks, individual freestanding retail warehouses, warehouse clubs or supermarkets.

Date of call-in	*Location of application*
North-west	
January 1998	Town Square Centre, Oldham, Greater Manchester
December 1999	Linkway, Bolton, Greater Manchester
September 2000	Ashton Road, Denton, Tameside, Greater Manchester
May 2001	Frontierland, Morecambe, Lancaster, Lancashire
North-east	
June 1997	Backworth, Tyne and Wear
January 1999	Dalton Flatts, Murton, Easington, Co. Durham
March 1999	Red Quadrant, Metrocentre, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear
April 2001	Dalton Flatts, Murton, Easington, Co. Durham
Yorkshire and the Humber	
May 2000	Gannex Mills, Elland, Halifax, West Yorkshire
April 2001	Castlegate/Piccadilly, York
West Midlands	
January 1999	Arena Central, Birmingham
July 2000	Overross, Ross On Wye, Herefordshire
East Midlands	
April 2000	Springfields Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire
May 2001	Springfield Business Park, Grantham, Lincolnshire
East of England	
July 2001	Belvedere Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk
London	
September 1998	Brent Cross, Hendon Way, London
South-west	
October 1997	Broadmoor Farm, Saltash, Cornwall
October 1998	Victoria Park, Roche, Cornwall
July 1999	Flowers Brewery Site, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
January 2000	Aldermeads, Wincanton, Somerset
October 2000	Symes Avenue, Bristol
South-east	
May 1998	Bracknell Town Centre, Berkshire (two applications)
October 1998	Main Square, Camberley, Surrey (three applications)
March 1999	Bietigheim Way, Main Square, Camberley, Surrey
October 1999	Main Square/Park Street, Camberley, Surrey (two applications)
February 2001	Westgate Shopping Centre, Oxford

Planning

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will deposit in the Library copies of the responses to the Planning Green Paper. [49889]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I will place a list of respondents in the Libraries of the House. Because of the large number involved, over 14,000, copies of the responses will be made available for public inspection in my Department's library once they have been analysed.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will assess the *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages of including demolition as part of the planning process. [48840]

Ms Keeble: Demolition of buildings is already part of the planning process. Generally speaking, the demolition of non-residential buildings does not constitute "development" (as defined in section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990), and consequently no planning permission is required. However, the demolition of a residential building does constitute development for which a permitted development right has been granted by Part 31 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. This means that, instead of having to submit an application for planning permission for the demolition of a residential building, a developer has to apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the proposed method of demolition and any proposed restoration of the site. Planning authorities also have powers—subject to approval by the Secretary of State—to require planning applications for demolition of residential property, where amenity would be seriously threatened.

In addition, listed building consent is required for the demolition of any listed building, and conservation area consent is required for the demolition of an unlisted building in a conservation area.

We are considering whether to introduce any changes to the existing demolition controls as part of our current review of the planning system and in taking forward work arising from the Government's Heritage Statement "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future".

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to require planning permission for buildings as part of the planning process; and if he will make a statement. [48841]

Ms Keeble: Putting up a building usually amounts to "development", for which planning permission is required. However, Parliament has granted a general planning permission or "permitted development right" to carry out certain types of minor development without the need to submit an application. This removes a large burden of unnecessary planning work from local authorities.

Leasehold Advisory Service

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding has been granted to the Leasehold Advisory Service in each of the last five years; and what the appointment arrangements are for members of the LEASE board. [50649]

Mr. Byers: Funding for the Leasehold Advisory Service for each of the last five financial years has been as follows:

1997–98

£309,885 (Including £1,000 from the Welsh Office and £38,326 from the private sector.)

1998–99

£268,322 (Including £1,000 from the Welsh Office and £26,622 from the private sector.)

1999–2000

£315,582 (Including £2,000 from the National Assembly for Wales and £12,700 from the private sector.)

2000–01

£398,000 (Including £2,000 from the National Assembly for Wales.)

2001–02

£489,700 (Including £4,700 from the National Assembly for Wales.)

The Leasehold Advisory Service is a private sector company, limited by guarantee. The arrangements for the appointment of its board members are governed by its memorandum and articles of association, copies of which are available from Companies House.

Homelessness

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless people there were *(a)* in absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the population in each local authority district or unitary authority in England and Wales, at the latest date for which figures are available. [49037]

Ms Keeble: Summary information on activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Department each quarter by local authorities in England. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

National and some regional information on local authorities' activity is provided in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. Key summary information at local authority and regional level is set out in associated supplementary table; this includes the number of households accepted, and this number is also expressed as a rate per thousand households living in the local authority area. Copies are available in the Library, and also via the Department's website. The latest version, published on 14 March, presents statistics for the period October to December 2001.

For corresponding information about Welsh authorities, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding will be available to local authorities in order to help them to implement the new duties imposed on them by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Priority Needs Order. [50528]

Mr. Byers: The Government have provided an additional £8 million per annum (through the local government finance settlement, with effect from 2001–02) to compensate local authorities for the revenue costs of implementing the Homelessness Act and the priority needs order.

In response to the homelessness report, 'More than a roof', I confirmed that the Government will allocate additional resources in order to help local authorities deliver the priority needs order. A further announcement on this will be made when the election purdah period is over.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding will be available to the National Homelessness Directorate over the next three years; and how much money will go to *(a)* the BBU, *(b)* the RSU and *(c)* the Hostels Inspectorate. [50529]

Mr. Byers: The DTLR has allocated £35 million to the Bed and Breakfast Unit and £30 million to the Rough Sleepers Unit for this financial year. Funding from April 2003 onwards is dependent on the outcome of Spending Review 2002.

As was stated in the document 'More than a roof' we are currently exploring the feasibility of establishing a hostels 'inspectorate'.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received on the incidence of commercial property companies offering local authority tenants a cash incentive to exercise the right to buy their home; and if he will make a statement. [49915]

Ms Keeble: We are aware of concerns that the right to buy scheme is being exploited in various ways. We have commissioned research into what is happening, including the effect on the housing market. The results will be made publicly available when the work is completed.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council properties were sold under the right to buy in each year since 1980. [49913]

Ms Keeble: The latest information on right to buy sales by local authorities and new towns in each year since the scheme's introduction in October 1980 is presented in the table:

	Total sales completed under RTB
1980–81	2,300
1981–82	106,600
1982–83	168,700
1983–84	107,500
1984–85	78,500
1985–86	72,600
1986–87	77,400
1987–88	94,600
1988–89	137,000
1989–90	134,900
1990–91	76,600
1991–92	48,500
1992–93	37,900
1993–94	44,900
1994–95	43,300
1995–96	31,500
1996–97	33,200
1997–98	41,300
1998–99	40,300
1999–2000	54,300
2000–01	52,000
2001[1]	23,800
Total	1,507,600

[1] April to September.
Note:
Includes sales under shared ownership arrangements;
Excludes sales under rent to mortgage.
Source:
DTLR PI(B) quarterly housing activity returns, and new town returns.

Tables showing reported information on right to buy and other sales and stock transfers by each local authority in England, along with national and regional summaries, for each year since 1979–80, are available in the Libraries of the House.

Heathrow

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what restrictions on night flights at Heathrow airport apply; what information he has collated on the rules that apply at other European hub airports; and what assessment he has made of the effect of such restrictions on Heathrow's competitive position. [48922]

Mr. Jamieson: The present night restrictions for Heathrow are as we announced on 10 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns 378–380. These restrictions came into effect on 31 October 1999 and apply until the end of the summer season 2004. Information on assessments made prior to the introduction of these restrictions and a comparison of the principal night flight restrictions at major international airports were published in "Night Restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted: Second Stage Consultation Paper" in November 1998, of which copies were placed in the Libraries of the House, *Official Report*, columns 492–493.

Appropriate up-to-date information will be published in a consultation paper when we put forward proposals for the next night noise regime for the BAA London airports.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has sole responsibility for drafting and presentation of certificates of registry; and which office within the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has authority to draft certificates of registry. [49962]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Registry of Shipping and Seamen at Cardiff is responsible for issuing all certificates of registry for UK vessels.

Ferry Services

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has made regarding the proposed EU directive on minimum conditions of service and wages for seafarers on intra-community ferry services. [50576]

Mr. Jamieson: We have made representations in support of the proposed EC directive on manning conditions for regular passenger and ferry services operating between member states.

Transport Links (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department or its agencies have for the improvement of transport links between the Isle of Wight and the mainland of Great Britain. [51069]

Mr. Jamieson: Improvements to the transport links between the island and the mainland are primarily for the Isle of Wight council to consider as part of their local transport plan work and in liaison with mainland local authorities and private sector ferry and hovercraft operators. My Department has frequent discussions with the council about its local transport plan, including recent proposals to improve interchange facilities at Ryde.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has received for improvements to the railway network of the Isle of Wight. [51068]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will make recommendations regarding the future of the rail network on the Isle of Wight in due course. The current franchise will expire in September 2003, and the SRA is currently working to define what it would expect a new franchise agreement to deliver.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage the provision of services facilitating the carriage of passengers or goods by rail from Scotland to the continent by way of the Channel Tunnel, pursuant to the provisions of the Transport Act 2000. [49960]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 741W.

Overturned Lorries

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many lorries overturned on British roads in each of the last five years; and how many overturned on the *(a)* A12, *(b)* A14, *(c)* A140 and *(d)* B1113 in each of the last five years. [50647]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

New Bypasses

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the status of the 100 new bypasses outlined in the 10-year Transport Plan; and if he will list the *(a)* start and *(b)* completion date for each. [50042]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year plan provided funds for up to 30 trunk road bypasses and up to 70 bypasses on local roads over the 10-year plan period. 24 schemes which bypass settlements were in the Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI) when the plan was published. Nine further such schemes have been added to the TPI since then and 17 more trunk road bypasses are subject to on-going multi-modal and other studies. Of these schemes 16 have started.

Scheme	*Actual/Estimated Date of Start of Construction*	*Estimated Date Available For Use*
A27 Polegate Bypass	October 2000	2002–03
A43 Silverstone Bypass	February 2001	2002–03
A43 Whitfield Turn-Brackley Hatch Improvement	February 2001	2002–03
A6 Great Glen Bypass	April 2001	2002–03
A66 Stainburn and Great Clifton Bypass	July 2001	2002–03
A6 Clapham Bypass	May 2001	2003–04
A500 Basford, Hough, Shavington Bypass	June 2001	2003–04
A650 Bingley Relief Road	July 2001	2003–04
A120 Stansted-Braintree Improvement	July 2001	2003–04
A41 Aston Clinton Bypass	August 2001	2003–04
A63 Selby Bypass	October 2001	2003–04
A5 Nesscliffe Bypass	March 2002	2003–04
A6 Rothwell-Desborough Bypass	2002–03	2003–04
A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass	2002–03	2003–04
A46 Newark-Lincoln	October 2001	2003–04
A6 Alvaston	2002–03	2004–05
A10 Wadesmill-Colliers End	2002–03	2004–05
A21 Lamberhurst Bypass	2002–03	2004–05
A5 Weeford-Fazeley Improvement	2003–04	2004–05
A1(M) Wetherby—Walshford	2002–03	2005–06
A421 Great Barford Bypass	2004–05	2006–07
A1(M) Ferrybridge to Hook Moor	2002–03	2006–07
A30 Bodmin-Indian Queens	2004–05	2006–07
A66 Temple Sowerby Bypass	2004–05	2006–07
A595 Parton-Lillyhall Improvement	2005–06	2007–08
A38 Dobwalls Bypass	2005–06	2007–08
A11 Fiveways to Thetford	2005–06	2007–08
A419 Blunsdon Bypass	2006–07	2007–08
A47 Thorney Bypass	2006–07	2008–09
A483 Pant—Llanymynech Bypass	2006–07	2008–09
A3 Hindhead	2005–06	2008–09
A46 Newark-Widmerpool	2006–07	2008–09
A303 Stonehenge	2005–06	2008–09

Of the 76 local road schemes approved (or approved subject to statutory procedures) through the local transport plans process, 33 are bypasses. Start and completion dates are subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures which are currently being taken forward by the relevant local authorities.

Motorways

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to prevent new buildings being erected adjacent to motorways to ensure that the costs of future motorway widening are kept to a minimum. [49262]

Ms Keeble: Where the Secretary of State intends to build a new road, or improve an existing one, he has powers to require the relevant local planning authority to notify him of any planning application affecting the line of that road.

To avoid unnecessary blight, these powers are exercised on behalf of the Secretary of State by the Highways Agency usually when the preferred route is announced. He then has a further power to direct that planning permission shall not be granted if the proposed development would prejudice the road proposal.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to reduce congestion on the northbound carriageway of the M1 Motorway at its junction with the M25. [49940]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to South Midlands Multi Modal Study is examining current and future travel problems between London and the South Midlands, including congestion on the southern section of the M1 Motorway.

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Congestion

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what is the average length of time per day, in hours per car, that cars are stationary on each road of the trunk road network; [50517]

(2) what the average road speed is on each trunk road in the UK in *(a)* the rush hour, *(b)* non rush hour periods, *(c)* over the course of a week, *(d)* over the course of a whole week day and *(e)* over the course of the weekend. [50516]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure to through traffic of roads in London on congestion levels since 1992. [49021]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not collect such information centrally. Assessment of the traffic impacts of road closures is a matter for the relevant highway or police authorities in each particular case.

Environmental Targets

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment has been made of progress towards the environmental targets set as part of the 10-year plan; and if he will place it in the Library; [50521]

(2) what environmental targets have been set as part of the 10-year transport plan. [50520]

Mr. Byers: The 10-Year Plan for transport will contribute to the achievement of a number of the Government's environmental targets. "Transport 2010: The 10-Year Plan", Annex 2, lists the principal targets in the plan. Copies are in the Libraries of the House. In July we intend to publish the first report on the 10-Year Plan for Transport. The report will allow us to update the plan and take account of new developments, as well as reporting on our progress to date.

Environmental Assessments

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessments he has made of the environmental effects of electricity generation for rail use; and what comparisons he has made with the use of diesel locomotives. [49706]

Mr. Byers: The SRA commissioned work on the railway's environmental impact during 2001. The results are sensitive to factors such as the mix of sources of electricity generation, the type of diesel traction, and operational factors such as speed or loading. Given the current mix of fossil fuel, nuclear and other generative sources, carbon dioxide emissions per passenger km attributed to electric long haul express trains are about half those of some comparable diesel trains currently in operation. It is likely that the on-going introduction of more modern diesel trains will reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

With the exception of sulphur oxides, most of rail's emissions of particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds are from diesel trains. Again, the on-going introduction of more modern diesel locomotives offers benefits—for example, reducing the level of emissions per tonne-km of these pollutants.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated environmental benefit is of increasing the number passenger kilometres of rail use by *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., *(d)* 40 per cent., *(e)* 50 per cent. and *(f)* 60 per cent. by 2010–11. [49703]

Mr. Byers: The environmental effect will vary depending on how the increase in rail passenger kilometres is achieved. An increase in rail use will, in general, cause an increase in emissions from the rail sector. However, to the extent that this is achieved through modal shift from more environmentally damaging modes, and accompanied by greater use of more fuel efficient rolling stock, there will be offsetting benefits.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made as to the danger resulting from particulate emissions from road vehicles. [49449]

Mr. Byers: The Government's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) is charged with advising the Government on the effects of pollutant types on human health. Their 'Statement on Long-Term Effects of Particles on Mortality' published in April 2001, gave a detailed assessment of the effects of particulate emissions on human health, including those from road transport. This can be seen at the Department of Health's website at www.doh.gov.uk/comeap/.

A summary of COMEAP's findings was also included in the Government's 'Air Quality Strategy Consultation Document on Proposals for Air Quality Objectives for Particles, Benzene, Carbon Monoxide and Polycyclic Aromatic Compounds', published in September 2001. Both reports were placed in the Libraries of the House on publication.

Vehicle Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average level is of *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* carbon monoxide, *(c)* benzene, *(d)* nitrogen oxide, *(e)* hydrocarbon, *(f)* lead, *(g)* sulphur dioxide and *(h)* particulate emissions, per mile, from (1) cars, (2) motorcycles, (3) vans and (4) HGVs travelling at *(i)* five mph, (ii) 10 mph, (iii) 20 mph, (iv) 30 mph, (v) 45 mph, (vi) 60 mph, (vii) 70 mph and (viii) 80 mph. [49456]

Mr. Byers: Detailed information on the emissions of key pollutants by various road vehicles running at different drive cycles is available from the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (NAEI) website at http://www.naei.org.uk/emissions/index.php.

Raw data for emissions of pollutant species at different speeds are also available on a separate website http://www.stanger.co.uk/airqual/modelhlp.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the average level is of *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* carbon monoxide, *(c)* benzene, *(d)* nitrogen oxide, *(e)* hydrocarbon, *(f)* lead,

(g) sulphur dioxide and *(h)* particulate emissions, per hour, from (1) cars, (2) motorcycles, (3) vans and (4) HGVs, at rest with the motor running; [49457]

(2) what the average level is of *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* carbon monoxide, *(c)* benzene, *(d)* nitrogen oxide, *(e)* hydrocarbon, *(f)* lead, *(g)* sulphur dioxide and *(h)* particulate emissions resulting from vehicle use of the fuels *(i)* Cngas, (ii) Lpgas, (iii) biodiesels, (iv) LNG, (v) E10 bioethanol blends and (vi) E85 bioethanol blends; and if he will place in the Library details of the supporting scientific evidence. [49452]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Chiltern Franchise Renewal Agreement

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on clause 44 of the Chiltern Franchise Renewal Agreement. [47386]

Mr. Jamieson: Clause 44 of the Chiltern Franchise Renewal Agreement refers to miscellaneous provisions. The items covered are: variations in writing; waivers; disregard tolerances; change of framework; time limits; payments to be free and clear; partial invalidity; further assurance; rights of third parties; relationship with previous franchise agreement; and Authority's consent or approval.

Railway Use

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many railway journeys have a standard single fare of less than £10; and how many such journeys were undertaken in the last year for which information is available. [51067]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many passengers per year travel between Waterloo and *(a)* Southampton Central station, *(b)* Lymington Pier station, *(c)* Portsmouth and Southsea station, *(d)* Portsmouth Harbour station and *(e)* stations on the Island line; [51066]

(2) what information he collects on the number of journeys between different railway stations. [51065]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) annual report provides details of train miles, passenger miles, passenger journeys, route miles operated and the number of stations operated by each train operating company. The SRA's publication "National Rail Trends" provides quarterly figures on passenger kilometres and passenger journeys by ticket type and sector. Copies of the Annual report and "National Rail Trends" are placed in the Library of the House. Further information on particular journeys may be available from train operators.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the estimated reduction in passenger kilometres travelled by road resulting from increasing the number passenger kilometres of rail use by *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., *(d)* 40 per cent., *(e)* 50 per cent. and *(f)* 60 per cent. [49704]

Mr. Byers: The reduction in road passenger kilometres resulting from an increase in the number of rail passenger kilometres will vary with the factors which have brought about the increase in rail passenger kilometres.

Rail Investment

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what private investment in railway infrastructure projects has been made since the start of the 10-year plan and into which projects; and what private investment is forecast for *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004. [R] [49030]

Mr. Jamieson: Nearly £7 billion of private sector investment has already been committed for the 10-Year plan period covering renewals and enhancement investment, rolling-stock investment and the CTRL. Over £1 billion has come since the turn of the year alone, through the GNER extension, Chiltern refranchise and South Central rolling stock order. Private sector investment will continue to be levered in through the franchising process, special purpose vehicles and specific funding schemes such as the Rail Passenger Partnership fund.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many railheads there are in the Greater London area. [49720]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 663W.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Network Rail's plans for developing services on the West Coast mainline. [49272]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Network Rail.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans exist for *(a)* electrification of lines from Hurst Green to Uckfield, *(b)* electrification of lines from Hastings to Ashford, *(c)* station improvements on the South Central line, *(d)* increased depot capacity, *(e)* platform lengthening, *(f)* the refurbishment of all power-door rolling stock on the South Central line, *(g)* enhancements at Gatwick airport for performance and capacity gains, *(h)* infrastructure work on the Brighton main line, *(i)* infrastructure facilities to allow faster trains to overtake slower stopping services on the Coastway route, *(j)* upgrade of the Arun valley line and *(k)* upgrade of the Sutton route, on the South Central route; and what is the expected (i) start date and (ii) completion date for such work. [49724]

Mr. Byers: The Heads of Terms for a new 20-year South Central franchise, signed by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and Govia on 24 October 2000, include these commitments. I expect the SRA to be able to sign a new franchise agreement with Govia later this year.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from *(a)* Govia, *(b)* the SRA, *(c)* Railtrack plc and its administrators and *(d)* Network Rail, with respect to the SPV being developed by Govia to upgrade infrastructure around London and the south coast. [49459]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I have received no such representations.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what funds are available as part of the SRA plan for the development of additional railheads in the Greater London area; [49722]

(2) what assessment has been made as to the number of additional railheads required in the Greater London area in order to meet the growth targets for rail freight in the SRA plan and the 10-year transport plan. [49721]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority's Freight Strategy, published last year, explains in detail the authority's funding strategy and its assessment of the future need for rail freight interchanges.

A copy of the SRA's Freight Strategy is available in the Libraries of the House.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Second Railway package. [49815]

Mr. Jamieson: The Commission published its second railway package on 23 January. It includes formal proposals to complete liberalisation of rail freight markets, on safety, interoperability, the creation of a European Rail Agency and Community accession to the COTIF convention (the convention concerning international carriage by rail).

The Communication also outlines the Commission's strategy for the next five years, including consideration of proposals on the quality of rail freight services; overcoming the barriers to entry to, and providing high-quality infrastructure for, European rail freight; improving the environmental performance of rail freight; extending liberalisation of international passenger services; and improving passenger rights.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department had with Swiftrail between 7 October and 25 March. [49868]

Mr. Jamieson: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the terms of reference are of the study commissioned by the Strategic Rail Authority into a high speed rail link from London to the north. [48747]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA are conducting a feasibility study to determine the need for, and viability of a new north-south high speed passenger line. The study, which will report by the end of the year, will consider and compare a wide range of rail capacity enhancement options which may be required to satisfy the long term growth in demand for north-south passenger movements.

Rail Safety

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, ref. 45304, on rolling stock, if the Railway Safety Regulations 1999 prohibit steam locomotives from operating on the main network unless protected by TPWS or a similar system. [49821]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railway Safety Regulations 1999 prohibit steam trains from operating on the mainline network at speeds above 25 mph after the end of 2003, unless they are protected by a suitable train protection system. I understand from the Health and Safety Executive that a train protection and warning system (TPWS) suitable for use by steam trains is currently under development.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those organisations consulted by his Department prior to the agreement of a grant to Network Rail for bringing Railtrack out of administration early. [49791]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Discussions took place with HM Treasury and the SRA before the Department indicated to Network Rail that it was willing to offer a grant payment to reflect the public benefits of an earlier exit from administration than would otherwise be the case.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the sale of railway assets by the company that succeeds Railtrack. [49840]

Mr. Jamieson: This a matter for the Rail Regulator, who set out his policy in chapter 12 of the October 2000 Periodic Review and condition 26 of Railtrack's network licence.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what provision exists in European law for the extension of state aid support to Railtrack in administration beyond 7 October; [49864]

(2) what factors underlay the comments made by his Department to Bloomberg on 22 March about state aid rules relating to Railtrack; [49866]

(3) what advice his Department has received about state aid rules relating to support for Railtrack beyond 7 October. [49865]

Mr. Jamieson: If the Network Rail bid were to be successful, any state aid provided to the company would be notified as permanent financial support that would bring the administration of Railtrack plc to a close. But if administration were to continue, state aid clearance would be sought as necessary as an extension of the existing clearance or as a separate notification if more appropriate.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 956W, if he has set aside contingency funds to cover an unexpectedly high periodic review. [49814]

Mr. Jamieson: The regulator has a statutory duty under section 4 of the Railways Act 1993, as amended by section 224 of the Transport Act 2000, to have regard to the SRA's budget when undertaking a review. The Government would consider any appropriate budgetary adjustments as and when any such review takes place.

Rail Regulator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the future of the Rail Regulator. [49871]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 100W.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place *(a)* written guarantees and *(b)* letters of comfort for financiers issued by his Department or the Strategic Rail Authority to Network Rail in the Library. [48180]

Mr. Jamieson: The normal notification procedures will be followed.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what timeframe the proposed standby loans from the SRA to Network Rail will be available to the new company. [48186]

Mr. Jamieson: This will depend on whether Network Rail's bid for Railtrack Group's shares is successful, when Railtrack plc comes out of administration and the terms of any loan when agreed.

London Underground PPP

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what estimate he has made of the total potential liabilities to the Exchequer which will arise from underwriting the contingent liabilities of the public-private partnerships for London Underground, as proposed in the letters of comfort and Minute from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the partners in the PPP presented to Parliament on 21 March 2002; and how those liabilities will be treated and presented in the national accounts; [47961]

(2) if he will publish the calculations and underlying assumptions which he has made to calculate the potential liabilities to the Exchequer which will arise from underwriting the contingent liabilities of the public-private partnerships for London Underground, as proposed in the letters of comfort and Minute from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to the partners in the PPP presented to Parliament on 21 March 2002. [47960]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Minute to Parliament explained that the proposed comfort letters would cover a wide range of obligations on London Underground under the PPP contracts. In normal circumstances, the letter recognises the annual payments that will be made by London Underground to the infrastructure companies for the successful delivery of the required services. However, it also recognises that, in the unlikely event of an infrastructure company persistently and materially defaulting on its obligations in a way which leads to a termination of the PPP, then any funds put up by shareholders in the infrastructure company would be wholly at risk. In addition, an 'underpinned amount' would become payable to the lenders to the infrastructure company concerned. This is capped at the total value of the third party debt and has a floor of 95 per cent. of that amount.

The contingent liability will be to repay some or all of the debt that has already been invested in the improvement of the Tube. The potential size of the payment will therefore depend on the amount of debt that has been invested at the time the underpinned amount becomes payable.

The Department's Resource Accounts are drawn in accordance with the Treasury Resource Accounting Manual, which takes account of all financial reporting standards pronounced by the Accounting Standards Board. The contingent liability arising from any letters of comfort would therefore be recorded as a Note to the Department's Resource Accounts.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has now decided to extend the consultation period for the comfort letters to provide the customary notification period.

Rail Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what is the estimated increase in use of diesel trains for rail freight use over the lifetime of the 10-year plan; [49712]

(2) what the estimated change is in use of electric trains for rail freight use over the lifetime of the 10-year plan; [49713]

(3) what volume of rail freight traffic is hauled by *(a)* electric and *(b)* diesel locomotives. [49711]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority does not keep data on the form of traction used by freight operating companies.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the estimated number of journeys made per month by road hauliers *(a)* to transfer freight onto the rail network and *(b)* to transfer freight from the rail network to its final destination in each of the last five years. [49716]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is not available on a monthly basis.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what compensation is being given to rail freight operators as a result of disruption to rail freight facilities through the Channel tunnel. [R] [49033]

Mr. Spellar: The companies affected should, in the first instance, be exploring the remedies available to them under their contracts and under EU law on the free movement of goods.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the impact on his ten-year transport plan of the rail freight disruption through the channel tunnel since November 2001; and if he will revise his estimated increase of rail freight. [R] [49026]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 957W.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the increase of freight by rail within the Greater London area. [50587]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) Freight Strategy proposes a number of initiatives for increasing use of rail freight in Greater London. The SRA is also working with Transport for London and its London Sustainable Distribution Partnership to identify opportunities for sustainable urban distribution.

The SRA will be focusing on London when it produces its regional freight strategy for London and the south-east later this year.

Rail Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated environmental benefit is in increasing the volume of rail freight traffic by *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., *(d)* 40 per cent., *(e)* 50 per cent. and *(f)* 60 per cent. by 2010–11. [49705]

Mr. Byers: The environmental effect will vary depending on how the increase in the volume of rail freight traffic is achieved. An increase in rail freight will, in general, cause an increase in emissions from the rail sector. However, to the extent that this is achieved through modal shift there will be some offsetting benefits, reducing the impact of transport on the environment.

SCOTLAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if she will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37984]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 no special advisers in my Department travelled abroad in an official capacity. Information for the last financial year is not yet available.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42993]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department has not market tested or outsourced any function during this period.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43204]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department has had no expenditure on public-private partnership consultants.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts her Office has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether she can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions she has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50838]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department currently has no contracts with consultants. On discussions with other Departments, I refer to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42988]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Scottish Executive

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has been formally consulted by the Scottish Executive in each of the last two years. [45358]

The Advocate-General: I have not been formally consulted by the Scottish Executive because that is not my role. As Law Officer I give legal advice to the Government. The Scottish Executive receives legal advice from its Law Officers—the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General for Scotland.

Leggatt Review

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Advocate-General what assessment she had made of the implications of the Leggatt Review for UK tribunals operating in Scotland. [45785]

The Advocate-General: The Government will publish their response to the Leggatt Report later in the year. There is ongoing work on this matter which will be subject to collective ministerial decision. As regards the implications for UK tribunals operating in Scotland, the Lord Chancellor's Department have been considering this

together with the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive and the results of this consideration will be included in the Government's response.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the dates of the meetings and contacts that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had with (i) Mr. Roy Parker, (ii) Sir Richard Needham and (iii) Mr. Shaun Harte since 2 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34326]

Dr. John Reid: There is no record of any such meetings or contacts taking place with either Mr. Parker or Mr. Harte.

Sir Richard Needham is a frequent visitor to Northern Ireland and it is possible that he might have had some contact with my Department in the course of these visits. However, we have been unable to find any record of any formal meetings or contacts with Sir Richard at ministerial or special adviser level.

Mackie Ltd.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the dates and subjects of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had since 2 May 1997 with representatives of Mackie Ltd.; and if he will make a statement. [34324]

Dr. John Reid: On 9 September 1998, the Minister of State dealing with economic development matters met Sul Sahota and Jim Gilmore, respectively chief executive and chairman of Mackie International Group plc. The Minister of State was accompanied by officials, but there was no special adviser present. The meeting was held at the request of Mr. Sahota to discuss financial difficulties that were being faced by Mackie International Group plc. We have no record of any other such meetings, although there was frequent contact with representatives of Mackie International Group at official level from May 1997 until the company collapsed.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department has made of the reasons for the collapse of Mackie; and if he will make a statement. [34320]

Dr. John Reid: Mackie International Group plc following its failure to raise additional funding of £15 million to acquire another engineering group and restructure its balance sheet. The company had incurred substantial trading losses of over £25 million from 1996 to 1998 due to a decline in the textile machinery market and a lack of orders. These losses significantly weakened the company's liquidity.

Mr. Shaun Harte

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what role Mr. Shaun Harte played on behalf of the British Government; if he will place the terms of reference for his appointment in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [34321]

Dr. John Reid: There is no record of Mr. Harte having been employed by the British Government at any time.

Shaun Harte was employed by the Northern Ireland Development Agency, a statutory agency, from 1978 to 1979. During that period, he was nominated by the Northern Ireland Development Agency to serve as a non-executive member of the De Lorean Motors Ltd. board. We are informed by the devolved Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that, given the passage of time since then, Mr. Harte's employment records are no longer available. He died in 1999.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the dates of the meetings and contacts that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had with Mr. Shaun Harte since 2 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [34325]

Dr. John Reid: There is no record of any such meetings or contacts having taken place.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library the information that his Department received from Mr. Roy Parker regarding Mr. Shaun Harte; and if he will make a statement. [34322]

Dr. John Reid: Roy Parker made a number of allegations against Shaun Harte and former directors of Mackie International Group. These were investigated by the Serious Fraud Office, who found no evidence of any impropriety which could lead them to take any action against the company, its former directors or its auditors.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Poverty

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to consult on the measurement of child poverty. [51496]

Malcolm Wicks: Today I have published "Measuring Child Poverty: a consultation document". Copies have been placed in the Library.

This consultation document aims to promote debate on how best to build on the Government's existing indicators to measure child poverty in the long term. The paper describes and seeks views on a range of approaches proposed by academics and poverty experts from the UK and overseas.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many companies have been *(a)* investigated and *(b)* fined by the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority for breaking the rules governing stakeholder pensions. [46474]

Mr. McCartney: Stakeholder pension schemes started in April 2001. Up to 1 March 2002, the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) has investigated 299 cases where an employer has failed to designate a stakeholder scheme and 144 cases of employers failing to pay contributions on time.

No companies have as yet been fined. Opra's focus is on getting employers to comply. Compliance has been achieved in 219 of the cases investigated. No breach was found to have occurred in 88 cases. The remainder are under continuing investigation.

Hospital Travel

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many grants were made to assist with the cost of travel to hospital, and of what mean and upper and lower decile values, in each *(a)* county, *(b)* health authority and (b) travel-to-work area in the last 12 months. [43243]

Malcolm Wicks: Patients admitted to hospital for NHS treatment can apply for help towards their travelling costs through the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme which is the responsibility of the Department of Health.

Hospital visitors can apply for a social fund community care grant to help with their travelling costs. Separate figures for the number and value of grants made in respect of these costs are not available.

Cold Weather Payments

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Social Fund cold weather payments have been made in each of the last 10 years; and what was value of these payments for *(a)* each Government Office region in England and *(b)* Wales. [39525]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Cold weather payments: 1991–92 to 2000–01
England and Wales

	Number of payments made
1991–92	[1]3,800,000
1992–93	[1]2,500,000
1993–94	[1]2,100,000
1994–95	10,969
1995–96	6,537,914
1996–97	4,543,665
1997–98	42,615
1998–99	14,512
1999–2000	97,469
2000–01	2,720,117

Notes:
1. Information before 1994–95 is only available rounded to the nearest 100,000.
2. Information on the value of these payments is not available by Government Office Region.
Source:
Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance Computer Systems.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is being done to reduce the backlog of those people who received the incorrect winter fuel payment in *(a)* December 2001 and *(b)* January and February 2002; and if he will make a statement. [48550]

Mr. McCartney: When the Department becomes aware that a winter fuel payment has been issued at an incorrect amount, remedial action is taken as a soon as possible. There is no current backlog.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people received the incorrect winter fuel payment of £100 in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [48633]

Mr. McCartney: Anyone who received a £100 winter fuel payment was advised to contact the Department immediately if they thought that they should have been entitled to £200. Where it was found that the higher rate was appropriate, a top-up payment of £100 was made as soon as possible. In winter 2000–01, a total of 43,962 top-up payments were issued; so far, around 38,500 have been made for winter 2001–02.

Social Fund

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure on (i) grants and (ii) loans from the Social Fund in the Leaside district in each year since 1990 indicating the number and amount of applications in each case for each year; and if he will make a statement. [25750]

Malcolm Wicks: Since April 1997 the gross discretionary Social Fund budget has increased by £153.1 million from £467.5 million to £620.6 million, an increase of almost 33 per cent. The Community Care Grant budget, previously frozen since 1994 at £97 million, has increased three times since 1998 to its current level in 2001–02 of £103 million. There is no cash limit on the amount a person may apply for initially.

The available information is in the tables.

Leaside benefits agency district: Social Fund grants

Financial year	*Number of grant applications*	*Amount applied for[1] (£)*	*Annual budget (£)*	*Amount spent (£)*
1995–96	7,508	7,288,166.25	630,008	629,426.43
1996–97	7,305	7,581,050.72	630,008	628,075.05
1997–98	7,330	8,006,455.55	630,008	630,007.46
1998–99	7,340	8,240,722.22	657,214	657,207.32
1999–2000	4,027	4,826,411.49	636,976	635,852.23
2000–01	3,426	4,134,400.08	644,904	644,372.63

Leaside benefits agency district: Social Fund loans

Financial year	*Number of loan applications*	*Amount applied for[1] (£)*	*Annual budget (£)*	*Amount spent (£)*
1995–96	14,628	9,100,636.61	3,188,322	3,170,058.26
1996–97	14,800	9,966,148.00	3,712,051	3,629,559.60
1997–98	17,014	10,505,600.90	4,127,058	4,050,358.03

Leaside benefits agency district: Social Fund loans

Financial year	*Number of loan applications*	*Amount applied for[1] (£)*	*Annual budget (£)*	*Amount spent (£)*
1998–99	18,803	11,434,358.20	4,143,626	4,032,679.15
1999–2000	20,583	12,579,494.70	4,662,581	4,604,114.43
2000–01	20,702	13,968,691.70	5,240,918	5,046,020.83

[1] The "amount applied for" column includes applications which were unsuccessful.

Note:
Reliable data at district level is not available prior to 1995–96.

Source:
Social Fund Policy and Budget Management Information System.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budget was for the Social Fund in 2000–01; and what the final outturn of expenditure was. [47763]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the Social Fund budget are in the 'Annual Report by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the Social Fund: 2000–01' and the outturn of expenditure is in the 'Social Fund Account: 2000–01'. Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for social fund payments have been subject to *(a)* an internal Benefits Agency review and *(b)* a review by the Independent Review Service in each year since 1992; what proportion of the reviews was successful; what the average waiting time was for each type of review; and if he will break down the applications by each type of social fund payment. [51044]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the annual reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund and the Social Fund Commissioner's annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for improving the training of Benefits Agency staff who deal with social fund applicants. [51050]

Malcolm Wicks: All staff engaged in administering the social fund undertake comprehensive training. We regularly review this training and it was last updated in January of this year. A further review of training is due to take place at the end of the year.

In addition, guidance on the social fund is regularly updated and social fund awareness training is provided to other staff not directly involved in social fund administration.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the guidance issued to Social Fund staff on the administration of the Social Fund since 1997. [51048]

Malcolm Wicks: Prior to January 1999 guidance to staff administering the Social Fund was in nine separate guides:

The Social Fund Guide—Volumes 1 and 2;

The Social Fund System Reference Guide volumes 1 to 7;

The Social Fund Customer and Application Detail Guide;

The Social Fund Printed Output Guide;

The Social Fund Decision and Review Guide;

The Social Fund Breakdown of Recovery Guide;

The Social Fund Review Officers Guide;

The Social Fund Risk Management Guide; and

The Social Fund Funeral and Maternity Guide.

The guidance was restructured in January 1999. From that date, guidance on Social Fund legislation and the Secretary of State's directions for the non-regulated fund are set out in the new Social Fund Guide. Operations and procedural guidance is set out in the following volumes:

The Social Fund Budgeting Loan Guide;

The Social Fund Community Care Grant and Crisis Loan Guide;

The Social Fund Customer Guide;

The Social Fund Enquiry Guide;

The Social Fund Payment Guide;

The Social Fund Recovery Guide;

The Social Fund Regulated Fund Guide;

The Social Fund Review and Complaints Guide; and

The Social Fund Management Guide.

New guidance is circulated to staff in bulletins which are then incorporated into the main guides. 108 bulletins have been produced since January 1997.

Home Responsibilities Protection

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received on the home responsibilities protection for foster carers. [48697]

Mr. McCartney: We regularly receive representations on all aspects of state retirement pension entitlement from a variety of organisations and interested individuals.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44902]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the destinations of people entering the New Deal for Young People in all of the Department and its agencies is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the

new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over 50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44922]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Figures before that date are for the former Department of Social Security and the Employment Service.

Such information as is available is as follows.

Information follows on the number of people who have started on the new deal for young people in the Department and its agencies.

People who have started on the new deal for young people

	Number
1998–99	347
1999–2000	207
2000–01	158
2001–02[1]	22

[1] Up to October 2001

Note:

These figures show people who have joined the Department on the new deal fixed term appointment (NDFTA) programme. They include some people recruited from the new deal for lone parents who also join the NDFTA on entering the Department. These cannot be identified separately.

The Department has also taken on 2,875 new deal jobseekers under its normal recruitment processes. This figure includes people who have been on the new deal for young people and new deal 25 plus and cannot be broken down. People recruited by the Department under the new deal 50 plus cannot be identified separately from new deal 25 plus recruits.New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified. The subsidy cost is approximately £1.3 million.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Delyn have benefited from the New Deal. [48917]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

	Total number of people entering jobs (up to the end of January 2002)	
Programme	*Alyn and Deeside*	*Delyn*
New Deal for Young People	484	359
New Deal 25 plus	111	96
New Deal for Lone Parents	250	218
New Deal 50 plus	93	106

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Information at constituency level is not available for the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners.

Back Pain

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what studies he is collating in conjunction with the Department of Health into *(a)* the incidence of low back pain among those of working age and *(b)* its implications for loss of working time and costs to the benefit system. [48823]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The Department has played an important role in raising awareness of back pain disability as an issue; in promoting best clinical practice to health professionals; in supporting the development of guidelines for managers and employees; and in devising more objective and rigorous assessment methods.

A Chief Medical Adviser bulletin has recently been issued to all General Practitioners which specifically mentions the management of low back pain and the need for doctors to follow the Royal College of General Practitioners management guidelines when treating this condition. The Department continues to work very closely with external experts in the field of back pain in developing policies, guidance and procedures.

An innovative approach to work preparation—the "From Back Pain to Work" project—has recently been piloted in at the main hospitals in Salford and Bristol. This involved Jobcentre staff working in partnership with medical practitioners to reintegrate people with back pain into employment. The project used a programme of psychological, physical and occupational elements to help people back into work.

Results from the initial trials have been encouraging and there are now plans for further expansion and evaluation of the pilots in additional locations starting in late summer 2002.

Medical Assessment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the Department has agreed the extended contract for medical assessment services with SchlumbergerSema; and if modifications take into account the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee's twenty seventh report (HC683). [48822]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* The extension of Contracts with SchlumbergerSema, announced on 30 November 2001 has not yet been confirmed. The decision to confirm or revoke the extension will be made by 31 May 2002.

Since the Public Accounts Committee hearing in March 2001 significant progress has been made towards addressing the Committee's concerns and improving the standard of services delivered by SchlumbergerSema.

Savings Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the proportion of expenditure on the savings credit element of the pension credit that will be attributable to *(a)* single male pensioners, *(b)* single female pensioners and *(c)* married pensioners; [47582]

(2) how many *(a)* single women, *(b)* single men and *(c)* pensioner couples are expected to be entitled to (i) the guarantee credit only, (ii) the savings credit only and (iii) both the guarantee credit and the savings credit in October 2003; [47583]

(3) what percentage of claimants entitled to the state pension credit are expected to be entitled to *(a)* housing benefit, *(b)* council tax benefit and *(c)* both housing and council tax benefit. [47584]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is in the tables.

Table 1: Proportion of total savings credit expenditure for which it is estimated that single men, single women and pensioner couples will be eligible

Per cent.[1]

	Proportion of savings credit expenditure
Single men	16
Single women	50
Couples	35
Total	100

[1] Percentages are given to the nearest per cent.

Table 2: number of single men, single women and pensioner couples estimated to be entitled to the pension credit in 2003–04[1]

millions

	Guarantee credit only	*Guarantee and savings credits*	*Savings credit only*	*Total pension credit*
Single men	0.15	0.25	0.20	0.60
Single women	0.40	1.15	0.55	2.10
Couples	0.35	0.35	0.50	1.20
Total	0.90	1.75	1.30	3.90

[1] Numbers rounded to the nearest 0.05 million.

Table 3: Proportion of total pension credit case load entitled to council tax benefit, housing benefit or both

Per cent.[1]

	Pension credit case load
No housing benefit/council tax benefit	8
Council tax benefit only	46
Housing benefit only	[2]—
Both housing benefit and council tax benefit	45

[1] Percentages are given to the nearest one per cent.

[2] Denotes a figure less than 0.5 per cent.

Notes:

1. Pension credit figures have been calculated using the Policy Simulation Model for Income Related Benefit. This models the benefits system and is based on data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) for 1999–2000. The model has been uprated to model benefits in 2003–04.

2. The figures are based on entitlement to pension credit.

3. The figures do not include pensioners in residential care or nursing homes (RCNH). This is because the FRS does not contain information on RCNH cases. It is estimated that 200,000 pensioners in RCNH will be eligible for pension credit, and the majority of these will be in single pensioner benefit units. Therefore the total case load estimated to be entitled to pension credit in 2003–04 is around 4.1 million households.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for each of the last 10 years, how many new claims have been made for industrial injury benefit; how many claims have been paid; and what was the total cost of benefits paid (i) in cash terms and (ii) at December 2001 prices. [51039]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the tables.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB), Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA) and Retirement Allowance (RA) claims and awards

	New claims received (IIDB, REA and RA)	*Awards (IIDB)*	*Awards (REA and RA)*
1990–91	[1]—	16,800	12,600
1991–92	[1]—	17,300	5,000
1992–93	[1]—	20,400	3,600
1993–94	[1]—	26,300	4,600
1994–95	[1]—	23,600	4,400
1995–96	73,000	28,400	7,700
1996–97	70,600	25,400	6,300
1997–98	96,400	29,800	3,800
1998–99	73,200	21,500	3,800
1999–2000	68,800	17,100	2,700

[1] Information on the number of new claims made prior to 1995–96 is not available because data are unreliable and inconsistent with the current method of data collection.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures may be subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. A customer may be in receipt of either IIDB or REA/RA or both.
4. Awards may be in respect of a claim made in an earlier period.

Source:

10 per cent. sample of annual statistical returns from disablement benefit offices.

Benefit expenditure on IIDB, REA and RA

£ million

	Cash terms	*Real terms at 2001–02 prices*
1990–91	520	711
1991–92	587	756
1992–93	601	750
1993–94	616	750
1994–95	645	776
1995–96	670	783
1996–97	685	776
1997–98	690	758
1998–99	710	759
1999–2000	700	730

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Source:

Figures are consistent with Social Security departmental reports

Crisis Loans

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the crisis loan expenditure on living expenses (alignment) in each year since 1996; and what such expenditure was expressed as a proportion of crisis loan expenditure. [51043]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Social Fund crisis loan expenditure—alignment payments

Year	*Total crisis loan expenditure (£ million)*	*Alignment payment expenditure (£ million)*	*Alignment payments as a percentage of crisis loan expenditure*
1996–97	52	14	27
1997–98	54	17	32
1998–99	59	20	33
1999–00	62	18	30
2000–01	65	18	28

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.
2. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source:

Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 1996–97 to 2000–01

Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many non-compliant pension schemes have been named by the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, broken down by the different types of offence. [50036]

Mr. McCartney: Under pensions legislation, the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) may publish the details of particular cases as they think fit. Up until June 2001, Opra used its discretion to name six of the most serious cases. Since June 2001, it has decided to publish the names of all schemes against which a penalty has been imposed. 201 such schemes have been named to date.

The table shows a breakdown of offences.

Type of offence	*Before June 2001*	*After June 2001*
No auditor	3	32
No actuary	2	1
No statement of investment principles	2	0
Breach of disclosure regulations	3	0
No internal dispute resolution	2	2
No member nominated trustee or director	1	2
No or late payment schedule	—	3
Late accounts or auditors statement	—	125
Late contributions	—	118
No minimum funding requirement valuation	—	5

Note:

The data are shown by offence and not simply by named schemes. About 40 schemes have been named in connection with more than one offence—for example one scheme had committed five different offences. Consequently the total of the figures in the table is more than the total number of schemes that have been named.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the take-up of means-tested benefits has changed *(a)* since 1997, *(b)* since 1998, *(c)* since 1999 and *(d)* since 2000. [44245]

Malcolm Wicks: Estimates of take-up of income-related benefits for the financial years 1999–2000 and 1998–99 were published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up 1999–2000". Estimates for 1997–98 were published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up 1998–99". Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Estimates are presented as percentage ranges within which departmental statisticians judge the level of true take-up to lie. The ranges for different years overlap; as a result it is not possible to make firm statements about changes in take-up rates between 1997–98 and 1999–2000.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of new housing benefit claims were determined within 14 days in each year since 1997. [41785]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested.

Appeal Tribunals

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what policy changes have been made to the conduct of appeal tribunal hearings in the UK as a result of the Tribunal of Commissioners decision in CSDLA/1019/99. [49010]

Maria Eagle: The jurisdiction of appeal tribunals administered by the Appeals Service extends to Great Britain. Northern Ireland has a separate appeal tribunal jurisdiction. This decision is currently the subject of an appeal to the Court of Session. There have been no policy changes in the conduct of tribunal hearings.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women (Public Appointments)

Linda Perham: To ask the Minister for Women what progress she has made towards increasing the number of women holding public appointments. [50530]

Ms Hewitt: The Government believe that women and men should hold an equal proportion of all public appointments. Public Bodies 2001, published on 14 February, shows that at 31 March 2001, women held 34 per cent. of all appointments to the boards of non-departmental public bodies, nationalised industries, public corporations and health bodies.

The document "Public Bodies: Opening Up Appointments" which was also published on 14 February sets out the targets that individual Government Departments are working towards for increasing the proportion of appointments held by women and the action plans to achieve these targets.

We want to encourage more women to apply for national public appointments. That is why my hon. Friend, Minister for Women in the Cabinet Office, is currently hosting a series of regional seminars to give information and offer practical support.

The seminars aim to inspire women through real-life case studies, provide information about what appointments are available and practical advice on how to go about getting a public appointment. The seminars hosted so far have been very successful, and the programme is being extended. Research will also be conducted into the usefulness of the seminars.

The Women's National Commission is offering women who attend the seminars the chance to join an e-network. This will offer notifications of specific opportunities, occasional workshops and mentors.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Commercial Materials (Schools)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on the use of commercial materials in schools. [50597]

Mr. Timms: While we welcome business involvement in schools, decisions on the use of commercial materials in this sector are for the schools themselves to make. My Department issued guidelines entitled "Best Practice Principles: Commercial Activities in Schools" last year, to help schools make informed and sensible decisions about this. The guidelines make clear that schools should satisfy themselves that the educational benefits of the commercial activity outweigh the potential disbenefits; that it is free of incentives to children to engage in unhealthy, unsafe or unlawful activities; that explicit sales messages should be avoided wherever possible; and that the level of any branding should be appropriate to the activity.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* her Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years; [38753]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with her Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with her Department in each of the past five years; [38754]

(3) if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38755]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Faith Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the denomination and type of publicly funded Christian schools which are neither Anglican or Catholic; and of these which are teaching creationism. [45762]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table. Information is not collected about whether or not a school is teaching creationism.

Maintained primary and secondary schools in England by type and denomination—as at January 2001

School name	*LEA name*	*Denomination*	*Type of establishment*
Maintained primary schools			
Beames Voluntary Primary School	Devon	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Wray with Botton Endowed Primary School	Lancashire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Warton Archbishop Hutton's Primary School	Lancashire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Richard Durning's Endowed Primary School	Lancashire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Cawthorne's Endowed School	Lancashire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Edmund de Moundeford VC Primary School, Feltwell	Norfolk	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Burnsall Voluntary Aided Primary School	North Yorkshire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Kings Cliffe Endowed Primary School	Northamptonshire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Longworth Primary School	Oxfordshire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Church Eaton (A) Primary School	Staffordshire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Dauntsey's (Aided) Primary School	Wiltshire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Woodhouses Voluntary Primary School	Oldham	Church of England/Free Church	Voluntary controlled
Blackrod Anglican/Methodist Primary School	Bolton	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Radcliffe Hall Church of England/Methodist Controlled Primary School	Bury	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Hey-with-Zion Primary School	Oldham	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Stansfield Hall Church of England/Free Church Primary School	Rochdale	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Aspull Church Primary School	Wigan	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
Emmanuel Anglican/Methodist Junior School	Sheffield	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
Holy Trinity Primary School	South Gloucestershire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
St. Mark's Voluntary Aided Ecumenical CofE/Methodist Primary School	North Somerset	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
St. Andrew's CofE Methodist (Aided) Primary School	Derbyshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
New Holland Church of England and Methodist Primary School	North Lincolnshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Trinity School	Lancashire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Hapton Church of England/Methodist Primary School	Lancashire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Turton and Edgworth CofE/Methodist Controlled Primary School	Blackburn with Darwen	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Wellfield Methodist and Anglican Church School	Lancashire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
Brinscall St. John's CofE and Methodist Primary School	Lancashire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
The Bardney Church of England and Methodist Primary School	Lincolnshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
The Caistor Church of England and Methodist Primary School	Lincolnshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
The Brant Broughton Church of England and Methodist Primary School	Lincolnshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
The Wainfleet Magdalen Church of England/Methodist School	Lincolnshire	Church of England/Methodist	Foundation
Forest of Galtres Anglican/Methodist Primary School	North Yorkshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Lowe's Wong Junior School	Nottinghamshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Elston All Saints Primary School	Nottinghamshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
John Fletcher Church of England/Methodist Junior School	Telford and Wrekin	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Knights Templar Church of England/Methodist Community School	Somerset	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided

Maintained primary and secondary schools in England by type and denomination—as at January 2001

School name	*LEA name*	*Denomination*	*Type of establishment*
Hob Hill CofE/Methodist Primary School	Staffordshire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Trinity and St. Michael's VA CofE/Methodist Primary School	Lancashire	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
Haven School	East Sussex	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary aided
Holt Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Wiltshire	Church of England/United Reformed Church	Voluntary controlled
Queen's Park CofE URC Primary School	St. Helens	Church of England/United Reformed Church	Voluntary controlled
Affetside Primary School	Bury	Congregational Church	Voluntary controlled
St. Cyprian's Greek Orthodox Primary School	Croydon	Greek	Voluntary aided
Nutgrove Methodist Community Primary School	St. Helens	Methodist	Voluntary aided
Summerseat Methodist Primary School	Bury	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Wesley Methodist Primary School	Bury	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
St. Andrew's Methodist Primary School	Salford	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Boothstown Methodist Primary School	Salford	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Hurst Methodist Junior School	Tameside	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Leigh Westleigh Methodist Primary School	Wigan	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Bedford Hall Methodist Primary School	Wigan	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Wakefield Methodist Voluntary Controlled Junior and Infant School	Wakefield	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Bakewell Methodist Junior School	Derbyshire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Staplecross Methodist Primary School	East Sussex	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Boughton-under-Blean Methodist Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Kent	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
St. Peter's Methodist Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Kent	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Ribbleton Avenue Methodist Junior School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Bamber Bridge Methodist Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Rishton Methodist Primary School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Oswaldtwistle Hippings Methodist Voluntary Controlled Primary School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Leyland Methodist Junior School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Leyland Methodist Infant School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Burscough Bridge Methodist School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Holmeswood Methodist School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
North Meols Banks Methodist (Controlled) Primary School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Wheatley Lane Methodist Voluntary Aided Primary School	Lancashire	Methodist	Voluntary aided
Gunnerside Methodist Primary School	North Yorkshire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Melsonby Methodist Primary School	North Yorkshire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Richmond Methodist Primary School	North Yorkshire	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Rode Methodist VC First School	Somerset	Methodist	Voluntary controlled
Hawkesley CofE/Methodist Primary School	Birmingham	Methodist	Voluntary aided
Holly Hill Methodist CofE Infant School	Birmingham	Methodist/Church of England	Voluntary aided
William Penn Primary School	West Sussex	Quaker	Voluntary controlled
Barrow School	Lancashire	United Reformed Church	Voluntary controlled
Maintained secondary schools			
Westminster City School	Westminster	Christian	Voluntary aided
The Coopers' Company and Coborn School	Havering	Christian	Voluntary aided
King Edward VI Handsworth School	Birmingham	Christian	Voluntary aided
King Edward VI Five Ways School	Birmingham	Christian	Voluntary aided
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls	Birmingham	Christian	Voluntary aided
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys	Birmingham	Christian	Voluntary aided
King Edward VI Aston School	Birmingham	Christian	Voluntary aided
Royal Latin School	Buckinghamshire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Beaminster School	Dorset	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Davenant Foundation School	Essex	Christian	Voluntary aided
Colchester Royal Grammar School	Essex	Christian	Foundation
St. George's School	Hertfordshire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Cranbrook School	Kent	Christian	Voluntary aided
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	Lancashire	Christian	Voluntary aided
Bourne Grammar School	Lincolnshire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Market Rasen De Aston School	Lincolnshire	Christian	Voluntary controlled
Lincoln Christ's Hospital School	Lincolnshire	Christian	Voluntary aided
St. Laurence School	Wiltshire	Church of England/Christian	Voluntary controlled
Selwood Anglican/Methodist Middle School	Somerset	Church of England/Methodist	Voluntary controlled
The John Loughborough School	Haringey	Seventh Day Adventist	Voluntary aided

Source:
Register of Educational Establishments.

Foundation schools and voluntary schools only may have a religious character. They are designated as such by the Secretary of State under section 69 (3) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA). City technology colleges are independent schools and therefore cannot be designated as having a religious character.

Rural Schools

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of rural *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools are located (i) within 5 km, (b) 5 to 10 km, *(c)* 10 to 15 km and *(d)* more than 15 km from the nearest settlement with under 3,000 people. [46457]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I am not aware of any schools which are more than five km from the nearest house. It is likely, therefore, that all primary and secondary schools fall in category (i).

Social Care Students

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many social care places have been offered by higher education institutions since 1997. [47382]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The available information, which shows the total number of students on social work courses, is given in the table.

Students[1] on social work[2] courses at higher education institutions in the UK

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Postgraduate	7,300	8,000	7,400	7,500
Undergraduate	18,400	17,400	18,200	19,900
Total	25,800	25,400	25,500	27,400

[1] Census count as at December 1. Covers home and overseas students, on full-time and part-time courses. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100. Figures may not sum to totals because of rounding.
[2] Covers all programmes classed as social work by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, but not all of these will lead to a professional qualification.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students took up places in higher education institutions to study social care courses in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999; and, of these, how many did not complete their courses. [47383]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The latest available information on the number of students entering social work courses is given in the table. Figures for 2001–02 will be available at the end of April 2002.

Entrants[1] to social work[2] courses in higher education institutions in the UK

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Postgraduate	4,000	3,500	3,700
Undergraduate	8,800	9,800	10,000
Total	12,900	13,400	13,700

[1] Covers home and overseas students, on full-time and part-time courses. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100. Figures may not sum to totals because of rounding.
[2] Covers all programmes classed as social work by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, but not all of these will lead to a professional qualification.

The available information on non-completion rates is contained in "Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK", published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The figures cover full-time first degree courses only, but they are not disaggregated by subject. The latest figures, covering all subjects, show that 17 per cent. of students who began their studies in UK higher education institutions in 1998–99 failed to complete their course.

School Spending

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the spending per head for each of the last five years by each local authority in England was on the education of school pupils *(a)* of primary school age, *(b)* of secondary school age and *(c)* in further education. [48607]

Mr. Timms: The information requested for *(a)* primary school age and *(b)* secondary school age pupils for 1995–96 to 1999–2000 for which expenditure data are currently available, for each local education authority in England has been placed in the Libraries. School pupils have only exceptionally undertaken education in further education colleges and information for the amount spent on school pupils in further education is not available centrally. Further education colleges are not maintained by local education authorities.

Higher Education

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will increase the level of support available for those students in higher education who are on longer courses and those with higher equipment costs with specific reference to medicine and dentistry. [49806]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Student support is already available for the full length of a designated undergraduate course regardless of the duration of the course. From 2002–03, in recognition that they need to study on longer courses, medical and dental students in their fifth and any subsequent years will receive from the Department of Health about half their support as non-repayable grants (with the remainder as loans from the Student Loans Company). Students on longer courses, including medical and dental students, are eligible to apply to their universities for additional £500 Hardship Loans and grants from the Hardship Fund.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what response she has made to the recent SKILL research, "Enhancing Quality of Life", on the extent of post-school education provision for people with profound and complex learning difficulties. [48810]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* My Department continues to work with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and other relevant agencies to develop appropriate responses to the issues raised by SKILL's research report. These include delivering the enhanced role for the Connexions service in transition planning for young people with learning difficulties; the introduction of flexible and innovative approaches to post-school provision; improved inter-agency collaboration in the design, management, delivery and funding of services through, for example, LSC involvement on Learning Disability Partnership Boards; and the implementation of the standards of care for learners in residential provision introduced by the Care Standards Act.

Dyslexia

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what percentage of children aged 14 to 18 years are known to have dyslexia; [49025]

(2) what records are kept by local education authorities on dyslexia; [49031]

(3) what steps are taken by the Department to assess children for dyslexia; and at what ages the tests are carried out; [49032]

(4) what *(a)* research is being carried out into dyslexia and *(b)* grants are being given by the Government to research organisations with regard to dyslexia in 2002–03; [49035]

(5) how many children aged between 5 to 10 years in the United Kingdom have dyslexia and related learning problems. [49036]

Mr. Timms: As at January 2001, 1,002,000 pupils in English maintained primary schools and 668,000 pupils in English maintained secondary schools had special educational needs (SEN). Of these, 75,300 and 82,100 respectively had statements of SEN.

In addition, 91,000 pupils are in maintained special schools, 87,400 of whom have statements. Information by specific category of SEN is not currently collected but we have conducted a pilot exercise to explore the feasibility of further categorisation without overburdening schools and expect to phase in new arrangements by 2004.

When dealing with dyslexia and other SEN, schools and local education authorities in England are expected to follow the SEN Code of Practice, published last November. LEAs must also publish their general arrangements for identifying and supporting children with SEN. The precise details of arrangements made by LEAs and schools, including record keeping and assessment of needs within the context of the Code, are for local determination and this information is not collected centrally.

Working in conjunction with other interested parties, the Department is currently supporting the SPELL IT project, looking at the impact of structured intervention methods with seven year olds experiencing difficulty with reading. This project is due to report later this year. In 2002–04 we are also supporting research and development in relation to possible applications of jet pilot eye tracking technology as an aid to early identification of dyslexia.

Work-related Skills

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the £1 million allocated for the embedding of work related skills more widely in higher education provision has been allocated; and how the allocation for *(a)* entrepreneurial, *(b)* generic and *(c)* vocational skills is progressing. [49851]

Margaret Hodge: The £1 million will be allocated through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) between April 2002 and March 2004. We regard work related skills as embracing all three skill areas. This integrated approach to delivery means it is not possible to identify separate amounts for each area.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what action her Department is taking to support children with autistic spectrum disorder at school; and if she will make a statement; [48883]

(2) what action her Department is taking to increase the number of specialist units able to support children with autistic spectrum disorder learning; and if she will make a statement. [48884]

Mr. Timms: Children with autistic spectrum disorder are benefiting from the improvements we are making to special educational needs (SEN) provision along with all other children with SEN. We have, for example, increased the supported expenditure available for SEN five-fold from £17 million in 1997–98 to £91 million in 2002–03. Funds can be used for a range of activities including the training for staff in SEN and improvements in speech and language therapy. We have introduced a revised SEN Code of Practice, effective from 1 January this year, which strengthens the guidance to schools, local education authorities and others and encourages earlier identification of needs and more effective intervention.

We have also supported a nationwide network of SEN Regional Partnerships to promote a multi-agency approach to aspects of SEN provision. The West Midlands SEN Regional Partnership has concentrated on provision for children with autistic spectrum disorder and produced recommendations. The work of the West Midlands Partnership will be reflected in guidance which the Department's Autism Working Group will be producing in the coming months. This will raise awareness of autistic spectrum disorders and help schools and local education authorities, in particular, to audit their provision.

The Autism Working Group's guidance will point to the benefits of children with the disorder being taught by those with an understanding of the condition in all settings. Decisions on opening specialist units for children with autistic spectrum disorders are taken at local, rather than national, level. The Department welcomes the opening of good quality, specialist provision in the maintained, non-maintained and independent sectors. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism's report "The Rising Challenge: A survey of Local Education Authorities on Educational Provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders" (December 2001) noted that several authorities commented that they had set up autism specific units attached to moderate learning difficulty schools.

Pay Scales

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 726W, if she will list the allowances which are available to *(a)* secondary school teachers and *(b)* further education lecturers. [50037]

Margaret Hodge: The following allowances are available to secondary school classroom teachers: management allowances; recruitment and retention allowances; special educational needs allowances and London allowances.

As independent corporations, further education colleges have their own staff pay and allowance policies. The allowances will, therefore, vary from college to college. The Department does not collect information on the allowances paid to staff by individual colleges.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50283]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Within my Department no Private Finance Initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1131W, regarding the estimated cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by her Department, for what reason the cost in 2000–01 rose from the figures for 1998–99. [50336]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The estimated cost of buildings refurbishment carried out in my Department in 2000–01 rose from the figures for 1998–99 due to many one-off large-scale building projects needed across the estate. Examples include:

Update of mechanical ventilation at Mowden Hall, Darlington

Lift refurbishment at Caxton House, London

Replacement windows at Vincent House, Darlington

Major refurbishment of the lower ground floor forum at Sanctuary Buildings, London (mow recognised as a beacon with other Departments)

Refurbishment of Secretary of States Office at Sanctuary Buildings, London.

Teachers (Early Leavers)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what analysis has been completed on the destinations of teachers who leave the profession and retire early; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [50493]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Numbers of teachers leaving the profession and retiring early are published in the 2001 volume of Teachers in England (including teachers pay for England and Wales), which has been placed in the Library.

The Department has commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson, from the University of Liverpool, Centre for Education and Employment Research to undertake research into the factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the profession and the characteristics and destinations of those leaving. The research commenced in December 2001 and we expect the report to be published in March 2003.

Some information on the destinations of teachers appears in the Employers Organisation's annual survey of teacher resignations and recruitment.

Teacher Vacancies (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are at schools in the London borough of Wandsworth in *(a)* junior and *(b)* secondary schools. [50543]

Mr. Timms: In January 2001 there were 22 vacant teacher posts in maintained nursery/primary schools and 25 vacant teacher posts maintained secondary schools in Wandsworth local education authority (2001 is the most recent available year).

The vacancies recorded had been advertised and were for full-time permanent appointments or full-time appointments of at least one term's duration, which existed at the survey date and which the local education authority/school intended to or had unsuccessfully attempted to fill.

Schools (East Riding)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* applications and *(b)* available places for schools in the East Riding there (i) are in the current academic year and (ii) were in the past three academic years. [50599]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold this information. The East Riding of Yorkshire local education authority (LEA) has informed my officials that for the academic year 2002–03, 4,255 secondary school applications have been received for 4,136 places.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children living in the Kingston upon Hull local education authority area *(a)* are enrolled and *(b)* were enrolled in the past three academic years in East Riding schools. [50600]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold this information. The East Riding of Yorkshire local education authority has informed my officials that of the 51,080 pupils currently attending maintained schools in East Riding, 2,800 have Kingston upon Hull postcodes.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications there were for places in East Riding schools from households in the Kingston upon Hull local education authority for the *(a)* current academic year and *(b)* past three academic years; and how many of these applications were (i) accepted and (ii) rejected. [50601]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold this information.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications were made by households in the Kingston upon Hull local education authority area for school places in the East Riding of Yorkshire using a false address in the *(a)* current academic year and *(b)* previous three academic years. [50602]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold this information. The East Riding of Yorkshire local education authority (LEA) has informed my officials that they have no evidence that any applications for school places from September 2002 are from people using false addresses. A number of checks were made on addresses of applicants for September 2001 entry, and in all cases documentary evidence verifying the address used was provided.

School Funding

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the review of funding for schools. [51300]

Mr. Timms: We are currently working up proposals for a reformed system of school and LEA funding for introduction in 2003–04. We aim to create a simpler, more transparent and fairer formula that reflects fairly, on the basis of up-to-date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country. We expect to consult on proposals for the new system in the summer.

University Funding

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been given by the Government to each university in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the North West in each year since 1997. [50640]

Margaret Hodge: The funding of higher education in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The allocation of funding by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to universities in the North West of England in each year since 1997 is as follows:

Universities in NW England	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*[1]2002–03*
Lancaster	25,191,849	29,612,073	30,993,227	31,810,325	32,085,258	34,912,405
University of Central Lancashire	32,998,301	37,450,122	40,910,888	41,857,351	44,615,346	48,292,962
Liverpool John Moores	37,470,423	47,764,966	44,831,515	45,402,799	47,243,386	49,025,709
Liverpool	55,829,857	61,570,235	64,653,663	66,408,652	69,828,532	74,537,492
Manchester	76,795,457	82,970,369	84,533,180	86,831,335	86,675,433	100,442,019
Manchester Metropolitan	52,590,864	59,668,540	61,134,705	61,953,626	65,321,576	67,158,787
UMIST	26,107,034	28,650,434	29,976,427	31,464,966	32,660,103	32,758,879
Salford	34,458,084	39,265,653	39,918,959	40,372,457	42,007,181	44,149,602

[1] Provisional.

Note:

These figures reflect recurrent and capital funding from DfES for allocation by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. It excludes any recurrent funding for teaching provided to these institutions by the Teacher Training Agency and other Government Departments, any research funding from the Research Councils and other Government Departments and regulated fee income paid by Government to institutions on behalf of students.

Source:

HEFCE data.

Learning Mentors

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning mentors there are in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) the Buckingham constituency and (ii) England. [51389]

Mr. Timms: There are currently no Learning Mentors working in primary or secondary schools in the constituency of Buckingham. Our provision of Learning Mentors is focused on schools in deprived city authorities as part of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme, and upon schools in Excellence Clusters which cover smaller pockets of deprivation. There are currently 1,155 Learning Mentors in England's primary schools, and 2,265 in secondary schools.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Government Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to co-ordinate the use of post offices as one-stop shops for Government services. [49797]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

DTI funded a pilot of the concept of post offices as Government General Practitioners (GGP)—one-stop shops for information, advice and transactions with a range of government and other bodies—which began last July and finished on 1 March this year. Together with other key stakeholders, we are now evaluating the outcome of the pilot to determine whether a national GGP service would meet the needs of citizens and participating organisations and provide value for money. The Department is also working with Post\Office Ltd., the Office of the e-Envoy, other Government Departments and local government evaluating the design and costing of a potential national service. A decision on whether or not to proceed will be taken in the light of all the evidence.

Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual budget is of the Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit; and how many people it employs. [43110]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit is an organisation independent of government and therefore the information requested is not held by my Department.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many contracts the Cabinet Office has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity

insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50826]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office standard terms and conditions of contract require consultants to indemnify the Department against all costs or third party claims arising from the consultant's acts or omissions, and to maintain insurance cover of a minimum of £500,000 per claim against the risk of fire or other damage to property or personal injury. The standard terms apply to all consultants irrespective of size. However, individual cases the amount of insurance required may be increased or reduced according to the risk associated with the contracted work.

The number of contracts is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

As with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of discussions which form part of the process of policy development and analysis.

Public Appointments (Diversity)

Miss Begg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he plans to take to ensure that Government departments *(a)* undertake the duties outlined in the Cabinet Office Diversity in Public Appointments document and *(b)* report on the numbers of disabled people who hold public appointments in their departments. [48755]

Mr. Leslie: The publication "Public Bodies: Opening Up Public Appointments 2002–05" sets out for each Department specific targets for increasing diversity on the boards of the Public Bodies it sponsors and the action that will be taken to ensure that the targets are met and for monitoring progress. The numbers of appointments held by men, women, disabled people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, will be reported in the annual Public Bodies data on the numbers of disabled appointees on bodies sponsored by some Departments was not available but, as noted in that publication, this information will be compiled for inclusion in Public Bodies 2002. Copies of Public Bodies: Opening up appointments 2002–05 and Public Bodies 2001 have been placed in the Libraries of the House and are available on-line at http://www.quango.gov.uk.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49587]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1265W, regarding paid leave for staff to undertake union duties, if the two officers of Cabinet Office agencies who spent part of their time undertaking union duties on an ad hoc basis are required to obtain in advance line management approval for such time off. [50343]

Mr. Leslie: Yes.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1265W, regarding paid leave for staff to undertake union duties, how many days have been spent on union duties by the two officers of Cabinet Office agencies who undertake union duties on an ad hoc basis. [50414]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is as follows.

1998–99: 75 days

1999–2000: 70 days

2000–01: 63 days

2001–02: 54 days.

Overtime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49132]

Mr. Leslie: Cabinet Office policy on overtime working is that where possible it should be kept to a minimum and used at times of exceptional pressure once alternatives have been explored. Where overtime is necessary managers are required to:

use volunteers;

give staff 48 hours notice whenever the requirement cannot be met by volunteers;

avoid regular calls to fulfil the requirement on particular blocks of staff;

avoid weekends.

Cabinet Office rules on overtime working which complies fully with Section 9 of the Civil Service Management Code.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EMNVISAT Project

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the ENVISAT project. [50853]

Ms Hewitt: ENVISAT, Europe's latest Earth Observation satellite, was successfully launched on 1 March. The £1.4 billion satellite will provide vital information about global warming, climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer. ENVISAT is the most complex Earth Observation satellite ever built, carrying 10 instruments which are able to detect environmental change to an unprecedented accuracy.

The UK Government has invested £300 million in the project, which has been steered by the British National Space Centre (BNSC) in partnership with the European Space Agency (ESA) and UK industry. 12 UK firms have played a vital part in the development and construction of ENVISAT, with many more standing to benefit from exploitation of ENVISAT's data in downstream sectors.

ENVISAT has reached its correct orbit and is delivering valuable data back to Earth for use by environmental researchers. Such data will provide a health check of our planet. It will monitor changes in the oceans, ice caps, vegetation and our atmosphere and its findings will underpin the future development of environmental policy.

Spacecraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the spacecraft which the UK is *(a)* operating and *(b)* funding; who owns the spacecraft; and what the purpose of each mission is. [50854]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 675–677W.

Accounting Industry

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the competition implications of the arrangement between Deloitte & Touche and Andersens UK in the accounting industry; if she intends to make a reference to the competition authorities; and if she will make a statement. [50499]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Any proposed merger which meets the qualifying threshold would be considered by the European Commission under the European Community Merger Regulation. The parties concerned have not yet made a formal notification to the Commission.

As Ministers have a role in the regulatory process for considering mergers it is not appropriate to make a statement about the proposed merger.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what services the UK Government *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* as part of the European Union will be requesting be liberalised under World Trade Organisation's general agreement on trade in services to be specified by 30 June. [50776]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 368–69W.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on how the liberalisation of social services under the World Trade Organisation's general agreement on trade in services will affect women as *(a)* citizens and *(b)* workers; [50811]

(2) what impact assessment has been made of how the liberalisation of social services under the World Trade Organisation's general agreement on trade in services to be specified by 30 June will affect women as *(a)* citizens and *(b)* workers. [50812]

Ms Hewitt: No country has so far tabled a negotiating proposal or request calling for liberalisation of social services in the current World Trade Organisation negotiations on trade in services. Unless any do so, the impact will be nil.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what commitments the Government have made under the World Trade Organisation's general agreement on trade in services regarding the liberalisation of public services. [50810]

Ms Hewitt: Public services—ie services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority—are in principle excluded from the scope of the GATS. The Government have therefore made no commitments under the GATS under which public services would be liberalised, and has said previously that it will make no commitments in the current World Trade Organisation negotiations that could call into question the supply of public services through for example the NHS or state educations system.

For the sake of clarity, the United Kingdom already allows the establishment of private educational establishments, hospital services and convalescent, rest and old people's homes, for example, and made commitments during the Uruguay Round confirming this market access.

Research Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 86W, on the Research Council, what the Government's policy was on the Commission's proposal to amend the negotiating mandate on the legal aspects of a possible International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, in order to include possible site offers for ITER in Europe and cost sharing provisions. [50995]

Ms Hewitt: The Government support the Commission's proposal which is still under discussion by the council's research group.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 86W, on the Research Council, what the Government's policy was on the Commission's proposal for a negotiating mandate to discuss a framework agreement with the European Space Agency. [50996]

Ms Hewitt: The UK has championed the development of closer relations between the European Community and the European Space Agency. The Government encourage the development of a framework agreement which would ensure increasing complementarity between the policies and activities of these two bodies, which have a substantial overlap in their membership.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 86W, on the Research Council, what the Government's policy was on the rules of participation and the specific programmes for the Sixth EU Research Framework Programme 2002–06 and Sixth EURATOM Framework Programme 2002–06. [50997]

Ms Hewitt: The Government broadly supported the proposal for the EC 2002–06 Rules of Participation and Dissemination (COM (2001) 822 final) but wanted to see a number of amendments to underpin the principles of scientific excellence, independent peer review and transparency as well as public accountability and simplification of administrative procedures. The Government also wanted to ensure that the rules would

encourage diverse participation, including by small and medium-sized enterprises and the candidate countries and enable member states to have access to policy related research results. In relation to the Euratom Programme rules (COM (2001) 0725 final), debate at Council focused on the Community financial contribution to projects where the UK supported the Commission's proposal for 17.5 per cent. basic support to national programmes.

In relation to the Specific Programmes for the Sixth EU Research Framework Programme (COM 2002 (43) final), discussion centred on comitology. The Government's policy was to argue for a wider remit for the programme committees than that envisaged in the proposals, in order to ensure that member states continue to play an appropriate role in programme management.

Export Credit Bill

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the impact of the Export Credit Bill on academic and scientific research; and if she will make a statement. [45867]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have consulted extensively, including with the academic community, throughout the development of the Export Control Bill, to which it is assumed this question is intended to refer. In the course of these consultations we received a number of representations about the potential impact of proposal on academic and scientific research. More recently the Government have received a number of further representations from parliamentarians, interested individuals and representative organisations on this issue. In response to concerns raised, the Government have tabled an amendment to the Export Control Bill to be moved at Report in another place. The amendment provides on the face of the Bill for protection of the principle of freedom to publish and to communicate information that has already been published.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which areas qualified for consideration for the assisted areas map by virtue of being *(a)* substantially below the national average for employment and *(b)* substantially above the national average for (i) residence-based unemployment, (ii) work force-based unemployment and (iii) manufacturing employment share. [51005]

Alan Johnson: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which areas warranted further consideration in the formulation of the assisted areas map by virtue of their divergence from the national average in the prescribed indicators; if he will publish the rates averaged over the three years used for the purpose of formulating the assisted areas map, for each area of (i) employment, (ii) residence-based unemployment, (iii) workforce-based unemployment and (iv) manufacturing employment share; and what the standard deviation was for each for the purpose of the European Commission's regional aid guidelines, indicating those areas not chosen for inclusion in the assisted areas map. [51006]

Alan Johnson: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

WTO Agreement on Agriculture

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the proposal by developing countries to incorporate a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. [50578]

Ms Hewitt: The UK is committed to securing a WTO agreement on agriculture which provides real and substantial benefits for developing countries. The proposal to consolidate such benefits in a special development box has attractions and has helped focus attention on developing country needs. I welcome those parts of the proposal which seek to integrate developing countries into world trade on terms that recognise their needs without constructing new barriers to trade.

Climate Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the external organisations set up by her as part of the Government's strategy to combat climate change indicating *(a)* their remits and *(b)* their sources of funding. [50447]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not itself established any external organisations as part of the Government's climate change programme. However, it has worked with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which leads on climate change policy on several initiatives. The Department has helped with the establishment of the Carbon Trust whose remit is to help the UK move towards a low carbon economy, by encouraging the development and uptake of low carbon technologies and administering energy support and advice for business. The Carbon Trust is funded from receipts from the climate change levy and also receives support from DEFRA, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Department also assists the Tyndall Centre at the university of East Anglia which supports the work in nine research institutions to promote understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change. The Tyndall Centre is funded by the National Environment Research Council (NERC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC); and the Department contributes £210,000 over three years for the development of assistance to business on climate change causes and its consequences.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the cost in *(a)* discounted terms and *(b)* undiscounted terms of making radioactive waste safe, prior to a long-term solution being found at the BNFL owned Sellafield site and other BNFL owned sites. [50430]

Mr. Wilson: The BNFL annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001 estimated the company's total future cash expenditure for waste management as £5.9 billion and £12 billion in discounted and undiscounted terms respectively.

The corresponding figures in the annual report and accounts for the year just ended are likely to be higher reflecting the revision of BNFL's historic waste management strategy which was outlined in my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 28 November 2001.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much direct Government funding has been made available to the renewables sector in the last financial year and the following year for *(a)* research and development, *(b)* capital investment and *(c)* revenue support; and to which projects it will be allocated. [50434]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation, the Government's main policy instrument for the promotion of renewable energy, came into effect from 1 April, and is financed through payments by electricity consumers. The earlier Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) was also financed in this way. Hence most public support for renewable energy is not direct Government funding.

Estimated maximum payments available under the Renewables Obligation for England and Wales and the corresponding Renewables Obligation (Scotland) for 2002–03 are £282 million. The level of the obligation is set to rise each year to 2010–11, when maximum payments for the year are estimated to reach £1 billion. Actual payments, and the projects that will benefit, will depend on the capacity coming forward. Estimated payments from NFFO and comparable arrangements in Scotland in 2001–02 were £85.5 million. Payments under these arrangements are expected to decline substantially from 2002–03 onwards, following the introduction of the Renewables Obligation.

The Government directly fund research and development in renewable energy through the DTI's Sustainable Energy Programme and through the Research Councils.

£ million

	2001–02[1]	*2002–03*[2]
DTI Sustainable Energy Programme	13.0	19.0
Research Councils	5.0	5.6

[1] Revised estimated spend

[2] Provision

Research projects are currently funded in the following programme areas: biomass; waste; embedded generation; fuel cells; solar; wind; hydro; wave; tidal; technology transfer and exports. I am placing in the Libraries of the House a list of research projects funded under the DTI's programme in 2001–02. Details of relevant current research projects funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) can be found on the EPSRC website http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/epsrcgrants/portfolio.asp by selecting 'Research Topics' and then 'Electricity Generation—Renewable and Clean'.

In addition to the research programmes described, the DTI has been assigned a further £5 million over three years for wave and tidal demonstration projects and a further £4 million for net metering storage and control demonstration projects.

The Government are also setting up capital grants programmes in the following areas with the following funding over three years:

£74 million for offshore wind (including £10 million from the New Opportunities Fund)

£69 million for bioenergy (including £36 million from the New Opportunities Fund and £3 million for biomass heating)

£20 million for photovoltaics (PV).

In addition, an element of the £10 million Community and Household Projects programme is expected to finance capital costs of these projects. Actual spend in each financial year, and the projects that will be supported, will depend on the applications coming forward.

As has been indicated, revenue support for the renewables sector is provided through the Renewables Obligation rather than through direct Government funding. The sector also benefits from exemption of renewable electricity from the Climate Change Levy.

Chemical Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on *(a)* the progress of the chemical industry's learning and skills strategy, *(b)* the programme to promote the spread of best practice, *(c)* support for chemical industry cluster initiatives and *(d)* the programme to support chemicals inward investment from north America. [49876]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Minister for Science announced on 24 January the formation of a Chemicals Innovation and Growth Team (CIGT) as a partnership between Government, the industry, and other stakeholders to stimulate the growth and sustainability of a competitive chemicals industry in the UK.

Among other things, the CIGT has been charged with identifying ways of improving competencies and skills in the industry. This will work alongside the new Sector Skills Council for chemicals manufacturing, oil and gas extraction and petroleum refining, in which the Government will be investing £2 million over the next two years.

The Process Industries Centre for Manufacturing Excellence—a Government-industry partnership—is the primary body charged with improving manufacturing performance and productivity in the UK chemicals industry through the spread of best practice. To date this initiative has proved extremely successful. Many of the companies who have so far been through this process have seen improvements measured in hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The chemicals industry has a number of natural clusters throughout the UK. In these primary areas, regional chemical initiatives have been formed to help improve networking between companies and to address collectively those issues which impact upon the competitiveness of the industry at a local or regional level. They are industry-led but have the active support and involvement of the DTI, the RDAs in those regions, and of Scottish Enterprise in Scotland. These cluster initiatives have proved of great value in helping to address the needs of the industry.

A chemicals industry specialist was appointed in January 2001 to work with Invest UK to promote UK chemicals investment opportunities to companies in north America. He is working with Scottish Enterprise, the RDAs and the regional chemical initiatives on opportunities for new investment.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants have received a final settlement through each of the top 10 claims handlers for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [50813]

Mr. Wilson: Nationally for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, the Department has made almost 68,500 individual payments and settled 24,000 claims, amounting to £293.6 million. In relation to vibration white finger (VWF), the Department has made 84,000 individual payments and settled over 38,000 claims, worth £512.1 million.

In the time given, the Department cannot provide data broken down by claims handlers.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to date to each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [50526]

Mr. Wilson: *(a)* The amount paid to each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for chronic bronchitis and emphysema is as follows:

Top 10 claims handlers	*Costs paid (£ million)*
Thompsons	11.3
Hugh James Ford Simey	8.9
UDM	3.1
Raleys	4.8
Mark Gilbert Morse	0.8
Browell Smith & Co.	3.8
Graysons	2.2
Watson Burton	1.6
Irwin Mitchells	2.5
Randell Saunders	0.5
Total	39.5

(b) The amount paid to each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for vibration white finger is as follows:

Top 10 claims handlers	*Costs paid (£ million)*
Thompsons	6.1
Browell Smith & Co.	4.5
UDM	3.9
Raleys	3.2
Hugh James Ford Simey	3.2
Graysons	2.2
Moss	1.5
Watson Burton	2.1
AMS Law	1.2
Towells	1.5
Total	29.3

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to claimants through each of the top 10 claims handlers involved in the compensation claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger of former coalminers. [50525]

Mr. Wilson: *(a)* The amount paid to claimants through each of the top 10 claims handlers for chronic bronchitis and emphysema is as follows:

Top 10 claims handlers	*Total damages paid (£ million)*
Thompsons	68.0
Hugh James Ford Simey	56.6
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	16.8
Raleys	30.2
Mark Gilbert Morse	5.6
Browell Smith & Co.	22.9
Graysons	10.4
Watson Burton	7.9
Irwin Mitchells	14.0
Randell Saunders	4.0
Total	236.4

(b) The amount paid to claimants through each of the top 10 claims handlers for vibration white finger, VWF, is as follows.

Top 10 claims handlers	*Total damages paid (£ million)*
Thompsons	74.1
Browell Smith & Co.	44.1
Union of Democratic Mineworkers	46.1
Raleys Solicitors	30.3
Hugh James Ford Simey	30.8
Graysons	23.4
Moss	15.3
Watson Burton	24.6
AMS Law	13.8
Towells	17.5
Total	320.1

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice will be given to customers of post offices which are expected to be closed in the restructuring of Post Office Counters networks in respect of where they will be able to receive post office counter services; and if she will make a statement. [48796]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Post Offices objective in restructuring the urban network is to retain and expand its customer base at modernised, improved facilities. Sub-postmasters leaving the network will be encouraged to help achieve this, for example, assisting customers by advising them of the nearest post office and introducing them to services available at the new outlet. Consultation on closure will involve the community, local stakeholders, sub-postmasters and Postwatch.

Under the Code of Practice, Post Office Ltd. are required to consult Postwatch on individual changes and plan to brief them on the process they envisage for reaching decisions.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many agency workers have been involved in delivering mail for the Royal Mail in the past year; [49946]

(2) how many cases of missing contents from post were recorded by the Royal Mail in the last year; of these, how many were investigated; and how many prosecutions were instigated. [49944]

Mr. Alexander: These are matters that falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received from Consignia on the number of proposed closures of post offices in Norfolk. [48990]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* This is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. The programme of urban restructuring has not yet begun.

Wainstones Plc

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent Wainstones plc may transfer to a third party the licence to build a gas-fuelled power station at Langage, Plympton. [50987]

Mr. Wilson: Like any planning permission, the consent goes with the land and as such can be transferred.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the licence granted to Wainstones plc to build a gas-fuelled power station at Langage contained a condition as to timescale for commencement of the project. [50986]

Mr. Wilson: The commencement of the development must be before the expiry of five years from the grant of consent.

Corus

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government actions to encourage business and industry to develop in the areas affected by Corus Steel plant closures. [50637]

Alan Johnson: Measures to help the Tees Valley and Scunthorpe areas, including regeneration and improvements to infrastructure, training and advice for people leaving Corus and help in the establishment of small firms were announced on 3 May 2001 as part of a £135 million package responding to closures in England and Wales. These are now being implemented. Measures in Wales are matters for the Assembly.

My Department is also in contact with the South Yorkshire Task Force, and will discuss their report with them once it has been finalised.

Lakshmi Mittal

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she sought advice from HM ambassadors to *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* Kazakhstan in connection with the takeover of Sidex by LNM/Ispat. [50454]

Ms Hewitt: No I did not seek advice from either ambassador.

Small Businesses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the Small Business Service about the regulatory burdens on small companies. [49477]

Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has appointed me as the Minister for Small Business. Since January I have had three meetings with Small Business Service (SBS) officials specifically about regulatory burdens and had a number of other meetings where regulating issues have been discussed.

Broadband

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policy initiatives are being considered in response to the recommendations of the Broadband Stakeholder Group. [49858]

Mr. Alexander: The Government response to the Broadband Stakeholder Group's report was set out in the UK Online annual report 2001, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Carrier 1 UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50186]

(2) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Limited Liability Partnerships (Forms) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50218]

(3) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Midlands Electricity plc) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50236]

(4) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Broadnet UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement. [50185]

(5) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Companies (Disqualification Orders) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50216]

(6) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Alpha Telecom Communications Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50242]

(7) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Limited Liability Partnerships Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50217]

(8) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (-E Tel) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50244]

(9) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Commencement No. 4 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50211]

(10) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insurers (Winding Up) (Scotland) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50230]

(11) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for Use Outdoors Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50266]

(12) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Protection (Continuity of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50203]

(13) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvency (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50225]

(14) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Utilities Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (No. 2) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50258]

(15) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Williams Communications UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50187]

(16) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Commencement No.3 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50219]

(17) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (SSE Telecommunications Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50241]

(18) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Commission (Register) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50094]

(19) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Export of Goods (Control) (Amendment No.2) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50106]

(20) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (First Mark Carrier (UK) Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50195]

(21) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Weighing Equipment (Beltweighers) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50276]

(22) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity Act 1989 (Commencement No. 3) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50250]

(23) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Company and Business Names (Chamber of Commerce etc.) Act 1999 (Commencement) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50098]

(24) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Universal Access UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50114]

(25) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50207]

(26) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Export of Goods (Control) (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50234]

(27) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Utilities Act 2000 (Commencement No. 4 and Transitional Provisions) Amendment Order; and if she will make a statement; [50262]

(28) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Fibreway Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50191]

(29) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Partnership (Unrestricted Size) No.16 Regulations; and if she will make a statement, [50272]

(30) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Equipment and Protective Systems Intended for use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50246]

(31) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Companies (EU Political Expenditure) Exemption Order; and if she will make a statement; [50093]

(32) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 (Electronic Communications) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50110]

(33) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Partnerships (Unrestricted Size) No. 17 Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50199]

(34) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvent Partnerships (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50222]

(35) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources Saving Arrangements (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50254]

(36) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Units of Measurement Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50102]

(37) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50213]

(38) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for use Outdoors (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50238]

(39) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50268]

(40) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50205]

(41) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvency Fees (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50228]

(42) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Working Time (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50260]

(43) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Energis Local Access Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50189]

(44) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50270]

(45) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Trade Marks (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50240]

(46) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Commencement No.2) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50091]

(47) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Limited Liability Partnerships (Welsh Language Forums) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50108]

(48) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Batteries and Accumulators (Containing Dangerous Substances) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50197]

(49) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government etc.) (Modification) (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50220]

(50) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Fossil Fuel Levy (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50252]

(51) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Companies (Unregistered Companies) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50100]

(52) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Consequential Modifications No. 1) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50209]

(53) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Registered Designs (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50232]

(54) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Dismissal Procedures Agreement Designation (Electrical Contracting Industry) Order 1991 Revoeation Order; and if she will make a statement; [50264]

(55) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (GTS Network (Ireland) Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50193]

(56) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Weights and Measures (Intoxicating Liquor) (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50274]

(57) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the GAS (Applications for Licences and Extensions and Restrictions of Licences) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50248]

(58) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Merger report (Interview SA and Bass plc) (Interim Provision) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50096]

(59) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Sub-Post Office Start-Up Capital Subsidy Scheme Order; and if she will make a statement; [50112]

(60) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Post Office Company (Nomination and Appointed Day) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50201]

(61) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvent Companies (Disqualification of Unfit Directors) Proceedings (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50224]

(62) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Utilities Act 2000 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional Provisions) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50255]

(63) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Consequential Modifications to Local Enactments No. 1); and if she will make a statement; [50088]

(64) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Supply, Sale and Export of Petroleum and Petroleum Products) (Revocation) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50104]

(65) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Limited Liability Partnership (Fees) (No.2) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50215]

(66) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources (Locational Flexibility) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50243]

(67) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999 (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50212]

(68) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Maternity and Parental Leave (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50237]

(69) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Relations Act 1999 (Commencement No. 8) (Amendment) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50267]

(70) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Relations Act 1999 (Commencement No. 8) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50204]

(71) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Disclosure of Information) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50251]

(72) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Tribunals (Increase of Maximum Deposit) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50099]

(73) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) (Scotland); and if she will make a statement; [50208]

(74) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Registered Designs (Fees) (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50233]

(75) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habits) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50263]

(76) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Isle of Wight Cable and Telephone Company Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50192]

(77) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Dual-Use Items (Export Control) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50273]

(78) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity (Applications for Licences and Extensions and Restrictions of Licences) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50247]

(79) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Competition Act 1998 (Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption); and if she will make a statement; [50095]

(80) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999 (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50111]

(81) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Wireless Telegraphy (Licence Charges) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50200]

(82) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvency Act 2000 (Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50223]

(83) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50103]

(84) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Offshore Combustion Installations (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50214]

(85) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Eigernet Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50239]

(86) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the ACAS Arbitration Scheme (England and Wales) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50206]

(87) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Wireless Telegraphy (Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50229]

(88) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Utilities Act 2000 (Commencement No. 5 and Transitional Provisions) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50261]

(89) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (ntl Group Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50190]

(90) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Patents (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50271]

(91) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity Act 1989 (Requirement of Consent for Offshore Wind and Water Driven Generating Stations) (England and Wales) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50245]

(92) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Limited Liability Partnerships (Fees) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50092]

(93) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the EC Competition Law (Articles 84 and 85) Enforcement Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50109]

(94) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Telecommunications (Licence Modifications) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50198]

(95) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvent Companies (Reports on Conduct of Directors) (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50221]

(96) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity (Class Exemptions) from the Requirement for a Licence Order; and if she will make a statement; [50253]

(97) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Weights and Measures (Metrication Amendments) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50101]

(98) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Postal Services Act 2000 (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50210]

(99) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Registered Designs Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50231]

(100) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvency Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50265]

(101) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Nextlink UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50194]

(102) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Measuring Equipment (Cold-Water Meters) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50275]

(103) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity from Non-Fossil Fuel Sources (Scotland) Saving Arrangements Order; and if she will make a statement; [50249]

(104) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Company and Business Names (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50097]

(105) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Public Telecommunication System Designation (Verizon Global Solutions UK Ltd.) Order; and if she will make a statement; [50113]

(106) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Merger (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50202]

(107) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Insolvent Companies (Reports on Conduct of Directors) (Amendment) Rules; and if she will make a statement; [50226]

(108) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50257]

(109) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Utilities Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) Regulations; and if she will make a statement; [50089]

(110) what assessment she has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Wireless Telegraphy (Broadband Fixed Wireless Access Licences) Regulations; and if she will make a statement. [50105]

Ms Hewitt: The Department makes an assessment of the costs and benefits of regulations when developing regulatory proposals. Where a regulatory proposal has an impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks that affect businesses, charities and the voluntary sector, a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) is undertaken to inform policy development. Final RIAs are placed in the Libraries of the House when the regulation is presented to Parliament, but are not required for regulations where it has been assessed that no or negligible costs or savings would be imposed or those that increase statutory fees via a predetermined formula. The Small Business Service are consulted on RIAs to ensure that the impact on small firms is not disproportionate.

Fair Trading Act

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, (1) pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 696W, if she will place in the Library details of her Department's strategy and procedures for enforcing the regulatory controls under Part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and its amendments; and if she will make a statement; [50467]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W, if she will place in the Library details of her Department's strategy and procedures for handling inquiries from the public on whether particular trading schemes are subject to the provisions of Part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and its amendments; and if she will make a statement; [50466]

(3) pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W, on representations to her Department for amendments to the definition of single tier established in the Fair Trading Act 1973, if trading schemes with more than one UK master franchise that do not comply with the regulatory controls are classified as illegitimate trading schemes; and if she will make a statement; [50464]

(4) pursuant to her answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, column 695W, if she will place in the Library details of her Department's strategy and procedures for protecting small participants who do not opt to register for VAT, thus ensuring their continued protection via the regulatory controls under Part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and its amendments; and if she will make a statement; [50468]

(5) pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W, on representations to her Department for amendments to the definition of single tier established in the Fair Trading Act 1973, if she will place in the Library the description of Government policy on multi-level trading provided to those parts of the franchise industry lobbying for an additional exemption in S.I. 1997 No. 1887. [50465]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Where a breach of legislation over which the Department has oversight is identified, and that breach is addressed by way of criminal sanction, the Department will consider bringing a prosecution, taking account of the evidential and public interest tests set out in the Code of Crown Prosecutors.

The Department is unable to give legal advice about individual schemes in response to inquires from the public. The circumstances of individual schemes will vary. Individuals are advised that they should seek independent and impartial business and legal advice on a scheme prior to signing any agreement.

All trading schemes within the scope of current legislation are expected to comply with the regulatory controls. Whether and how the regulatory controls apply will depend on the operation of the individual scheme. In particular, in order to establish whether a scheme is a

"single-tier" scheme for the purpose of the legislation, a detailed assessment is required of the characteristics of the scheme in question.

The effect of the legislation is that, if all participants in a scheme are not making taxable supplies in the UK and not registered for VAT, the regulatory controls would apply. The issue of when to register for VAT purposes is a matter to be determined by reference to revenue legislation.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50417]

Ms Hewitt: The costs of pay awards for the 2001–02 pay years for each of the DTI organisations are estimated in the table. It is not possible to cost the awards more precisely since the increases in organisational paybill are also affected during the period over which they are paid by other factors including promotions and other staff moves.

£

DTI organisations	*Cost of pay award*
Department of Trade and Industry	4,300,000
Agencies	
Companies House	650,000
Employment Tribunal Service	620,000
Insolvency Service	960,000
Patent Office	1,100,000
Radiocommunications Agency	890,000
Non-departmental Public Bodies	
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	2,300,000
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	2,000,000
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	240,000
Natural Environment Research Council	1,600,000
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	220,000
Economic and Social Research Council	74,000
Medical Research Council	3,100,000
Advantage West Midlands	200,000
East Midlands Development Agency	130,000

£

DTI organisations	*Cost of pay award*
East of England Development Agency	120,000
North West Development Agency	370,000
One North East	330,000
South East of England Development Agency	190,000
South West of England Regional Development Agency	220,000
Yorkshire Forward	210,000
Coal Authority	£110,000
Design Council	£60,000
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service	£1,500,000

Notes:
Equivalent figures are not yet available for the 2002–03 pay years.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49113]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49155]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the 2002 departmental report will be published. [49595]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 774W.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are part-time employees. [47169]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Equality

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will bring forward the Commission for Racial Equality's draft statutory code of practice on the duty to promote race equality. [51717]

Angela Eagle: Yesterday I laid before Parliament the Commission for Racial Equality's draft statutory code of practice on the duty to promote race equality.

The code of practice will offer practical guidance to public authorities on how to meet their duty to promote race equality. Once the code of practice is brought into effect it will be admissible in evidence in any legal action, and a court or tribunal should take relevant provisions of the code into account.

United Nations Convention on the Child

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reasons why he rejected the conclusions set out in the legal opinion obtained by Save the Children UK on the United Kingdom's Immigration Reservation to the United Nations Convention on the Child. [48659]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* We have carefully reviewed the reservation in the light of the legal opinion submitted by Save the Children and other recent requests that it should be withdrawn. We have taken legal advice which strongly suggests that the reservation remains necessary in order to maintain an effective immigration control. We consider that, not withstanding the reservation, there are sufficient checks and balances in place to ensure that children are protected.

The United Kingdom always takes its international obligations seriously. We are obliged, under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to consider all applications for asylum made in the United Kingdom. Each application is considered on its individual merits. While awaiting a decision on their claims, all asylum seeking children have access to primary health care and education facilities and there are currently no outstanding cases where the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been cited by children seeking asylum here. The majority of asylum seeking children are, of course, accompanied by their families.

We fully appreciate the potential vulnerability of unaccompanied children and the distress they may experience while awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. The need for anxious scrutiny is stressed in training and guidance to all staff involved in the asylum decision making process. Because of the particular sensitivities surrounding applications from unaccompanied children, their cases are given priority and dealt with by specially trained caseworkers, who are provided with comprehensive instructions setting out areas to consider when dealing with such applications. These instructions are available on the Internet and are reviewed on a regular basis.

All unaccompanied minors who apply for asylum are referred to the Refugee Council's Panel of Advisers, a non-statutory body which acts as adviser to the child in his/her dealings with the Home Office and other agencies for the duration of the asylum claim. Unaccompanied minors are not entitled to benefits but are supported under the Children Act 1989 (maintenance and accommodation being provided by social services departments of the local authorities). It has been agreed that no unaccompanied child will be removed from the United Kingdom unless we are satisfied that adequate reception and care arrangements are in place in the country to which he/she is to be removed. If care arrangements cannot be established, the child is normally allowed to remain here exceptionally, outside the Immigration Rules, on compassionate grounds.

For these reasons, we do not accept the recommendation made in the legal opinion forwarded by Save the Children.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations have been made by his Department to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in respect of the eligibility of prison officers for a Golden Jubilee Medal. [44419]

Beverley Hughes: The question of the Prison Service and other groups being included in eligibility for the Golden Jubilee Medal was considered by the Ministerial Group. It was decided that eligibility should be restricted to members of the armed forces and the emergency services. However, I am determined to ensure that improvements are made to the existing recognition mechanisms. Later this year both a Prison Service long service award and a prison officer of the year award will be introduced. In addition, consideration is being given to the proposal for a Queen's prison service medal.

MI5 Files

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many MI5 files have been destroyed in each year from 1997 to date; and if all those destroyed were classified as red. [49283]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Information is not held by year in the way requested, and could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost. Approximately, 85,000 files have been destroyed since 1997.

All files destroyed were classified red.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria have been applied to decide which M15 files should be subject to destruction; and what is the minimum period a file is no longer classified as *(a)* green and *(b)* amber before destruction is authorised. [49284]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* A copy of the criteria for file retention is in the Library. These are consistent with the Public Records Act 1958 and are approved by myself the Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor. Criteria for retention and release of historically significant records are agreed with the Public Record Office and endorsed by the Advisory Council.

There is no minimum period.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many files held by M15 have been destroyed subsequent to an application being made by the subject of a file for access under the Data Protection Act 1998. [49285]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* None.

Correspondence

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute *(a)* dated 14 February, regarding the Iona Community and *(b)* dated 10 October 2001, on asylum seekers. [48177]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* My noble Friend Lord Rooker wrote to the hon. Member regarding the Iona Community on 20 March 2002.

He also responded to the hon. Member's correspondence on asylum seekers on 8 April 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of public correspondence he expects to be responded to within 20 days of receipt by March. [47240]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* To cover all aspects of this question, I have two figures regarding the Home Office response to public correspondence. The first figure is based on performance for the whole financial year 2001–02, and the second figure is based on performance just for March 2002.

Correspondence responded to within 20 days of receipt:

1 April 2001–31 March 2002: 77 per cent.

1 March 2002–31 March 2002: 75 per cent.

I consider the prompt answering of correspondence from the public to be a very important part of the Department's work.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when officials at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will answer the letters from the hon. Member for Vauxhall of 29 October 2001, 23 January and 26 February 2002, about a constituent (Home Office reference: E105598). [46652]

Angela Eagle: My officials at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate wrote to my hon. Friend on 12 April 2002. I am sorry that she did not receive an earlier reply.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42459]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is contained in 'Civil Service Statistics' published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office for the Government Statistical Service annually. For ease of reference, the figures for the Home Office are set out in the table.

Full-time equivalents over 10 years

	Home Office area					
Year (as at 1 April)	*Home Office Main*	*Fire Service College*	*Forensic Science Service*	*UKPA*	*HM Prison Service*	*Grand total*
1992	—	—	—	—	—	49,739
1993	[1]12,312	—	—	—	39,057	51,369
1994[1]	[1]12,368	—	—	—	38,003	50,371
1994[2]	10,250	260	670	1,370	38,070	50,620
1995	9,570	260	670	1,460	38,940	50,900
1996	9,450	230	1,040	1,510	38,010	50,240
1997	9,360	220	1,180	1,410	37,700	49,870
1998	8,070	250	1,240	1,280	39,360	50,200
1999	7,710	190	1,640	1,250	38,720	49,510
2000	9,270	180	1,780	1,320	40,560	53,110
2001	13,020	190	2,190	2,270	41,490	59,160

[1] Old FTE
[2] New FTE
[3] Including agencies

Notes:
1. With the new full-time equivalents calculation (1994 onwards), part-time staff are counted on the basis of the proportion of hours worked, formerly, they were counted as half.
2. From 1999 casual staff have been added to permanent staff to give the total for all staff.

European Documents

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his position towards Council Document 13957/01, on Harmonisation of Criminal Punishment. [39653]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government believe that it is desirable to set common penalties for serious organised crime offences across the European Union (EU), in line with the conclusions of the Tampere European Council. Council document 13957–01 sets out different technical options for doing this, which were discussed at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 6–7 December 2001. The Government supported the "combined" option described in the paper, whereby a limited range of penalties would be introduced based on a number of different minimum levels.

Following further discussion of this option at the informal JHA ministerial meeting in Santiago de Compostela, 14–15 February, 2002 it has now been agreed that the "combined" option should be used as the basis for setting common penalties for offences in future EU instruments. Such penalties do not affect judicial

discretion on sentencing in individual cases, nor do they prevent member states from establishing higher penalties than those required by European law.

Prisoners' Mail

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the reading by prison authorities of mail to prisoners from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [48748]

Beverley Hughes: The policy on prisoners' correspondence with their Members of Parliament is set out in Prison Standing Order 5B and D, copies of which are in the Library.

Prisons

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reason underlying the reduction in the key performance target for staff sickness, as published in the Prison Service Corporate Plan 2001–02 between 2000–01 and 2001–02. [49968]

Beverley Hughes: The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) target was agreed following the "Working Well Together" study published by the Cabinet Office in July 1998 and the recommendations of the National Audit Office report on the management of sickness in the Prison Service published in May 1999. The targets set aimed to achieve a stepped reduction in the average level of staff sickness by 20 per cent. by 2001 and 30 per cent. by 2003. These reductions are in line with Cabinet Office targets across the civil service.

The sickness figures for April 2001–02 are not yet available. However, a figure for the year ending February showed a KPI of 13.93 days. The key performance target in the Corporate Plan 2001–02 was to ensure that average staff sickness did not exceed 10 working days by April 2002. The service will not meet its KPI target.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there was a waiting list for *(a)* reading, *(b)* writing, *(c)* computer skills training and *(d)* other educational courses at HM prisons in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [48914]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the numbers of prisoners waiting to take up educational courses is not collected but we do know that waiting lists exist for courses in prison education departments including those in basic skills and computer skills. The Government are creating more learning opportunities through increased investment over the next two years and by mapping basic and key skills into learning in other prison regimes such as vocational training, workshops, kitchens and physical education so that prisoners can gain dual accreditation.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will launch an investigation into conditions at the Dungavel Detention Centre for asylum seekers; how many asylum seeker detainees at the Dungavel centre are on hunger strike; if he will review provisions for visits and access arrangements to asylum seekers detained in asylum centres; and if he will take steps to ensure freedom of information provisions apply to asylum seeker detention centres. [48838]

Angela Eagle: We have no reason or intention to launch an investigation into conditions at Dungavel Removal Centre. We are confident that Premier Services Ltd., which manages and operates the centre, provides care of the highest order for all its detainees in line with the requirements of the Detention Centre Rules.

Reports that have recently been circulating suggesting that there has been a hunger strike by a number of detainees at Dungavel are completely unfounded.

On Tuesday 9 April 2002 a number of detainees announced their intention to stage what they termed a 'non-compliance' day. Detainees refused to get out of bed, take part in removal centre activities such as education or sport activities or eat in the centre's dining hall. They did, however, continue to buy food from the centre's shop.

Most detainees ate lunch and supper the next day and the centre has been operating normally since.

There are already in place a number of local befriending schemes at Dungavel and regular visits to detainees do take place. In addition, each removal centre has a Visiting Committee. The Visiting Committee is responsible for monitoring the state of the removal centre premises, the administration of the centre and the treatment of detainees. Dungavel has been visited by a range of representatives from national non-governmental organisations with a direct interest in asylum, immigration and detention.

The freedom of information provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will, when implemented, apply to immigration removal centres.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the mental health charity MACA of 22 August 2001, 16 October 2001, 19 December 2001 and 30 January 2002, about police handling of serious incidents involving people with mental health problems. [49772]

Mr. Denham: A reply to my hon. Friend was despatched on Friday 12 April 2002. A separate reply to Mental After Care Association (MACA) will be sent this week.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each Civil Service

grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39155]

Angela Eagle: I am sorry for the delay in replying. Information on staff as at 31 January 2002 in the Home Office and its Agencies by grade and age range is set out in the tables.

Information in respect of part three and part four have been placed in the Library.

Count of staff by ethnicity

	White		Black		Asian		Mixed		Chinese	
Grade equivalent	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Administrative Assistant	354	516	51	141	117	170	5	12	1	7
Administrative officer	574	1,079	78	227	151	338	7	16	4	12
Executive officer	1,652	1,647	118	213	160	293	13	16	4	13
Grade 6	70	41	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Grade 7	252	179	0	3	5	1	2	3	0	0
Higher executive officer	820	728	23	42	33	55	1	7	2	3
Industrial grade	28	1	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Non-industrial casual	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sandwich course student	6	12	0	0	2	4	1	0	0	0
Senior executive officer	391	259	6	4	11	7	3	2	2	0
Senior grades total	87	49	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Grand total	4,236	4,511	279	630	485	869	33	56	14	35

	Other		Refused		Unknown		Total		Ethnic as percentage of:		Known as percentage
Grade equivalent	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Ethnic*	*Known*	*Known*	*All*	*of all*
Administrative assistant	10	15	11	27	321	517	529	1,399	37.8	23.3	61.5
Administrative officer	10	12	23	29	420	672	855	2,508	34.1	23.4	68.7
Executive officer	26	31	77	81	605	612	887	4,186	21.2	16.0	75.3
Grade 6	0	0	1	2	31	14	3	114	2.6	1.9	70.4
Grade 7	0	2	9	3	70	44	16	447	3.6	2.8	78.0
Higher executive officer	6	9	39	48	190	225	181	1,729	10.5	8.1	77.5
Industrial grade	0	0	3	0	18	1	6	35	17.1	10.5	61.4
Non-industrial casual	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sandwich course student	0	0	0	0	8	13	7	25	28.0	15.2	54.3
Senior executive officer	1	1	7	3	80	62	37	687	5.4	4.4	81.9
Senior grades total	0	0	1	0	19	7	3	139	2.2	1.8	83.7
Grand total	53	70	171	193	1,762	2,168	2,524	11,271	22.4	16.2	72.4

Count of staff by disability

	With disability		With no disability			Percentage
Grade	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Unknown male*	*disabled*
Administrative assistant	30	48	825	1,337	14	3.4
Administrative officer	39	73	1,213	2,307	14	3.1
Executive officer	63	86	2,593	2,819	2	2.7
Grade 6	0	0	104	58	0	0.0
Grade 7	2	3	336	232	0	0.9
Higher executive officer	23	31	1,091	1,085	0	2.4
Industrial grade	1	0	54	2	0	1.8
Non-industrial casual	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Sandwich course student	0	0	17	29	0	0.0
Senior executive officer	10	6	490	332	1	1.9
All senior grade totals	1	0	109	56	0	0.6
Grand totals	169	247	6,832	8,257	31	2.7

Count of staff by ethnicity

	White		Black		Asian		Mixed		Chinese	
Grade equivalent	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Administrative Assistant	34	63	5	7	6	13	1	0	1	0
Administrative officer	171	367	6	18	8	33	1	1	2	1
Executive officer	178	320	5	12	23	31	5	3	1	4
Grade 6	28	9	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 7	157	39	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0

Count of staff by ethnicity

Grade equivalent	White		Black		Asian		Mixed		Chinese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Higher executive officer	184	289	2	7	8	11	1	1	6	2
Sandwich course student	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SCS equivalent	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senior executive officer	120	111	3	1	4	3	0	3	1	0
Grand total	875	1,201	21	46	52	92	9	8	11	7

Grade equivalent	Other		Refused		Unknown		Total	Ethnic as percentage of:			Known as percentage of all
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Ethnic	Known	Known	All	
Administrative assistant	0	1	6	10	2	3	34	131	26.0	22.4	86.2
Administrative officer	3	2	24	50	13	13	75	613	12.2	10.5	86.0
Executive officer	4	6	10	15	11	22	94	592	15.9	14.5	91.1
Grade 6	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	39	5.1	5.0	97.5
Grade 7	0	1	1	0	2	1	5	201	2.5	2.4	98.0
Higher executive officer	3	2	5	3	2	8	43	516	8.3	8.1	96.6
Sandwich course student	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0.0	0.0	75.0
SCS equivalent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.0	0.0	100.0
Senior executive officer	2	0	4	0	1	0	17	248	6.9	6.7	98.0
Grand total	12	12	51	78	32	47	270	2,346	11.5	10.6	91.9

Count of staff by disability

Grade equivalent	With disability		With no disability		Unknown		Percentage disabled
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Administrative assistant	10	1	4	41	78	13	7.2
Administrative officer	50	9	6	151	375	68	8.3
Executive officer	14	2	6	196	372	39	2.5
Grade 6	0	0	0	29	10	1	0.0
Grade 7	0	3	0	157	42	3	1.5
Higher executive officer	3	2	3	199	311	10	0.9
Sandwich course student	0	0	0	0	3	1	0.0
SCS equivalent	0	0	0	3	0	0	0.0
Senior executive officer	0	2	1	124	114	9	0.8
Grand total	77	19	20	900	1,305	144	3.8

Prison Service by civil service grade equivalence

Grade	16 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 60	60 plus	Total
Administrative assistant	1,436	7,013	9,059	8,027	781	26,316
Administrative officer	638	1,496	2,427	2,694	37	7,292
Executive officer	148	854	1,580	1,935	62	4,579
Higher executive officer	24	339	560	646	23	1,592
Senior executive officer	—	109	272	512	46	939
Grade 7	—	48	148	291	6	493
Grade 6	—	5	32	143	2	182
Senior Civil Service	—	—	17	58	3	78
Industrial grades	67	469	800	1,303	318	2,957
Total	2,313	10,333	14,895	15,69[illegible]	1,278	44,428

United Kingdom Passport Service

Grade	Age range					
	16 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 60	60 plus	Total
PO1	135	123	88	152	21	519
PO2	55	47	44	38	3	187
PO3	218	594	368	323	26	1,529
SPS	0	0	2	0	0	2
EO	15	165	169	83	2	434
HEO	2	37	56	29	0	124
SEO	0	6	26	21	1	54
Grade 7	0	1	9	15	0	25
Grade 6	0	0	2	4	0	6
Senior Civil Service	—	—	—	2	—	2
Total	425	973	764	667	53	2,882

Policing

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there are in England and Wales; and how many there were on 1 May 1997. [49023]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables in England and Wales on 31 September 2001 was 12,068. In March 1997 there were 19,874 serving special constables.

The Government are committed to increasing the size of the special constabulary. Measures to achieve this would include improvements to the recruitment, training, conditions, management and deployment of specials—focusing their role on intelligence-led, high visibility patrolling and local crime reduction initiatives. In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular Police Service.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of civilians to fulfil policing tasks. [49024]

Mr. Denham: The use of civilian support staff in the police service is not a new concept. Support staff carry out a variety of administrative roles in police stations, and in headquarters units, in order to lighten the bureaucratic load on police officers.

The Police Reform Bill contains provisions which will develop these roles further, allowing limited powers to be extended to police employed support staff who will work in four areas as investigating officers, escort officers, detention officers or community support officers (CSOs).

These support staff will be employed by the police authority and will be under the direction and control of the chief officer. He or she will be responsible for deciding which of the limited powers currently provided for in the Bill they will be allowed to exercise.

Yarl's Wood

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all asylum seekers in Yarl's Wood at the time of the recent fire have been properly accounted for. [49844]

Angela Eagle: 17 detainees held at Yarl's Wood removal centre at the time of the disturbance and fire remain unaccounted for. Efforts to locate them continue.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the measures introduced by road hauliers to check for on-board illegal immigrants prior to cross-channel ferry embarkation to the United Kingdom. [49934]

Angela Eagle: The civil penalty provisions introduced by the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act are intended to encourage hauliers to take effective measures to prevent unauthorised persons travelling in their vehicles. The number of clandestine entrants dealt with by the Immigration Service at Dover fell from 12,679 in 2000 to 9,225 in 2001, a reduction of 27 per cent. This indicates that while many hauliers have taken steps to properly secure their vehicles against unauthorised entry, a large number have not implemented effective systems to prevent this traffic.

Because of the high volume of cross-channel freight traffic, the security measures and checks employed by hauliers can only be assessed in respect of individual vehicles selected for examination upon arrival in the United Kingdom.

When vehicles are selected for examination at Dover, whether or not they are found to contain clandestine entrants, an assessment is made of the security measures in place. On average some 48 per cent. of vehicles examined are assessed as being properly secured.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations have taken place with the Ministry of Defence about using Hemswell Cliff as a possible site for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. [50545]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence is aware of our plans and officials of both Departments are in touch.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether evaluations of the sites proposed for asylum seekers accommodation centres will be published. [50494]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The evaluations of the sites will inform site selection, acquisition negotiations and the evaluation of the forthcoming competition. As such, they will be commercially confidential. However, any forthcoming planning notifications will set out the basis on which the particular site was chosen.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the asylum seekers' accommodation centres in mainland Europe on which he is modelling the proposed centres to be established in the UK. [50495]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Although the Home Office has recently commissioned research on the reception policies and practice of four European countries, our proposals are not directly based on any particular model.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks have been made on the services infrastructure at Hemswell Cliff as part of the assessment process to determine whether Hemswell Cliff is a suitable site for an asylum seekers' accommodation centre. [50496]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* No such checks took place prior to the announcement of the potential sites for trial accommodation centres. A range of factors, including the practicability of service provision, will be taken into account at every site before final decisions are made.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2002 to the hon. Member for mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), *Official Report*, column 57W, on asylum

accommodation centres, when he expects to announce the selected locations of the proposed accommodation centres for asylum seekers. [45735]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 718W.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the consequences are for an asylum seeker in the pilot induction centre in Dover of a failure to comply with the requirement to sign, before leaving the induction centre, a declaration confirming that he or she understands the processes that accompany a claim for asylum and support and his or her obligations within those processes. [44753]

Angela Eagle: As the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Havens", published on 7 February 2002, made clear asylum-seekers, before they leave the induction centre, will be asked to sign a document confirming that they understand:

the processes that accompany their claim for asylum and support;

their obligations to comply with temporary admission and reporting arrangements;

the requirement to leave the United Kingdom should their asylum claim fail;

how they can obtain assistance to return.

This will enable proper monitoring and ensure that all asylum-seekers are receiving accurate information and advice and so are aware of what is likely to happen during the consideration of their claim and the likely time-scales involved.

At present there are no consequences for asylum seekers who refuse to sign the declaration.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in relation to land vacated by Ministry of Defence Logistics at Bicester, what consultations have taken place with the providers of local services as to the extra demands that will be placed upon them by using this site as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers; if he will specify the organisations consulted; and if he will place copies of correspondence with the bodies concerned in the Library; [48944]

(2) in relation to land vacated by the Ministry of Defence logistics at Bicester, what consultations have taken place in the provision of local services as to the suitability of such a site for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers; if he will specify the organisations consulted; and if he will place copies of correspondence with the bodies concerned in the Library. [48945]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* We have not yet consulted with providers of local services. However, we will consult local service providers as part of the planning process. We envisage that accommodation centres will be essentially self-contained communities with the majority of necessary services provided on site.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2002 to the hon. Member for mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), *Official Report*, column 1134W, on asylum accommodation centres, (1) for what reasons his Department is looking for sites for accommodation centres for asylum seekers beyond the South East of England; [48953]

(2) what his definition is of the South East of England. [48954]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* In accordance with existing policy on the dispersal of asylum seekers, the Government are looking to take the pressure off the south eastern areas of the country supporting the highest number of asylum seekers. These areas are those where the highest number of asylum seekers declare their applications, namely London and Kent.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what his policy is on the housing of asylum seekers on the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire; and if he will make a statement on the suitability of the site for that purpose; [45161]

(2) if he plans to carry out a feasibility study into the suitability of the Centrex site at High Ercall, Shropshire, as a place for housing asylum seekers. [45162]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Centrex site at High Ercall has not been offered to us for use during the trial of accommodation centres. It was put forward by the Angel Group as part of its contract with the National Asylum Support Service as possible dispersal accommodation for asylum seekers. I am unable to give details of any discussions which took place as part of that contract.

Unless or until the site is offered I will not make any feasibility study about its possible use.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements there are for asylum seekers to produce a valid passport; and if he will make a statement. [48892]

Angela Eagle: There are no requirements for asylum seekers to produce a valid passport when making an application for asylum in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he or his Department has had discussions with the Angel Group Plc or any of its subsidiaries about housing asylum seekers at Otterburn Hall, Northumberland. [48300]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The National Asylum Support Service has not held any discussions with the Angel Group or its subsidiaries regarding the use of Otterburn Hall, Northumberland as accommodation for asylum seekers dispersed under the current arrangements.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications were received at the Eurostar terminal at Waterloo; and how many asylum applicants were refused permission to board Eurostar trains at the Gare du Nord by British officials in each of the past 12 months. [48533]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Local management information obtained from Waterloo International, indicates that 3,874 asylum applications were made at Waterloo International between January—31 December 2001.

No asylum applications have been made to United Kingdom officials at Paris Gare du Nord, since the implementation of juxtaposed controls on 8 June 2001. Asylum applications made in France are the responsibility of the French Government.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will halt the deportation to Russia of further asylum seekers and refugees from Chechnya; and if he will make a statement; [48565]

(2) what measures he takes to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees from Chechnya who are deported from the UK to Russia safely return to Chechnya; [48568]

(3) how many people from Chechnya have been deported to Russia in each of the last two years for which figures are available; how many were males in the age group 18 to 35; and how many he has estimated have safely returned to Chechnya; [48569]

(4) what account is taken of military involvement by Russian troops in Chechnya when considering the deportation to Russia of asylum seekers and refugees from Chechnya. [48570]

Angela Eagle: Applications for asylum from people from Chechnya are considered on their individual merits, in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention.

A decision on whether or not an unsuccessful asylum applicant from Chechnya is returned to the Russian Federation will depend on the facts of the particular case. Full account is taken of objective country information about the situation for Chechens including the ability of the individual concerned to reside in other parts of the Russian Federation.

The Home Office closely monitors the situation and a country assessment on the Russian Federation is published on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's internet site. The assessment was revised in October 2001. It is currently being revised and will be published shortly.

The policy is to remove unsuccessful Chechen asylum seekers to the Russian Federation if they have no other basis of stay in the United Kingdom, and if there is the possibility of internal relocation in the Russian Federation. This is in accordance with guidance issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). There are no plans to review this policy.

Statistical information on asylum seekers from Chechnya is not separately recorded from that on asylum seekers from other parts of the Russian Federation. The statistics requested are not therefore available.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will send immigration officials to the Sangatte refugee camp in France to take asylum applications there. [46984]

Angela Eagle: We have no plans to send United Kingdom immigration officials to Sangatte to process asylum applications. The United Kingdom's obligations under the 1951 United Nation convention on the status of refugees are engaged only after applicants have arrived in this country. We are working closely with the French authorities to address the problems of cross-Channel illegal immigration. Our shared aim is to achieve a situation in which the Red Cross Centre at Sangatte would be unnecessary.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effect of access to the Channel Tunnel by asylum seekers on the French side on British exports and imports using this route as a form of transportation; what the implications are of this situation on the future of British businesses using the Channel link; and what measures are being taken in liaison with the French authorities and British businesses in order to identify a physical deterrent to the problem of refugees who are preventing the safe and effective passage of transportation through the Channel Tunnel link. [48861]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Government recognise that the disruption caused by would-be illegal immigrants is causing severe hardship to many businesses in this country who depend on reliable freight services through the Channel Tunnel.

The removal of the restrictions is dependent on the implementation of additional security measures at the Calais Fréthun yard so that SNCF can deal effectively with potential illegal immigrants. The Government continue to press the French Government at the highest levels to provide adequate policing resources at Fréthun to support the anti-intrusion measures already being installed by SNCF in order to address the disruption to Channel Tunnel services caused by would-be illegal immigrants. We welcome the additional resources that have already been deployed. The Government also welcome the recent announcement by the French Government of proposals to further strengthen the anti-intrusion measures at Fréthun.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total external spending by the Department was on public private-partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43197]

Mr. Wills: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 714W, which gave information about PFI consultants. The total amount spent on PPP consultants, excluding PFI consultants, over the last four years is as follows:

1998—£775.50;

1999—£172,263.54;

2000—£114,081.56; and

2001—£179,593.63.

The number of consultancy firms used over this period was eight. The other information requested about full-time equivalent consultants, billed consultancy days and the

implied average cost of each consultant is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Census

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are being taken to rectify the problems associated with the 1901 on-line census. [50534]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd. is continuing to work on the technical enhancements. These enhancements are intended to make the site sufficiently robust to permit general internet access. The most important consideration is to ensure that the service is relaunched successfully. In the first instance, the service will be reintroduced at the designated service centres throughout the country as part of a rigorous testing process. It will then be relaunched on the internet as soon as practicable thereafter, subject to satisfactory completion of this process.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to initiate an inquiry into the problems associated with the 1901 on-line census. [50442]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Lord Chancellor's Department officials are working closely with the Public Record Office and other parties involved with the 1901 census and are being kept fully informed of developments. I have no plans to launch an inquiry into the project.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria were used to evaluate the ability of QinetiQ to deliver the 1901 on-line census. [50537]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following criteria were used to evaluate the ability of QinetiQ to deliver the 1901 on-line census: commercial viability; customer service; innovation; operational impact on the PRO; organisational and cultural fit; risk management; technical feasibility.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which company was used to measure the capacity and size of system needed to manage the number of visitors to the 1901 on-line census. [50535]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The system sizing was undertaken by QinetiQ Ltd.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what evaluation was done to assess the use of the 1901 on-line census; and if rationing of initial access occurred. [50536]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The experience of large family history websites in the United States was investigated in order to chart likely levels and patterns of demand for the 1901 on-line census. In addition, a pilot project was conducted between April and July 2001 when the 1891 census returns for the county of Norfolk were made available over the internet. Rationing of initial access did not occur when the service was launched on 2 January 2002.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria will be used to assess the viability of companies who will be awarded contracts for the 1891 on-line census. [50533]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the event of a contract being awarded for the 1891 on-line census, the criteria for the award of that contract would be the same as for the contract awarded for the 1901 on-line census.

Land Registry

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, under what circumstances the Land Registry is permitted to change the registered boundaries of land registered with it in the absence of supporting records or court decisions. [50015]

Mr. Wills: The registered extent of a property can be changed only where it is established that the present registered extent is wrong. If someone believes that there is an error in the registered extent of their property, it is open to them to apply for rectification of the register and title plan under the relevant provisions of the Land Registration Acts and Rules. Any application for rectification must be supported by evidence. If satisfied that there is an arguable case for rectification, the Land Registry will serve notice on interested parties, and may rectify the register or title plan if no objection is received, or if any objection which is received is considered to be groundless. In any other case, the Land Registry can correct an error in the register or title plan only with the consent of all relevant parties, or following a judicial determination by the Court, or by the Solicitor to HM Land Registry. The Court and the Solicitor will order rectification of the register or title plan only if (1) it is established on the evidence that there is an error, and (2) they consider that they should exercise their statutory discretion in favour of rectification.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many contracts the Lord Chancellor's Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50840]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department currently has 67 contracts with consultants.

For the majority of these contracts, professional indemnity insurance is not required.

Where professional indemnity insurance is considered appropriate, eg for construction-related contracts, the nature and value of the contract will determine the level of insurance required, regardless of the size of the consultancy firm.

As with previous administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of discussions that form part of the process of policy development and analysis.

HEALTH

Smoking

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department has spent on school education on the dangers of tobacco smoking in the last 12 months. [40521]

Yvette Cooper: In 2001–02, the sum of £250,000 has been spent on the development of a series of short films made by young people, with expert assistance. The Department has also commissioned a teaching pack for schools. The short films are designed to encourage discussion of smoking issues. The films have been shown on 'Trouble TV', a youth network with the highest youth profile in the UK. Trouble TV are showing the films free of charge, donating airtime worth approximately £800,000 to the project.

The Healthy Schools programme, to which £7.7 million has been allocated this year, includes smoking prevention in a wide range of educational activity designed to improve children's health.

We recognise that children and young people smoke for different reasons. There is no single cause. That is why we:

have agreed an Enforcement Protocol with local authorities to strengthen the enforcement of the existing legislation on under-age sales of cigarettes; and

support proof of age card schemes, which protect shopkeepers and children alike.

will introduce tobacco advertising ban.

These measures are supported by an overarching Tobacco Education Campaign launched in December 1999 aimed at persuading and helping smokers to give up and non-smokers, including children and young people not to start.

Myodil

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out into the side effects of myodil. [43495]

Mr. Hutton: Myodil was first marketed in the 1940s and was granted a Product Licence of Right in 1972 after the introduction of the Medicines Act 1968.

Myodil has not been marketed in the UK since 1987, when the manufacturers withdrew the product for commercial reasons. At the time of licensing, published case reports and spontaneous reports received by the company and regulatory agencies led to the inclusion of a warning about the occurrence of post-myelography arachnoiditis in the product information for Myodil.

There have been over 50 publications in the scientific literature relating to Myodil, including human and animal studies. These have included research in to patients who had received myodil to evaluate the risk of arachnoiditis. In general these studies do show an increased risk of arachnoiditis in patients, especially if they had a history of previous spinal surgery or spinal stenosis. When Myodil was used in procedures away from the lumbar spine there did not appear to be an increased risk. A published animal study in 1982 comparing Myodil with another contrast agent also showed an increased risk of arachnoiditis. Other studies have evaluated the use of Myodil for diagnostic procedures without looking specifically at safety or long term issues.

Hospices

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of voluntary adult hospices will be eligible to receive grants from the New Opportunities Fund. [48720]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

£22 million is available under the New Opportunity Fund's Palliative Care programme to extend adult palliative care provision in areas of need. The fund aims to support the provision of home-based palliative care for adults with cancer and other life threatening or life limiting conditions. Hospice care is not eligible for funding through this programme though adult hospices are eligible to apply to provide home based care services providing they meet the programme eligibility criteria.

Performance Measurement

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the usefulness of the quality adjusted life year as a measure; and if he will make a statement on how it is used by the NHS and his Department. [41715]

Yvette Cooper: Quality adjusted life years (QALY's) are commonly used in the national health service and elsewhere to compare different treatments which prolong life or improve the quality of life. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence uses QALY's as part of its range of tools to assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of treatments which it is appraising, prior to issuing its guidance to the NHS.

Food Standards

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to respond to the long-term reduction in the mineral content of UK food. [46633]

Yvette Cooper: The evidence on whether there has been a reduction in the mineral content of foods generally is unclear. This is due to the differences over time in study methodologies and because mineral levels naturally occurring in foods can vary widely due to a range of factors.

Experts advise that the overall balance of the diet is more important than the nutrient content of individual foods. It is for this reason that Government activity has concentrated on promoting the uptake of a healthy balanced diet.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether advice on the need to provide clear information about levels of uncertainty contained in Guideline 2000 applies to advice given by the Food Standards Agency to *(a)* the public and *(b)* the Government. [46634]

Yvette Cooper: Guidelines 2000 on "Scientific Advice and Policy Making" is aimed at all Government Departments. The Guidelines do apply to the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which is a non-ministerial Department.

As its guiding principles are "Putting the consumer first", "Being open and accessible" and "Being an independent voice", the FSA gives advice both to the public and to the Government. Policy issues are discussed at meetings of the FSA board which are open to the public, and the right for the Agency to publish its advice to Ministers (subject to specified conditions) is enshrined in section 19 of the Food Standards Act 1999.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide a specialist breast cancer centre of excellence in the north-west. [41940]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Calman Hine Report states that where appropriate, cancer services should be provided close to patients. Furthermore, the large volume of patients attending for assessment, diagnosis and treatment together with the current available evidence suggests that a single centre of excellence would be impractical. Therefore there are no plans currently in the north-west region to develop a single centre specialising in breast cancer treatment.

All NHS providers of care for breast cancer patients have recently been appraised against the national standards contained in the "Manual of Cancer Standards". The three cancer networks within the north-west now have the results of those appraisals and are working with those providers to develop action plans where necessary and to prompt further developments as appropriate.

Leukaemia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is of the assessment of the drug Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia; and if he will make a statement. [41598]

Yvette Cooper: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently appraising Glivec for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia. As this appraisal is ongoing it is not possible at this time to give a cost of the assessment of Glivec.

Domiciliary Oxygen Services

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of domiciliary oxygen has been prescribed by *(a)* GPs and *(b)* hospital respiratory specialists in the last 12 months. [44302]

Mr. Hutton: Domiciliary oxygen is only prescribed by general practitioners in England.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1160–64W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what the nature was of the data stored on such items in each case. [42649]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* Since May 1997 in total 170 items of departmental computer equipment have been stolen. Some 30 items were new (unused) equipment. The information stored generally concerned policy and finance issues. No departmental information was stored on new items. All the information should have been protected by password only access. There is no indication that unauthorised access has been gained to any information.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45227]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

	Number of secondments
1999–2000	20
2000–01	62
2001–02	49
Total	131

Source:
Department of Health interchange database 1 April to 31 March

Dentists

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of female dentists on the *(a)* General Dental Council list and *(b)* health authority list practise in (i) the Government Dental Service full time and (ii) the Government Dental Practice Service for the NHS full time. [44409]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Dentists on health authority lists are self-employed principal dentists. They do not have a standard working week and can vary their working hours.

In March 2000 the Office of Manpower Economics (OME) carried out a survey into the hours of work and workload of principal dentists taking any part in the General Dental Service (GDS) in Great Britain.

The survey found that 49 per cent. of female principals in the GDS considered themselves as carrying out dental work full-time. This would be equivalent to about 3,000 of the 6,122 female principals in the GDS in the UK at 31 December 2001. The survey found that about one quarter of full-time principals spent 100 per cent. of their time on GDS work. This would be equivalent to 780 female principals at December 2001.

10,194 female dentists were on the General Dental Council (GDC) Register at 1 January 2002. The 3,000 principals estimated to be doing dental work full-time are equivalent to 29 per cent. of the females on the GDC register. The 780 principals estimated to be doing dental work full-time and spending 100 per cent. of their time in the GDS are equivalent to 8 per cent. of the females on the GDC register.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessors since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43379]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend for Shipley (Christopher Leslie) on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Health Services (Barnet)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of public transport links from *(a)* Colindale, *(b)* Burnt Oak and *(c)* West Hendon to (i) Barnet Hospital and (ii) Northwick Park East Hospital at (A) midnight, (B) 2 am and (C) 4 am; and if he will make a statement. [45827]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* It is the responsibility of local national health service bodies to ensure that services are accessible to members of the public.

General Practitioners

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioner surgeries who were using clinical computer systems in March 1999 were connected to the NHSnet by the end of 1999. [45719]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Approximately 29 per cent. of computerised general practitioner (GP) practices had NHSnet connections by the end of 1999.

There are now currently 98 per cent. of GP practices connected to NHSnet. The outstanding GP practices are those for whom it is not currently cost-effective to provide NHSnet connections, for example those planning to merge, or where the practitioner is planning to retire. Remaining work is being carried forward as part of the wider strategic target to connect all national health service staff by March 2003.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47138]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Ms Blears) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1142W.

Ambulances

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average response time for ambulances in each of the NHS trusts in Lancashire has been in each year since 1997; [48597]

(2) how many ambulances have been available to each NHS trust in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [48598]

Ms Blears: Response times are not measured on the basis of the national health service trust to which the patient is conveyed. Neither are individual vehicles assigned to specific NHS trusts.

Information about ambulance responses to emergency calls is not available for individual NHS trusts in Lancashire. Information about Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust and all other ambulance NHS trusts, about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times is contained in the Department's statistical bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library, and at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce yellow as the mandatory colour for ambulances. [47853]

Jacqui Smith: The Department currently has no plans to introduce yellow as the mandatory colour for ambulances.

Section 64 Funding

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisations which receive funding under the section 64 General Scheme under the Health and Public Services Act 1968; and how much money each received in the last financial year. [47834]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Junior Doctors' Hours

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of trusts are meeting New Deal hours targets for junior doctors. [47848]

Mr. Hutton: From figures produced at the September 2001 monitoring round, 24 per cent. of trusts were reported to be meeting the New Deal requirements. However, the 66 trusts involved are mostly small community trusts, in total employing only 6 per cent. of all doctors in training, and only 11 per cent. of all doctors meeting the New Deal. Overall, 64 per cent. of junior doctors in all types of trusts complied fully with the New Deal hours and rest requirements at 30 September 2001.

Ward Housekeepers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS trusts employ ward housekeepers. [47010]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan set a target for 50 per cent. of all hospitals to have housekeepers working on wards by 2004. Data compiled in March 2002 show that 41 per cent. of NHS trusts, excluding ambulance trusts, report that they are employing housekeepers within their hospitals on a number of their wards.

	Number	*Percentage*
Acute trusts with housekeepers	73	49
Community trusts with housekeepers	19	27
Mental health trusts with housekeepers	10	30
Multiservices trusts with housekeepers	19	40

Syphilis

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to combat the rise in syphilis. [47873]

Yvette Cooper: We have funded a range of national and local interventions aimed at reducing the recent resurgence of syphilis in England. These include an awareness campaign for groups most at risk of syphilis, reviewing and updating of national enhanced laboratory surveillance for syphilis and improving outbreak management skills. We have also funded local interventions in London, Manchester and Brighton, which complement national initiatives, but are more targeted, appropriate and sensitive to local circumstances.

In addition, the Sexual Health and HIV Strategy announced a new mass-media safer-sex campaign to improve awareness of sexually transmitted infections and how to avoid them. This is planned for the autumn.

Drug Abuse

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much NHS spending there was in 2001–02 on serological screening and direct investigative testing for *(a)* HIV, *(b)* chlamydia and *(c)* related hepatitis due to drug abuse and usage. [47874]

Yvette Cooper: Information about NHS spending on serological screening and direct investigative testing for these infections is not collected centrally. The National Blood Service spent £1.575 million on screening the blood supply for HIV in 2001–02 (and a further £7.138 million on screening for hepatitis B and hepatitis C).

Patient Travelling Expenses

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the entitlement is of patients to claim expenses *(a)* when travelling between their home and hospital and *(b)* when travelling between their home and the point of departure for international treatment. [47838]

Jacqui Smith: Anyone on a low income, who needs to go to hospital for national health service treatment under the care of a consultant may claim full or partial reimbursement of travelling costs. Help is provided on an income-related basis through the hospital travel costs scheme which is part of the NHS low income scheme. If such a patient is travelling abroad for NHS treatment, they may also receive assistance with travelling costs from home to the point of international departure through the hospital travel costs scheme.

Information on the above schemes is contained in leaflet HC11 'Are you entitled to help with health costs?' available either in the Library or www.doh.uk/nhscharges/hc11.htm.

Vulnerable Adults

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the introduction of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list has been delayed until August 2002. [47831]

Jacqui Smith: It has been necessary to address complex issues on the healthcare aspects of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (PoVA) scheme. When PoVA is implemented in August, it is the intention that the recently established Criminal Records Bureau will extend its services to include checks against the PoVA list.

Schizophrenia

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans the Government have to ensure that social workers, health workers and other people working with people suffering from schizophrenia receive better training and support; [47918]

(2) what additional support and training intitiatives have been implemented since 1997 for social workers, health workers and other people working with people suffering from schizophrenia. [47923]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health does not set the curricula for pre-registration and undergraduate health professional education. This is a matter for the professional regulatory bodies to determine.

It is the responsibility of local managers of NHS organisations locally to determine both the work force and the skill mix they require to provide local health services and whether or not to fund training or continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for their staff. We are taking steps to ensure that training for all NHS staff relates closely to national service frameworks.

The key drivers, principles and opportunities for education, training and CPD in the NHS are set out in the recently issued "Working Together—Learning Together, a Framework for Lifelong Learning for the NHS". The strategy is focused on ensuring all staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to work flexibly in support of patients and that they are supported to grow, develop and realise their potential and enhance their careers.

On social care the Department has supported the new qualification for mental health staff, Certificate in Community Mental Health Care, that has been developed by the Mental Health Foundation and was launched in June 2000. This certificate is a vocational qualification aimed at practitioners in the mental health field who do not have a professional qualification relating to mental health. It is linked to NVQ Level 3.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures the Government have put in place since 1997 to improve the financial integration and communication among Government agencies to help ensure a better service for people suffering from schizophrenia and their carers; and what assessment he has made of improvements as a result; [47922]

(2) what plans the Government have to improve the financial integration and communication among Government agencies to help ensure a better service for people suffering from schizophrenia and their carers. [47921]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's aim is to develop the whole range of mental health services so that all people can access the right services at the time when they need them. "The National Service Framework for Mental Health" (NSF), published in September 1999, has set the agenda for a comprehensive modernisation of mental health services.

The document "Effective Care Co-ordination in Mental Health Services", issued in October 1999, stressed the need for all agencies to work together to meet clients' needs for health and social care in an integrated way. This principle applies across all mental health services, not just those for people with schizophrenia, although the NSF and the related NHS Plan commitments do identify people with severe mental illness as a high priority for improved services.

The new services referred to in the NHS Plan are in the early stages of implementation but it is envisaged that, by 2004, 100,000 people will benefit from crisis resolution services, 20,000 from assertive outreach services, 7,500 from early intervention services and 5,000 from mental health in-reach services in prisons. Many of the recipients of these services will have schizophrenia.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffer from cystic fibrosis in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, (c) Tyne and Wear, (d) the North East and (e) the United Kingdom. [47639]

Jacqui Smith: Data is not available in the form requested. Data on finished consultant episodes (FCEs) for cystic fibrosis by health authority area of residence is shown in the table. As of 1 April 2002, Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority, Newcastle and North Tyneside health authority, Sunderland health authority and Northumberland health authority became the new Northumberland and Tyne & Wear health authority; and County Durham and Darlington health authority and Tees health authority became the new County Durham and Tees Valley health authority.

Health authority area	*FCEs*
County Durham and Darlington	139
Gateshead and South Tyneside	71
Newcastle and North Tyneside	148
Northumberland	56
Sunderland	51
Tees	122
All areas of residence	7,939

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change in costs incurred by NHS trusts and health authorities as a result of the introduction of the climate change levy. [47566]

Yvette Cooper: The estimated cost of the climate change levy, paid by the national health service on national contracts, is almost £24.5 million inclusive of VAT.

The effects of the climate change levy were designed to be offset by a reduction in the employers' national insurance contributions.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reported cases there were of TB in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex in each year since 1997. [47552]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The number of reported cases of human tuberculosis in the London region and to West Sussex health authority from 1997 to 2000 is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of tuberculosis notifications in London (by region)*	*Number of tuberculosis notifications to West Sussex health authority*
1997	2,411	36
1998	2,444	29
1999	2,493	32
2000	2,834	42
2001[1]	2,917	62

[1] Provisional

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the screening process for TB in children. [47537]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Children are not routinely screened for TB unless they are in a high-risk group such as a close contact of a new TB case.

A tuberculin skin test is carried out before BCG immunisation. The test assesses the individuals sensitivity to tuberculin protein. Those with a positive test are not given BCG. Those with strongly positive tests are referred to a chest clinic for assessment of the need for further investigation and treatment.

South West Yorkshire Mental Health Trust

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the benefits of the establishment of a South West Yorkshire Mental Health Trust. [47619]

Jacqui Smith: I considered the application made to establish the South West Yorkshire Mental Health National Health Service Trust and approved it on the expectation that it will improve the quality of services provided to the people of Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield districts.

Mental Health

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place for involving people with mental health problems in decisions about their care and treatment. [47627]

Jacqui Smith: People of working age in contact with specialist mental health and social care services have their care and treatment co-ordinated under the care programme approach (CPA). The key principles of the CPA are applicable to all service users: they have a right to the thorough assessment of all their needs, the development of a care plan and a review of the care by the professionals involved in their care. It is envisaged that written care plans should be drawn up with the involvement of the

service users, and where appropriate their carer. Any refusal to accept treatment or medication should be noted in the care plan along with the service user's reasons for refusal. Service users should be given the opportunity to sign the agreed care plan and then receive a copy. Users or carers must also be able to ask for a review of care at any time and annual audit should ensure that reviews are carried out.

Further, any local audit of quality will need to include the views of service users, who should be given the opportunity to contribute to the setting of quality standards and measures. The views of service users are an effective indicator of the quality of services and must be included in any audit of service delivery.

Inquiries (Costs)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of the *(a)* Ashworth high security hospital and *(b)* Victoria Climbié inquiries was. [48029]

Jacqui Smith: The direct cost to the Department of the inquiry into the personality disorder unit at Ashworth high security hospital was £2.3 million. This does not include the costs incurred by other statutory bodies involved in the inquiry, for example Ashworth hospital itself.

The Victoria Climbié inquiry is ongoing and final costs will not be known until the end of the year.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money he estimates will be required by local authorities to meet the demand for residential care homes in the next 10 years. [47621]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Andrew Lidington) on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 626–27W. Gross expenditure by councils in England on residential care for adults was £3,557 million in 2000–01. Future expenditure will depend on changes in costs as well as in demand.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of elderly people in care are living in state-funded residential care homes. [47620]

Jacqui Smith: At 31 March 2001, there were 34,380 residents aged 65 and over supported by local authorities in local authority homes.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise the guidelines used by local authorities to determine charges for residential care in order to make the charges more reflective of the services provided. [48553]

Jacqui Smith: Government guidance on charges for residential accommodation is updated regularly. It is based on the principle that those people who are able to pay for their care should do so, while those who have limited income and assets contribute according to a fair financial assessment. Advice on the fees which local authorities should negotiate with care home owners is contained in "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care", an agreement between central government and the statutory and independent social and health care and housing sectors. The agreement states that fee setting should take into account the legitimate current and future costs faced by providers, the factors that affect these costs and the potential for improving performance and more effective ways of working.

Nursing Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 931W, on nursing staff, how many posts have been filled in April. [50501]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* Available information was published in a report, 'Modern Matrons in the NHS: a progress report', on 15 April 2002, showing that there are 1,895 nurses in modern matron posts across the NHS in England.

Social Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority social services are in special measures. [47625]

Jacqui Smith: There are now 10 councils with social services responsibilities subject to special measures by the social services inspectorate: Coventry, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Lancashire, Merton, Newham, North East Lincolnshire, Peterborough and Sheffield.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of social services staff posts are *(a)* filled by permanent staff, *(b)* filled by agency staff and *(c)* vacant. [47623]

Jacqui Smith: This information requested is not collected centrally.

Resource Allocation

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the components of the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources to PCTs. [50794]

Mr. Hutton: We currently allocate funding to health authorities, and they allocate funding to primary care trusts (PCTs), on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority and PCTs fair share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of services for populations in equal need.

The formula has the following components: hospital and community health services; HIV/AIDS; general practice infrastructure, i.e. practice staff wages, premises and equipment; general practice prescribing, i.e. drug costs of prescriptions dispensed not dispensing fees; and general medical services non-cash limited.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. This is subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. Allocations will continue to be based on the principle of weighted capitation.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists are employed *(a)* by the

national health service and *(b)* by each NHS trust in England and Wales; what the equivalent figures were for the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [51058]

Mr. Hutton: Information relating to Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

The available information for England has been placed in the Library.

Between 1997 and 2001 the number of speech and language therapists working in the NHS has increased by 810 (11 per cent.) and the number of training places available for students has increased by over a hundred since 1998. There will be further increases in the number of students entering training as a result of the NHS Plan commitment to provide 4,450 more training places each year for therapists and other health professionals by 2004. The increased investment in training, work to make the NHS a better employer and encourage return to practice will result in a continued increase in the number of speech therapists available to work in the NHS.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recruitment and retention of speech therapists. [51059]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including speech and language therapists. These include an increase in pay, encouraging the national health service to become a better employer through the 'Improving Working Lives' and 'Positively Diverse' programmes, increasing training commissions, reducing student attrition, running national and local recruitment and return to practice campaigns. Further information on 'Improving Working Lives' is available at www.doh.gov.uk/iwl.

Strategic Health Authority Personnel

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list names of the chairperson and chief executive of each strategic health authority in England. [50022]

Mr. Hutton: The names of the chairperson and chief executive of each of the new health authorities established on 1 April 2002 is shown in the table. Subject to legislation, it is expected that the new health authorities will be designated strategic health authorities from the autumn of 2002.

Health authority	*Chairperson*	*Chief executive*
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire HA	Ms Anthea Millett	Mr. Mark Outhwaite
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire HA	Mr. Ian White	Ms Jane Herbert
Birmingham and the Black Country HA	Mrs. Elisabeth Buggins	Mr. Geoff Scaife
Cheshire and Merseyside HA	Mrs. Judith Greensmith DL	Mrs. Christine Hannah
County Durham and Tees Valley HA	Mr. Tony Waites	Mr. Ken Jarrold
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire HA	Mr. Charles Goody	Mr. Mike Marchment
Cumbria and Lancashire	Mrs. Kath Reade	Mr. James Pearce Butler
Dorset and Somerset HA	Mrs. Jane Barrie	Mr. Ian Carruthers
Essex HA	Mr. Michael Brookes	Mr. Terry Hanafin
Greater Manchester HA	Mr. Philip Smith	Mr. Neil Goodwin
Hampshire and Isle of Wight HA	Mr. Peter Bingham	Mr. Gareth Cruddace
Kent and Medway HA	Miss Kate Lampard	Mrs. Candy Morris
Leicester, Northamptonshire and Rutland HA	Sir Richard Tilt	Mr. David Sissling
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire HA	Mr. Stewart Francis	Mr. Peter Houghton
North Central London HA	Ms Marcia Saunders	Ms Christine Outram
North East London HA	Professor Elaine Murphy	Ms Carolyn Regan
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire HA	Professor David Johns CBE	Mr. David Johnson
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear HA	Mr. Peter Carr CBE DL	Mr. David Flory
North West London HA	Ms Jane Kelly	Professor Ron De Witt
Shropshire and Staffordshire HA	Mr. Michael Brereton	Professor Bernard Crump
South East London HA	Ms Linda Smith	Mr. Duncan Selbie
South West London HA	Mr. James Cochrane	Mrs. Julie Dent
South West Peninsula HA	Mrs. Judith Leverton	Ms Thelma Holland
South Yorkshire HA	Mrs. Kathryn Riddle	Mr. Mike Farrar
Surrey and Sussex HA	Mrs. Terese Hawksworth	Mr. Simon Robbins
Thames Valley HA	Mrs. Jane Betts	Mr. Nick Relph
Trent HA	Mr. Arthur Sandford	Mr. Alan Burns
West Yorkshire HA	Sir Alistair Graham	Mr. Richard Jeavons

Cancer Plan

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent on hospices and palliative care *(a)* by the voluntary sector and *(b)* by Government in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [45779]

(2) how much has been invested in hospices and palliative care under the Cancer Plan. [45780]

Yvette Cooper: Estimates by the National Council for Hospices and Specialist Palliative Care Services indicate total expenditure (1999–2000) on adult palliative care services to be approximately £300 million, of which £170 million was provided by the voluntary sector and £130 million by the national health service.

The NHS Cancer Plan set out our commitment to increase NHS investment in specialist palliative care (including hospices) by £50 million by 2004. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the extra training of existing staff as identified in the Cancer Plan. [45769]

Yvette Cooper: Good progress is being made in extra training of NHS staff to help them extend their skills and offer increased support to people with cancer. A number of new initiatives are underway to develop existing NHS roles and to increase the number of training places available so that we meet the NHS Cancer Plan targets to increase the number of cancer specialists. New ways of working pilot projects have been set up in four breast screening centres and nine radiotherapy centres. These are testing and developing new ways to make the best use of the skills and abilities of staff. We are also developing a nationally accredited educational and training programme for cytology-screening.

£6 million has been made available over the next three years to support over 10,000 nurses in primary care (one in four of all district nurses) to take part in new training and support in the general principles and practice of palliative care. The training programme will help district and community nurses to support people with cancer in remaining at home for as long as possible during their illness. £2.5 million has also been made available to train additional staff in endoscopy procedures. We will also be introducing new joint training across professions in communication skills.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the five-a-day programme under the Cancer Plan. [45771]

Yvette Cooper: Progress has been as follows:

The National School Fruit Scheme—the first pilots were launched in November 2000 covering 33 schools, the spring pilots were subsequently launched in February 2001, and covered 500 schools across the country. £42 million from the New Opportunities Fund will fund the expansion of the scheme from this month, when another 1,899 schools, within the west Midlands region will be included in the scheme, and thereafter on a termly basis further regions will come on board.

Five-a-day community initiatives—following the successful evaluation of the five-a-day pilot sites, a further £10 million has been provided from the New Opportunities Fund, to support more five-a-day community initiatives. The funds have been allocated to 66 areas, based on deprivation and need.

These schemes are being reinforced by the other measures set out in the NHS Plan and Cancer Plan, including involvement of the food industry and other Government Departments, a communications programme to increase awareness to the health benefits, and a means of monitoring the impact on the targeted population.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in recruiting the extra *(a)* cancer specialists, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* radiographers identified in the Cancer Plan. [45777]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows good progress in increasing the number of doctors and radiographers working in cancer services. This increase means the national health service is on track to hit the target set out in the Cancer Plan of nearly 1,000 extra cancer consultants by 2006. Separate figures are not available for cancer nurses, but the Department's Census shows that since the launch of the NHS Plan in September 1999 until September 2001 there was a net increase in nurses working in the NHS of 20,740. This increase will enable the recruitment of additional cancer-site specific nurse specialists, chemotherapy nurses, palliative care nurse specialists and additional nurses on cancer wards.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting staff and Scientific, Therapeutic & Technical staff employed in the specified areas of work in England as at 30 September each year.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (NCHS): nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and scientific, therapeutic and technical staff employed in the specified areas of work in England as at 30 September each year

	1999	*2001*
Consultants		
All cancer specialities	3,360	3,720
Histopathology	840	920
Clinical Radiology	1,510	1,640
Clinical Oncology	300	330
Medical Oncology	110	150
Haematology	510	560
Palliative Care	90	120
Registrar Group		
All cancer specialities	1,400	1,670
Histopathology	200	270
Clinical Radiology	600	730
Clinical Oncology	170	220
Medical Oncology	140	140
Haematology	240	230
Palliative Care	50	80
Radiography	13,860	14,690
of which:		
Diagnostic	12,300	13,040
Therapeutic	1,560	1,660

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
Figures exclude learners and agency staff
As in the NHS Cancer Plan, the figures for "all cancer specialities" covers the six specialities listed in the table.
Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what trend data are available to measure progress against the PSA target for the reduction in the death rate from heart disease and stroke and related illnesses among people aged under 75 years. [47302]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Data to monitor the Public Service Agreement target to reduce the death rate from heart disease and stroke and related illnesses (all circulatory diseases) among people aged under 75 years are obtained from mortality data published by the Office for National Statistics. Data are for England.

This PSA target is the target published in 2000 in the NHS Plan and previously in 1999 in the White Paper 'Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation' for a 40 per cent. reduction by 2010 against a baseline of the average age standardised mortality rate for the three years 1995–97.

The trend data are as follows:

Three-year average age standardised mortality rate per 100,000 population

Period	
1995–97	139.60
1996–98	133.78
1997–99	127.00
1998–2000	120.53

Waiting Times

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times for chemotherapy and radiotherapy are in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* other counties in England; and what steps are being taken to improve these waiting times. [40463]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan set out maximum waiting time targets for first definitive cancer treatment which will come into effect over the next few years. From December 2001 there is a one-month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one-month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for childrens testicular cancer and acute leukaemia. By 2005 there will be a maximum one-month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers. Data to monitor the December 2001 target are being collected and will be published in due course. Data on waiting times for treatment of other cancers will be collected as the targets are introduced.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers PCTs have to commission services from outside the NHS. [50804]

Mr. Hutton: Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have a legal duty and freedom to secure the provision of locally relevant, high quality services for the populations they serve. This may be from the public (including local authorities) or independent sector. Commissioning decisions must be made on the basis of health care needs of the local community and should take into account of both clinical and cost effectiveness. PCTs may also legally secure the provision of services from countries in the European Economic Area for their patients. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W.

Acute Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of funding for acute hospital trusts will be *(a)* channelled through PCTs and *(b)* directly provided by his Department. [50795]

Mr. Hutton: Trusts receive the bulk of their funding via service agreements with Primary Care Trusts (PCTs).

PCTs will receive 100 per cent. of unified allocations which covers hospital and community health services, general practice prescribing, general practice infrastructure, in order to commission services for their populations.

Trusts also receive revenue funding from the Department for medical and non-medical staff and nurse education services and for research and development.

In addition trusts can charge staff, visitors or patients for services provided, such as catering or provision of private patient facilities.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 April 2002

PRIVY COUNCIL

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49586]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave on 15 April, *Official Report*, column 774W.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Paul Keetch MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which nations have contributed forces to *(a)* Operation Enduring Freedom and *(b)* ISAF; how many troops each of these nations has contributed; and if he will make a statement. [50000]

Mr. Hoon: Pursuant to the answer I gave on 16 April, *Official Report*, column 824W, I regret to inform you that there was an error in the table given. The nation of Poland should have read Portugal.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49638]

Dr. John Reid: No New Deal for Young People staff have been employed by non-departmental public bodies in the last four years.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on overtime payments for staff in his Department. [49133]

Dr. John Reid: Overtime work is paid for hours worked in excess of conditioned hours to qualifying grades below the Senior Civil Service at a rate determined according to their overtime band.

Staff in overtime band 1 (mainly junior grades) receive non-pensionable hourly payments at the rate of time and a half, Monday to Saturday.

Staff in overtime band 2 (more senior grades) receive non-pensionable hourly payments at plain time rate, Monday to Saturday.

Staff in grades eligible for overtime receive an additional pensionable payment of half the plain time rate for attendance between the hours of midnight Friday and midnight Saturday. Staff in overtime grades whose pay does not include an element for Sunday attendance, will receive an additional pensionable payment at plain time rate for attendance on Sundays in excess of conditioned hours.

Very senior staff who are required to work exceptionally long hours for a sustained period may receive an ex-gratia payment.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49145]

(2) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49103]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my right hon. Friend, The Leader of the House of Commons on 17 April 2002.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what notification was received by her Department concerning the possible death of cattle from foot and mouth-disease at Thornhill Farm, Cwymbach, Aberdare on 4 October 2000; and if she will make a statement. [51401]

Margaret Beckett: Inquiries made by the Department indicate that the farmer concerned first informed the National Assembly of Wales (NAW) of his belief that two cattle on his farm had died in August 2000 as a result of foot and mouth disease in a letter dated 3 November 2001 addressed to the First Minister. There is no record of the farmer having made this suggestion to the Department or to the NAW in October 2000, or at any other time prior to his letter of 3 November 2001:

There was no reason to suspect the presence of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom prior to the discovery of the first suspect case on 19 February 2001.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the economic viability of replacing ozone depleting substances with non-ozone depleting substances. [48073]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* In December 1998, the Department produced a Regulatory Impact Assessment of the EC's proposal for a Regulation which became EC Regulation 2037/2000. This considered two options; either to agree the proposal as it stood, or to argue for modifications to the proposed controls which went beyond the requirements of the Montreal Protocol where these would deliver no real environmental benefit

or where the costs of compliance would be disproportionate. As a result of consultation with interested parties, the Government agreed to the proposal in broad terms following changes made during negotiations to some of the proposed controls that in the UK's view were disproportionate.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations her Department has made to other EU Governments regarding the length of period for which use of ozone depleting substances will remain permissible. [48071]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* My officials meet regularly with counterparts from other EC Member States to discuss issues arising from EC Regulation 2037/2000 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Together with the European Commission, the UK and other Member States consider possible EC proposals for improving and strengthening the Montreal Protocol. EC Regulation 2037/2000 itself goes considerably further than the Protocol in controlling and phasing out ozone-depleting substances. For example, HCFCs are to be phased out under the Protocol by 2030 and under the Regulation by 2015.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she proposes to take to promote the use of non-ozone depleting refrigerants which have been developed in the UK. [48072]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The key measure is enforcement of EC Regulation 2037/2000 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer as this puts pressure on producers, suppliers and users of refrigerants to use alternatives to CFCs through the ban on use and supply and HCFCs through use controls on new and existing equipment. The Department with DTI produced the guidance document, "Refrigeration & Air Conditioning—CFC and HCFC Phase Out: Advice on Alternatives and Guidelines for Users". It is available on the DTI's website, www.dti.gov.uk/access/ozone.htm.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria have to be met for sites of special scientific interest to be classified as in good condition. [48538]

Mr. Meacher: SSSIs are notified because of specific biological or geological features, and when those features are being managed in a way which maintains their nature conservation value, they are said to be in favourable condition. Sites are assessed against Common Standards, published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) which are well established. This publication will be made available to the Library of the House.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to ensure that 95 per cent of all sites of special scientific interest within the UK are brought into good condition by 2010. [48544]

Mr. Meacher: The target under the Department's public service agreement is that 95 per cent of SSSIs in England, by area, should be in favourable (or unfavourable and improving) condition by 2010. Nature conservation is a devolved matter. Some 60 per cent of sites in England are presently in favourable condition.

We are addressing the condition of SSSIs on several fronts. English Nature is working with owners and occupiers, advising on management and offering management agreements for positive management of sites. Where necessary, English Nature will also use strong new powers available under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to tackle the condition of specific sites. With English Nature's advice, we will be looking carefully at the resources necessary to make good progress towards achieving the target.

We are also working with other Departments and public bodies, who own sites, or whose operations might affect sites, to ensure that their activities further the conservation of these special places.

Within DEFRA, we are looking at implementation of the Rural White Paper, the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Farming and Food on sustainable farming and, in the longer term, CAP reform measures with a view to addressing some of the incentives to heavy stocking, which can cause damage, particularly to upland SSSIs.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish *(a)* the base year emissions of the participants in the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002, *(b)* their respective targets and *(c)* the reductions that they are committed to already, as a result of (i) legislation and (ii) public voluntary commitments. [48979]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Government will publish the baseline emissions (average over 1998–2000) for each of the direct participants in the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme once these have been independently verified by organisations accredited for this specific purpose by the UK Accreditation Service. The respective targets for each direct participant have already been have published on the Department's website. Emission levels required of direct participants through integrated pollution control regulation are already available on the public register. The Department of Trade and Industry's flare consent regime specifies limits on the volume of natural gas flared rather than an emissions level. The 2002 flare consents for British Petroleum plc installations and fields in the Emissions Trading Scheme allow 1,132.55 thousand standard cubic metres of natural gas flared per day. For Shell UK Ltd, the comparable number is 698.17 thousand standard cubic metres of natural gas flared per day. Whilst the Government welcomes any public voluntary commitment made by firms to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, these are a matter for the firms themselves, and not for Government.

Plastics

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of degradable plastic technology; and what plans she has to promote it; [47575]

(2) what assessment she has made of *(a)* the availability and *(b)* the environmental merits of biodegradable plastic bags; and what plans she has to promote their use. [47577]

Mr. Meacher: We are aware that a number of companies are marketing degradable plastics technology and products manufactured from these materials. However these new technologies are based on modified plastics manufactured from mineral oil. I realise that there is a range of products and applications, for example in agriculture, where controlled degradability may be of benefit when considering disposal options, but it is not clear that this approach is a sustainable option to the general problem of managing plastics waste.

The waste strategy for England and Wales, Waste Strategy 2000, emphasises the need to gain more value from waste through re-use, recycling, composting and the recovery of energy. Degradable plastics based on fossil carbon resources, which are specifically designed for disposal with no beneficial recovery potential, run counter to this approach.

However I do support the development of biodegradable plastics from non-fossil sources. The Government Industry Forum on Non-Food Uses of Crops was set up in March 2001 to provide strategic advice to Government and industry on the development of non-food uses of crops.

The Forum has examined the UK potential to produce compostable packaging materials from mainstream agricultural crops and has concluded that there is a clear opportunity for both UK agriculture and industry to develop these materials. The Forum is developing a series of recommendations designed to encourage industry to respond and develop to supply an expanding market. These recommendations are likely to be published in the Forum's first Annual Report in the summer of 2002.

Air Quality Strategy

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress there has been in improving air quality in deprived areas to meet the objectives and targets prescribed in the Government's Air Quality Strategy; and whether the target the dates set out in the strategy have been met. [46606]

Mr. Meacher: The Government set out its targets for safeguarding people's health and protecting the environment from air pollution in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in January 2000. It includes health-based standards for the eight air pollutants of main concern and objectives for their achievement between 2003 and 2008. Good progress has been made towards achieving most of the targets as a result of the measures put in place by central Government and local authorities. We are, for example, broadly on track to meet our policy objectives for carbon monoxide, benzene, 1,3 butadiene, lead and sulphur dioxide, but more may need to be done in some areas to meet our targets for nitrogen dioxide, particles and ozone.

Local authorities have a duty to review and assess the local air quality in their area and to designate air quality management areas where it is likely that the air quality objectives will not be met by the relevant deadline. Out of the 88 deprived areas across England, 35 authorities have designated air quality management areas in respect of one or more pollutants. A full list of those authorities that have designated air quality management areas is available at www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual/aqma/home.html

The majority of the air quality management areas have been designated due to likely exceedences of the NO_2 and PM_{10} objectives relating to pollution from traffic. These authorities have a duty to draw up an air quality action plan setting out those measures they intend to take in pursuit of the air quality objectives. They will also have to work closely with other local stakeholders, such as the Highways Agency, Environment Agency and local businesses, in order to deliver improvements in local air quality. The Government will continue to oversee this process to ensure that the objectives are met as far as possible in all parts of the country, including the most deprived areas, by the relevant target dates.

Risk Assessment

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to ensure that scientific risk assessments are carried out before EU legislation is introduced banning or restricting the use of well established chemicals or metals that in her view are used safely and responsibly; and if she will make a statement. [46970]

Mr. Meacher: The main route to EU based restrictions on well-established chemicals is through the European Community's Existing Substances Regulation (793/93/EEC). The Regulation requires that risk assessments are prepared before proposals for restrictions or bans can be considered. The UK plays an active role in the operation of the Regulation, including carrying out a number of the assessments. Should unacceptable uses be identified by the risk assessment, the Member State Rapporteur will prepare a risk reduction strategy. This will include an analysis of the advantages and drawbacks of potential risk reduction measures and lead to a recommendation in the Official Journal for further Community action as appropriate. A small number of chemicals are also subject to restrictions through discussions arising from Member State notifications under the Technical Standards Directive 98/34/EC, concerns identified by the European Commission's scientific committees or other international programmes. Whenever these are debated the UK presses for an appropriate risk assessment to be carried out.

Endangered Species

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what checks are made on illegal imports of products made from endangered species; what plans she has to extend the ban on the import of products made from endangered species; and if she will make a statement. [50470]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* The United Kingdom is a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which controls and monitors international trade in endangered species and products derived from them.

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CITES is implemented within the EU by Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 939/97.

HM Customs and Excise enforce the controls imposed by these Regulations, targeting their checks on the importation of items covered by the legislation on the basis of assessed risk, or as a direct result of intelligence received (including advice from my Department). Any offences detected would result in seizure of the goods concerned and may result in the prosecution of the individuals or company involved where appropriate.

CITES does not ban trade in all endangered species. Over 30,000 animals and plants are currently listed in the three Appendices to CITES, of which only around 800 are listed in Appendix I, effectively banning them and their derivatives from trade except under exceptional circumstances. We have no plans to seek to include more species in Appendix I.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will support the labelling of animal feeds containing or derived from genetically modified organisms in the forthcoming European negotiations on traceability and labelling. [29502]

Mr. Meacher: The Government supports the labelling of feed that consists of, or contains, genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, enforcement of a requirement to label feed derived from GMOs which does not contain GM material at detectable levels would be at present extremely difficult, because it is impossible to test such feed to distinguish it from its non-GM counterpart, and hence not practical to apply appropriate validation and enforcement measures.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom will be able to reduce discharges of hazardous substances into water supplies to the levels required by the EU Water Framework Directive. [43601]

Mr. Meacher: So far as UK drinking water supplies are concerned, standards are laid down in the EC Drinking Water Directive and enforced through UK Drinking Water Regulations. Water is treated as necessary by the water companes to meet these standards. The Water Framework Directive does not set standards for drinking water.

As for the aquatic environment, discharges of dangerous substances are controlled under the existing EC Dangerous Substances Directive and parallel regulations in the UK. These will be superseded in due course under the provisions of the Water Framework Directive. Standards for "priority" dangerous substances will be set in new Water Framework Directive "daughter" directives due to be proposed by the end of 2003.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of 10 and 14 January from the hon. Member for Totnes about the *(a)* Totnes and District Show and *(b)* Kingsbridge Show regarding the range of measures put in place by her Department since the foot and mouth outbreak; and if she will make a statement. [43138]

Mr. Morley *[holding reply 19 March 2002]:* A reply was sent on 19 March covering both letters. I am sorry that the honourable member's Parliamentary Question was not answered as soon as the letter was sent.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham's letters dated 30 January, 12 February and 14 March and the letters from the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* dated 11 January, 15 March and 22 March concerning the Bale Us Out campaign sent to the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. [830]

Mr. Morley: We have been unable to trace copies of the correspondence referred to.

Recycling

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage the recycling of *(a)* waste plastic and *(b)* waste silage film from farms. [48260]

Mr. Meacher: Waste plastic packaging, of which some 1.7 million tonnes is expected to arise in the UK waste stream this year, is one of the materials covered by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended). Since the introduction of these Regulations in 1997, and in particular the recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste which took effect in 1998, the amount of plastic packaging waste recycled has risen from 7 per cent in 1998 to 12 per cent at the end of 2000. Final outturn figures for 2001 are not yet available, but we expect this to have risen to around 15 per cent last year.

We will be addressing the question of how to deal with waste non-packaging farm plastics, including waste silage film from farms, in the forthcoming consultation document on agricultural waste. We will consider whether a statutory scheme should be introduced in the light of responses to this consultation exercise.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Press Officers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press officers there were in her Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46881]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding reply 10 April]:* The average number of staff within the Department for Education and Employment/Department for Education and Skills Press Office for 1997 and 2002 are:

Year	*Press Office Total*
1997–1998	20.5
2001–2002*	23.0

*Excludes five members of staff transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions as part of the Machinery of Government changes following the general election.

Graduate Earnings

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the average level of graduate earnings, broken down by social class. [49804]

Margaret Hodge *[holding reply 17 April]:* The table below shows the estimated average gross weekly earnings of graduates with a first degree and in full-time employment. The figures include all graduates who are currently in the labour market and employed full-time, irrespective of age and how long ago they graduated.

Current socio-economic classification	*Average gross weekly earnings of graduates in full-time employment*
Higher managerial and professional	£730
Lower managerial and professional	£520
Intermediate occupations	£310
Lower supervisory and technical	£410
Semi-routine occupations	£270
Routine occupations	£240
Never worked, unemployed and not elsewhere classified	£230
All	*£570*

Source:
Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2001.

Business Development Unit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many civil servants are employed in the Business Development Unit in her Department; what the Unit's annual budget is; and if she will make a statement on the Unit's activities. [50598]

Mr. Timms: The Business Development Unit operates under contract to my Department and is staffed mainly by non-civil-servants, but currently includes one civil servant on secondment from the Department. Its budget for 2002–03 is £482,278. The Unit's role is to manage and develop relationships with appropriate key business partners, promoting their understanding of and responses to our educational policies, and securing sponsorship and other support for specific national projects particularly for the schools sector.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49154]

(2) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49112]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 17 April, *Official Report,* column 929W by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House of Commons. Since the election the hon. Member has tabled 225 questions to this Department.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current session, for her Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37414]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not target Wales and Northern Ireland with its advertising. This means that regional media outside England is not used for Departmental advertising. However, our campaigns do unavoidably receive some coverage in Wales and Northern Ireland through the use of national newspapers, satellite television and other national media which reaches outside England.

It is not possible to provide the information as requested by Parliamentary session, or by month, except at disproportionate cost. The figures by financial year are as follows:

	£000
1997–98	9,992
1998–99	15,673
1999–00	11,900
2000–01	29,066
2001–02 (to date)	17,665

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 March, *Official Report,* column 795W, on departmental events, how many such events have taken place on departmental premises in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [50395]

Ms Hewitt: No central records are kept that would enable the information to be supplied, and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 793W, on publicity expenditure, how much money her Department has spent on advertising since May 1997. [50396]

Ms Hewitt: DTI spending on advertising through the Central Office of Information from 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2002 has been £29,614,332.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage change was in the unit cost of administering bankruptcy and compulsory liquidation in December 2002 by comparison with *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* December 1999. [47339]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The unit cost of case administration in December 2001 had *(a)* increased by 2.7 per cent in comparison with December 2000 and *(b)* increased by 2.6 per cent in

comparison with December 1999. The increase was principally the result of the cost of IT investment and change.

National Australia Bank

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make representations on behalf of Clydesdale Bank employees and other UK staff whose jobs are under threat from plans by National Australia Bank to cut its European workforce; and if she will make a statement. [50573]

Alan Johnson: Whilst job losses are always of great concern, this is a commercial matter for the firm concerned and I have no plans to make representations.

Biotechnological Co-operation (Israel)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the objectives are of the Britech programme of biotechnological co-operation with Israel; how many *(a)* British and *(b)* Israeli companies are involved; what the cost is of the programme; and what monitoring is undertaken to ensure that companies and individuals located in the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza are not involved. [49736]

Ms Hewitt: The Britain-Israel Technology Fund "Britech" was established by an intergovernmental Agreement between the UK and Israel in May 1999 and each country is contributing £7.75 million over five years. The objectives are to encourage and support alliances between private sector businesses in the UK and Israel, for joint industrial research and development and subsequent joint management and marketing of new products. To date, 12 projects, each involving one UK and one Israeli company have been approved and £4.74 million have been committed. Of these, 4 projects are in the area of biotechnology and £1.71 million have been committed. Project proposals are presented to the Britech Board for approval and details of the location of the participants are included. The Britech Chief Executive advises the Board of potentially sensitive projects. No projects are located in settlements in the West Bank or Gaza.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the rates averaged over the three years used for the purpose of formulating the assisted areas map were for *(a)* the Isle of Wight, *(b)* the Isle of Thanet, *(c)* England and *(d)* the United Kingdom of (i) employment, (ii) residence-based unemployment, (iii) workforce-based unemployment and (iv) manufacturing employment share; and what the standard deviation was for each of the purposes of the European Commission's regional aid guidelines. [51004]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The following figures were calculated for the purposes of the regional aid guidelines:

Per cent.

	Estimate of employment rate	*Estimate of residential unemployment*	*Estimate of workforce unemployment*	*Manufacturing employment share*
Isle of Wight	69.4	10.2	10.4	17.4
Thanet, Sandwich and Worth	72.8	10.7	12.5	20.0
Great Britain	73.6	7.7	6.9	18.3
Great Britain excluding Article 87(3)(a) areas	74.2	7.6	6.6	18.1
Standard deviation	6.0	2.6	2.6	8.2

These numbers are not National Statistics, though they were derived from National Statistics sources. The calculations for Thanet also included Sandwich and Worth wards in Dover, and total figures were calculated for Great Britain rather than for England or the United Kingdom.

Supermarket Competition

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will investigate the competition implications of supermarkets' refusal to accept meat from UK-registered low throughput abbatoirs. [48269]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Product sourcing decisions are normally a commercial matter for the company concerned. However, if these do raise competition concerns, they should be put to the Director General of Fair Trading, who is responsible for investigating complaints about anti-competitive behaviour.

Food Safety (Toys)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set up a joint working group of her Department and the Food Standards Agency to undertake a risk assessment of toys embedded in foodstuff items. [45764]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no plans to do so. Research commissioned by my Department provided no evidence to suggest that toys marketed with foodstuffs pose a greater risk to children than other small toys. The European Commission has also looked at this issue and reached the same conclusion.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to encourage retailers to make an assessment of the risk of toys embedded in foodstuff items. [45763]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is for suppliers—manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers—to take appropriate measures, within the limits of their activities, to ensure that the products they supply to consumers are safe. Risk assessments are generally carried out by the manufacturer of the final product.

All toys supplied in the UK must satisfy the essential safety requirements of the Toys (Safety) Regulations 1995 which implement the European Directive on the safety of toys. The Directive is under review and we will give

careful consideration to any proposals put forward regarding toys supplied with foodstuffs and warning labels.

Business Mergers

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes to UK law she is considering following the merger between P&O Princess and Royal Caribbean Cruises. [45362]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is a proposed merger which is presently being considered under the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. Further comment would not be appropriate at this stage.

Postal Services

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place with the Dutch Postal Service about the future of Consignia; and if she will make a statement. [48635]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Consignia took part in discussions about a possible merger of Consignia's postal activities with the Dutch Postal Service (TPG). However, no satisfactory agreement was reached and Ministers therefore agreed with the company that discussions should cease. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to go into the detail of such commercially confidential matters.

Since the government has given Consignia commercial freedom, within the public sector, it is entirely appropriate that Consignia has been considering its commercial strategy, including the possibility of relationships or ventures with other operators.

Chemical Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is towards the proposals contained in the EC White Paper, Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy; and if she will make a statement. [48928]

Ms Hewitt: The UK Government supports the aims and objectives of the EU Chemicals Strategy. We wish to see a workable strategy that protects the environment and human health by targeting chemicals of most concern through the authorisation process while at the same time minimising animal testing, encouraging innovation and maintaining the competitiveness of the chemicals industry. We support the addition to the authorisation process of chemicals that are at the same time persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBTs) and that are very persistent and very bioaccumulative (vPvB), once the necessary criteria for identification of PBTs and vPvBs are established; and also the inclusion of known endocrine disruptors when agreed scientifically valid test methods and criteria are established to identify these substances.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the UK chemicals industry of the EC White Paper, Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy. [48929]

Ms Hewitt: The White Paper estimates that testing costs to industry in the EU would be 2.1 billion euros over 11 years and that 190 extra staff will be needed at the European Chemicals Bureau. No extra costs are envisaged for regulatory authorities and the Commission argues that a saving in industry human resources can be expected. An initial Regulatory Impact Assessment carried out on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs suggests that the costs to the UK might be in the order of £760 million (about 1.2 billion euros). The consultants Risk and Policy Analysists Limited are currently carrying out a Business Impact Assessment on behalf of the Commission for the whole of the EU. This report is due to be published next month.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are for the Chemical Innovation and Growth Team; and if she will make a statement. [49856]

Ms Hewitt: The terms of reference for the Chemicals Innovation and Growth Team are that it will evaluate the key factors that will impact on the chemicals industry globally and identify the opportunities and challenges for the UK; formulate a vision of what the future chemicals industry might look like and how to get there; and make recommendations to industry, Government and others for specific actions.

The Chemicals Innovation and Growth Team consists of representatives from the chemicals industry and other key stakeholders and is chaired by Byron Grote of BP Chemicals. It is focusing on four major areas: innovation; regulation and reputation; customers and markets; and skills and competences. It will report later this year.

Data Protection Act

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to control the activities of businesses which represent themselves as public agencies enforcing the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. [49903]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mr. Wood) of 5 February 2002, *Official Report,* columns 906–907W; and the hon Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 196W.

WALES

Consultants

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts the Wales Office has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50835]

Mr. Murphy *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* My Department currently has one contract. There is no standard level of insurance required, it would depend on the nature and purpose of the contract.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of

the Environment Act 1995 (Commencement No. 20 and Saving Provision) (Wales) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51127]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The essential purpose of the Order was to bring into force, in Wales, the provisions of the Environment Act 1995 relating to the remediation of contaminated land. As such, and having regard to information I received from the National Assembly for Wales, I was satisfied that it raised no untoward financial implications.

The detailed implementation of these provisions is a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the Artificial Insemination of Cattle (Emergency Licences) (Wales) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement. [51128]

Mr. Paul Murphy: That is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 15 to 16 April; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [50858]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Luxembourg on 15 April. The Council adopted the "A" points listed in document 7057/02. It also noted the resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament listed in the documents 7059/02, 7060/02 and 7061/02. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library of the House. No formal votes were taken. Council Conclusions were adopted by consensus.

Work in other Council formations

The Council noted recent developments in the Transport, Telecommunications and Agriculture Councils.

Enlargement

The Council welcomed progress made in the accession negotiations. It underlined the importance of establishing EU Common Positions on the remaining chapters in order to keep to the timetable for conclusion of the negotiations.

Staff regulations

Commission Vice-President Kinnock outlined progress on EU institutional personnel policy reform and reminded the Council of the reform objectives: to introduce a more streamlined career structure, modernise pay and pension systems, and to safeguard ethical and professional standards.

The Council supported the Commission's aims to make its personnel policy more efficient, transparent, accountable and meritocratic and congratulated the Commission on work done so far.

EU Action Plan on the fight against terrorism

The Presidency briefed Partners on progress in implementation of the EU Action Plan. In particular, it focussed on implementation of UNSCR 1373, improving links between police and the judiciary in Member States (including Europol and Eurojust) and co-operation with third countries.

Illegal immigration

The Council discussed methods of combating illegal immigration including policing sea borders more effectively. This followed presentations by Italy and the Commission. The Council stressed the need for close, effective co-operation with countries of origin. Conclusions on these lines were adopted. It was agreed that the EU should strive to improve the speed and effectiveness of its actions and should implement the measures outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, adopted in February 2002, by harnessing all external relations instruments available in addition to those provided by the immigration policy framework. The Council welcomed the Commission's proposal to convene a high level meeting to address these issues. It highlighted the gravity of the situation, and the human rights violations which resulted from illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings.

Wider Europe: relations between the future enlarged EU and its Eastern neighbours

At the Presidency's invitation I outlined the case for the EU to consider how it could make more effective its relations with the EU's post-enlargement eastern neighbours, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The need for further thinking on this was widely endorsed. The Commission agreed to come forward with a Communication, in co-operation with the High Representative. The Council welcomed Commission and High Representative plans to contribute to the debate on strengthening relations during the second half of 2002.

India/ Pakistan

At UK request, the Council discussed the continuing India-Pakistan tensions and expressed concern at sectarian violence in Gujarat. It welcomed the prospect of early visits to the region by the High Representative, Javier Solana, and Commissioner Patten.

EU/ Switzerland relations

The Council welcomed the Commission's adoption of draft positions on the outstanding negotiating mandates for sectoral agreements between the EU and Switzerland and called for them to be finalised as swiftly as possible. The Council urged the Swiss authorities to make progress quickly in negotiations on combating fraud and called on the Presidency and Commission to pursue these aims also at senior levels.

European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to overcoming outstanding issues on EU-NATO co-operation, including "Berlin-plus". It also debated the possibility of a future EU operation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Middle East

Ministers discussed at length the latest diplomatic efforts to achieve a cease-fire and withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian-controlled areas. Ministers reiterated their support for the US Secretary of State's mission to the region.

Western Balkans

Commissioner Patten presented the first annual report on the Stabilisation and Association Process for South East Europe.

The Council adopted Conclusions welcoming the Commission's presentation of this work and covering the countries of the region. In particular, the Council was encouraged by the willingness of the Serbian and Montenegran parliaments to restructure their bilateral relations and to draft a new constitutional charter by June this year. The EU offered its assistance to aid these objectives. The Council welcomed progress toward concluding a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, but noted that continuing co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) remained crucial to Serbia and Montenegro's EU aspirations.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Council welcomed agreement reached by Bosnia and Herzegovina political leaders on the Constitutional Court decision on constituent peoples and called for urgent adoption of the amendments in full compliance with the agreement.

The Council also requested full and prompt compliance by the Bosnian authorities with the remaining elements of the road map, in the context of the Stabilisation and Association Process. It also asked authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to co-operate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal.

Right of return

The Council requested governments across the region to step up efforts to allow for the return of displaced persons.

EU relations with Central American and Andean community countries

The Council agreed with the Commission's intention to submit a proposal for negotiating directives, aimed at deepening the bilateral relationships between the EU and these regions through the conclusion of political dialogue and co-operation agreements.

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Council endorsed the Presidency's proposals for EU positions for the Valencia Euro-Mediterranean conference of 22–23 April.

Afghanistan

Ministers met Afghan Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah briefly at the GAC.

The Council reiterated that international assistance to Afghanistan should be based on territorial integrity and be conditional on implementation of the Bonn agreement objectives (peace, representational governance, elimination of terrorism and of drug production/ trafficking). The EU emphasised the necessity of conducting the Emergency Loya Jirga selection process in political neutrality.

Zimbabwe

The Council expressed deep concern at reports of continuing state-sanctioned violence against opposition supporters and condemned continuing widespread human rights abuse.

The Council agreed to impose a moratorium on bilateral ministerial level contacts with Zimbabwe until further notice, exempting political dialogue intended to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It awaits with interest the report from the Troika visit to the SADC region and signs of a clear commitment by the Government of Zimbabwe to ending political violence, respecting basic democratic norms, and engaging quickly and constructively in efforts at national reconciliation.

Zimbabwe

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Zimbabwe was discussed during the EU General Affairs Council on 15 April. [51811]

Mr. Straw: On 15 April, the EU General Affairs Council imposed a moratorium on bilateral ministerial level contacts with Zimbabwe until further notice, except for the conduct of political dialogue intended to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Zimbabwe, and on issues relating to regional security or for addressing humanitarian needs. The Council decided to defer consideration of additional targeted measures against the Government of Zimbabwe until its next meeting in May. An EU Troika will visit Southern Africa soon, to discuss the situation in Zimbabwe with SADC countries (not Zimbabwe itself).

We have made clear that the people of Zimbabwe have been denied their fundamental right to choose by whom they are governed. We support efforts by South Africa and Nigeria to facilitate dialogue between ZANU(PF) and MDC, to try to restore democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. We remain in continuous contact with our EU, US, Commonwealth and SADC partners.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the running costs were of *(a)* her Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* her Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [41034]

The Solicitor-General: Of the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, only my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, has a small private office of four staff which serves both the Attorney General and me. The cost of running the private office cannot be separated from the cost of running the Department as a whole and so the figures provided below relate only to part *(b)* of the question. The figures provided below include staff costs.

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

	£
1997–98	2,477,000
1998–99	2,292,000
1999–00	2,150,000
2000–01	2,327,000

Treasury Solicitor's Department (including Government Property Lawyers)

	£
1997–98	23,751,000
1998–99	25,016,000
1999–00	29,160,000
2000–01	27,989,000

Crown Prosecution Service

	£
1997–98	368,018,000
1998–99	368,411,000
1999–00	381,683,000
2000–01	406,864,000

Serious Fraud Office

	£
1997–98	9,301,000
1998–99	10,685,000
1999–00	11,223,000
2000–01	12,159,000

Sex Abuse Investigations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many *(a)* complaints and *(b)* items of correspondence have been received by *(a)* the Attorney General, *(b)* the Solicitor-General and *(c)* the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to historical sex abuse investigations in the United Kingdom in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [49830]

The Solicitor-General: Correspondence and complaints sent to the Law Officers are recorded primarily by the name of the sender. They are not categorised by recipient nor by subject in the manner set out in the question. The CPS has no central records of complaints or correspondence. The information requested could only be obtained by examining all correspondence received since 1998. This would incur disproportionate costs.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49594]

The Solicitor-General *[holding reply 17 April 2002]:* The 2002 Departmental Reports will be published by 31 May 2002.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer of 11 February, *Official Report,* column 1112W, on mobile phones, how many staff of the Crown Prosecution Service were provided with mobile telephones and other associated equipment in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02. [50552]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Crown Prosecution Service provided the following numbers of mobile phones with associated equipment in 1998–9, and subsequent financial years.

	Phones In Circulation Throughout Year
1998–1999	131
1999–2000	336
2000–2001	404
2001–2002	507

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46956]

The Solicitor-General: *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* None of the departments for which the Attorney General is responsible employ special advisers or have done so in the last five years.

TREASURY

Taxation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* audits and *(b)* investigations have been conducted by the Inland Revenue of taxpayers with a gross annual income of *(a)* £15,000 or less, *(b)* £15,001 to £25,000, *(c)* £25,001 to £50,000, *(d)* £50,001 to £100,000, *(e)* £100,001 to £200,000, *(f)* £200,001 to £500,000, *(g)* £500,001 to £1,000,000 and *(h)* more than £1,000,000, for the most recent available accounting period. [49297]

Dawn Primarolo: *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The Inland Revenue does not have figures analysed in this way. The Board of Inland Revenue publishes the results of its work tackling non-compliance in its annual report, which is available in the Library. The latest figures are in Appendix 2 and cover the year to 31 March 2001.

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual total cost of non-compliance with Inland Revenue laws and rules in each of the last five years. [49294]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* There is no reliable measure of the total income tax and national insurance contributions lost to evasion. In his report, published in March 2000, Lord Grabiner QC commented on the scale of the hidden economy and said:

"By its nature, the size of the informal economy is hard to measure. Most estimates are based on analysing high-level economic aggregates, such as labour market statistics or income and expenditure surveys, and calculate the result as a percentage of GDP. However there is research which suggests that these estimates tend to be exaggerated."

"It would be impractical to arrive at a precise and meaningful figure as to the scale of the problem without a considerable investment of time and resources."

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Royal Family

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his duties are in relation to Royal issues. [49938]

Mr. Wills: None of the Parliamentary Secretaries in the Lord Chancellor's Department has delegated responsibility for Royal matters.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42434]

Mr. Wills: I apologise for the delay in answering this question. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement; [45598]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45613]

Mr. Wills: The only private finance initiative (PFI) or public private partnership contract signed by this Department in the last four years to have gone through a preferred bidder stage was the PFI contract for the Probate Records Centre. There was no change in contract value between the preferred bidder stage and contract signature in July 1999. PFI contracts for magistrates' courts have not been included in this reply because they are let by local authorities.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43260]

Mr. Wills: The 2001 departmental report provides details of progress against Public Service Agreement targets developed under the Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 and lists the published Public Service Agreement targets for Spending Review 2000. From 1 April 2001 the Spending Review 2000 Public Service Agreement, which covers the work of the Lord Chancellor's Department until March 2004, replaced the Comprehensive Spending Review targets.

Since the publication of the 2001 departmental report, no further Public Service Agreement targets have been introduced. In the first year of Spending Review 2000, one Public Service Agreement target has been updated (WA 349, 8 May 2001).

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to seek compensation from the Affinity Consortium for the delay to the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation IT project. [46316]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask what plans the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has to seek compensation from the Affinity Consortium for the delay to the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation IT project.

We will take stock of the position when testing is complete and we are able to recommend to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions a revised commencement date for the next phase of Child Support Reforms.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many CSA cases have been referred to the Parliamentary Ombudsman in each year since the creation of the agency from *(a)* the Angus constituency, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [31582]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Michael Weir, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You have asked how many CSA cases have been referred to the Parliamentary Ombudsman in each year since the creation of the Agency from *(a)* the Angus Constituency, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK.

The Table on the attached annex provides this information.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman started recording CSA details late 1995. As details are validated on completion of the cases, due to the backlogs at that time, the first year the Office was confident of accurate figures was 1997 when Agency details were first published in its Annual Report. Therefore figures listed prior to 1997 should be viewed as incomplete records of those years.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1

Number of CSA cases referred to Parliamentary Ombudsman

Year	*Angus (Constituency cases)*	*Scotland cases*	*Total UK Cases*
1993–1994	0	1	7
1994–1995	1	8	88
1995–1996	0	34	118
1996–1997	1	28	102

Annex 1
Number of CSA cases referred to Parliamentary Ombudsman

Year	Angus (Constituency cases)	Scotland cases	Total UK Cases
1997–1998	1	14	67
1998–1999	1	11	51
1999–2000	1	19	102
2000–2001	0	17	76

Source:
Parliamentary Ombudsman's Office and the Child Support Agency's Parliamentary Ombudsman Office Focal Point.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are registered with the Child Support Agency; how many people registered in *(a)* January and *(b)* February; and how many are forecast to register in April. [45344]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask how many people are registered with the Child support agency; how many people registered in *(a)* January and *(b)* February; and how many are forecast to register in April.

The live and assessed caseload for the Agency up to February 2002 was 1,077,800 cases. The number of parents with care who made an application for a maintenance assessment to the Agency in January and February 2002 was 34,086 and 29,681 respectively.

We forecast that a further 30,000 parents with care will make an application to the Agency in April 2002.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the new CSA computer system was subject to OGC Gateway reviews. [47970]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask whether the new CSA computer system was subject to OGC Gateway reviews.

The development of the CSA computer system is part of a broader programme to implement the Child Support Reform programme. Two OGC Gateway reviews of that programme have taken place. The first was from the 23 to 27 April 2001 and the second was from the 22 to 25 January 2002.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many departures from Child Support Agency assessments have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* approved in each year since the scheme's inception. [51061]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask, how many departures from Child Support Agency assessments have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* approved in each year since the scheme's inception.

The table set out below shows the number of Departure applications and awards from the inception of the Departures scheme in December 1996.

Figures are for year ending March unless otherwise specified.

Year ending	December 1996 to March 1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	April 2001 to February 2002	Total
Departure Applied for	3,648	21,918	14,889	14,853	17,100	11,840	84,248
Departure Awarded	114	2,360	3,162	6,393	7,049	6,116	25,194

Source:
CSA Performance Management Team

Since April 2000 the Agency has been recording figures of departure applications through the computer system. Figures prior to April 2000 were recorded manually and may be less accurate.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parents without care have failed to pay the necessary maintenance to parents with care for *(a)* six to 12 weeks, *(b)* 12 to 26 weeks and *(c)* more than 26 weeks in each year since the creation of the Child Support Agency; and what proportion they represent of all parents against whom maintenance orders are kept. [51063]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask, how many parents without care have failed to pay the necessary maintenance to parents with care for *(a)* six to 12 weeks *(b)* 12 to 26 weeks and *(c)* more than 26 weeks in each year since the creation of the Child Support Agency; and what proportion they represent of all parents against whom maintenance orders are kept.

I am sorry but information is not available in the format you have requested.

The table set out below shows the numbers of full, partial and non compliant non-resident parents for each year end (March). I am unable to supply the same information for earlier years as we did not gather information in that way.

Non-Resident Parent Case Compliance

	2000	2001	2002
Full Compliance	165,820 (49.3%)	185,900 (52.9%)	211,000 (60.9%)
Partial Compliance	56,340 (16.7%)	52,060 (14.8%)	30,600 (8.8%)
Nil Compliance	114,500 (34%)	113,720 (32.3%)	104,800 (30.3%)

Source:
CSA Performance Management Team

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* planned cost was and *(b)* current estimated cost is of the Child Support. Reforms New Rules Implementation IT project. [46315]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 26 March 2002]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 18 April 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask what the *(a)* planned cost was and *(b)* current estimated cost is of the Child Support Reforms New Rules Implementation IT project and

The planned total cost of the project to implement Child Support Reform over the 10 year period of the business case was £651 million.

I am sorry that I cannot provide the planned and current estimated cost of the IT component as it is commercially confidential. As this is a PFI contract and subject to performance criteria the amount of payment will be affected by the level of performance achieved.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

ITV Digital

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the implications for future broadcasting rights contracts of ITV Digital's stated inability to meet the terms of its agreement with the Football League. [50897]

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the implications for future broadcasting rights contracts of ITV Digital's stated inability to meet the terms of its agreement with the Football League. [50898]

Dr. Howells: Subject to the requirements of the 1996 Broadcasting Act, relating to "listed events", contracts for the broadcasting rights to sports events are matters for commercial negotiations between the rightsholders and the broadcasters concerned.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what meetings she has had with representatives of *(a)* Granada plc and *(b)* Carlton Communications plc since ITV Digital's entry into administration; [50710]

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from the Chairmen and chief executives of *(a)* Granada plc and *(b)* Carlton Communications plc since 27 March. [50668]

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with representatives of Granada plc and Carlton Communications plc since ITV Digital went into administration. [50847]

Dr. Howells: Over the past weeks I have been kept closely in touch by all sides involved in the ITV Digital negotiations. However the decisions taken by ITV Digital are commercial decisions for them, and them alone, to take.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many contracts her Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether she can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions she has had with other Government departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50825]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The DCMS does not maintain a register of contracts under £5,000 in value. Over that value there are fifteen current contracts in which contract conditions stipulate "that policies of insurance should be effected and maintained providing an adequate level of cover in respect of all risks". To date there have been no discussions with other Government Departments concerning levels of professional indemnity insurance.

Religious Broadcasting

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by what criteria she will assess the continuing need for the statutory ban on Christian broadcasters holding different categories of broadcasting licence when reaching a conclusion on these issues prior to the publication of the Communications Bill. [50579]

Dr. Howells: In considering whether to restrict religious bodies holding broadcasting licences, the Government takes into account, amongst other things, the need to promote the efficient use of scarce resources in order to safeguard pluralism, cater for a variety of tastes and interests and avoid discrimination between the many different religions practised in the United Kingdom.

Television Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the circumstances under which a television licensing officer can enter a private dwelling. [51073]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* TV Licensing officials may enter a private dwelling only with the consent of the occupier or if authorised to do so by a warrant issued by a magistrate. Under section 15(1) of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 (as amended), a magistrate may issue such a warrant if satisfied, by information provided on oath, that there is reasonable ground for suspecting that an offence under the Act has been or is being committed.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the circumstances in which the owner of a television in the United Kingdom *(a)* does not and *(b)* does require a television licence. [51072]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* A television licence is required to instal or use television receiving apparatus to receive television programme

services, as defined by section 2(4) of the Broadcasting Act 1990. The BBC, as Licensing Authority, has responsibility for determining television licensing requirements in individual cases, subject to the ultimate authority of the courts.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many private finance initiative projects have been subject to refinancing after the contracts have been signed; and what has been the financial effect in each case. [50279]

Dr. Howells: None.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and if the target was met. [49640]

Dr. Howells: Information about the efficiency targets and performance of the Department's sponsored bodies can be found in their published Annual Reports, which may be obtained from the Library of the House.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 22 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 575W, regarding creche facilities, how many places were taken up in 2001–02 at the four central London sites to which she refers. [50427]

Dr. Howells: During 2001–02 a total of five places were taken up at the four central London sites referred to.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50403]

Dr. Howells: With regard to pay settlements made in 2001 by the sponsored bodies for which information is available, estimates of the annual cost of the pay increase at the time of the settlement are set out below. The average headline settlement was 3.48 per cent. The Department cannot give costs for 2002–03 because pay increases have not yet been agreed.

	£
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	407,139
Arts Council of England	229,326
British Library	1,183,000
British Museum	1,199,800
British Tourist Authority	266,000
Broadcasting Standards Commission	33,842
Community Fund	590,000
English Heritage	764,000
English Tourism Council	50,000
Film Council	144,979
Horniman Museum & Gardens	66,600
Imperial War Museum	298,178
Millennium Commission	107,000
Museum of London	119,735
Museum of Science and Industry for Manchester	46,700
National Gallery	466,000
National Heritage Memorial Fund	175,000
National Maritime Museum	180,000
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	358,000
National Museum of Science & Industry	625,760
National Portrait Gallery	159,000
Natural History Museum	991,307
New Opportunities Fund	176,625
Registrar of Public Lending Right	6,592
Resource (Council for Museums, Archives & Libraries)	86,433
Royal Armouries	109,000
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts	19,408
Sir John Soane's Museum	875
Sport England	498,000
Tate Gallery	496,288
UK Sport	165,810
Victoria and Albert Museum	778,000
Wallace Collection	50,735

Televised Music

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will introduce proposals in the Communications Bill for the Government to take responsibility for reviewing the amount of televised music on terrestrial television. [48737]

Dr. Howells: The Government's proposals for the future regulation of communications will be set out in a draft Communications Bill which we expect to publish shortly. It is, however, a long-standing principle that the Government does not itself take responsibility for the scheduling or content of broadcasting and we do not propose to do so.

Bishopsgate Goods Yard

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what communication she has received from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions since 20 January about Bishopsgate Goods Yard. [37872]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and DCMS officials have had contact with DTLR Ministers and officials since 20 January about Bishopsgate Goods Yard.

Discussions centred on the impact of any listing of the Braithwaite Viaduct or the buildings in the Goods Yard on the new East London Line Extension project. The Secretary of State's decision to add the Braithwaite Viaduct to the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest was announced on 8 March.

HEALTH

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients received treatment abroad at the direction and expense of the NHS in *(a)* 2002 to date and *(b)* each of the last three years. [47648]

Mr. Hutton: Under the pilot scheme to treat NHS patients overseas 181 patients received treatment overseas between 18 January and 12 April 2002.

The E112 scheme is the process through which patients may receive treatment in other European Economic Area (EEA) countries at the expense of the NHS. Applications are almost always instigated by patients rather than at the direction of the NHS. 310 applications for treatment were approved between 1 January and 12 April 2002. The figures for the last three years were as follows:

1999	860
2000	1100
2001	1140

All the above figures are for Great Britain and rounded to the nearest 10. They relate to applications approved during the relevant period, rather than individuals treated; some applications will have been in respect of the same individual. Moreover, some treatments approved in one year may have taken place the following year.

Websites

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column 1405W, concerning the Departmental website, what the reasons are for the increase in (i) hosting and maintenance charges and (ii) website development costs. [48251]

Yvette Cooper: The increase in hosting and maintenance charges for the Departmental website between 1998 and 2002 was caused by two factors:

(a) the number of databases made available increased from one at the beginning of 1998 to around sixty in 2002. Hosting for each is charged separately; and

(b) Office of Government Commerce's charging arrangements for website hosting and maintenance changed annually during the period 1998 to 2002.

The increase in website development costs was due to the following factors:

(a) The increase in size of the site from 100 to over 80,000 pages in the six years since its launch, and the increase in use of the Internet as a publishing vehicle for departmental publications, has meant that the information has had to be substantially reorganised.

(b) Other changes have been made in order to meet the Office of the e-Envoy's *"Guidelines for UK government websites"* on Accessibility and Usability.

(c) User research and ongoing customer and stakeholder feedback has prompted redesign work to improve the site's navigational structure, the search engine and the choice of document format available.

Violent Patients

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have implemented schemes to provide safe havens in which violent patients can be treated. [47858]

Mr. Hutton: The Department issued Health Service Circular 2000–01 "Tackling violence towards GPs and their staff" to health authorities on 28 January 2000. Health authorities were asked to audit levels of violence, assess risk and put appropriate plans into place which address safer working, in close consultation with local medical committees (LMCs).

A recent survey of fifty LMCs found that 22 health authorities had provided advice on how to deal with violent patients; 10 had provided secure facilities for consultation and treatment of violent patients; 4 had other successful schemes in place; and 9 health authorities and LMCs had discussions in progress.

The following health authorities have secure facilities or other schemes in place:

Health Authority areas where secure facilities are provided:

Southampton

Suffolk

South Derbyshire

Liverpool

Avon

Nottingham

North Warwickshire

Hillingdon

Camden and Islington

Hampshire & Isle of Wight

Health Authority areas where other related schemes are in place:

East and West Kent

Lincolnshire

Wirral

Gloucestershire

Workforce Numbers Advisory Board

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources are used to enable the work of Workforce Numbers Advisory Board to continue. [47844]

Mr. Hutton: The Workforce Numbers Advisory Board (WNAB) is part of the Department's new workforce planning structures. It plays a key role in determining future commissioning levels and engaging the NHS in planning the future workforce.

It does not have a budget but is supported by civil servants and may call upon the resources of the Department to commission work as required.

Neo-natal Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many positions in neo-natal units in each health authority area have been vacant for over three months. [47872]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the number of vacant positions in neo-natal units is not collected. Staff for neo-natal units comprises neonatal nurses, midwives, paediatric nurses, other nursing staff and paediatricians. Vacancy information is only available for midwives and paediatric nurses and this is shown in the table.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Vacancies in NHS Trusts by Region, HA area and NHS Trust, in the specified staff groups
3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

Region/HA Code	HA Name	Qualified paediatric nurses				Qualified midwives			
		3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)	3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)
England		*3.6*	*510*	*13,640*	*16,920*	*2.6*	*470*	*17,640*	*22,550*
Northern and Yorkshire		*2.8*	*50*	*1,730*	*2,090*	*0.7*	*20*	*2,200*	*2,690*
QDD	Bradford HA	1.6	0	160	190	0.1	0	250	300
QDE	County Durham & Darlington HA	0.0	0	80	100	0.0	0	160	190
QDF	East Riding & Hull HA	1.1	0	90	110	0.0	0	170	210
QDG	Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	1.4	0	50	80	0.0	0	130	160
QDH	Leeds HA	7.9	30	320	370	1.5	0	270	340
QDJ	Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	0.9	0	420	510	1.1	0	180	220
QDK	North Cumbria HA	5.6	0	30	40	2.4	0	100	140
QDM	Northumberland HA	0.0	0	30	40	0.0	0	130	150
QDN	Sunderland HA	0.0	0	100	120	0.0	0	100	120
QDP	Tees HA	3.3	10	150	180	1.8	0	200	240
QDQ	Wakefield HA	1.4	0	70	90	0.0	0	140	170
QDR	North Yorkshire HA	1.3	0	80	110	0.0	0	220	270
QDT	Calderdale & Kirklees HA	3.2	0	130	170	2.1	0	150	180
Trent		*0.3*	*10*	*1,570*	*1,940*	*0.1*	*0*	*1,820*	*2,280*
QCG	Barnsley HA	0.0	0	40	50	0.0	0	90	100
QCH	North Derbyshire HA	0.0	0	70	90	0.0	0	100	120
QCJ	Southern Derbyshire HA	0.0	0	120	150	0.0	0	160	190
QCK	Doncaster HA	0.0	0	20	30	0.0	0	120	150
QCL	Leicestershire HA	0.0	0	260	340	0.0	0	300	390
QCM	Lincolnshire HA	1.1	0	110	140	1.3	0	190	260
QCN	North Nottinghamshire HA	1.3	0	70	80	0.0	0	120	140
QCP	Nottingham HA	0.7	0	400	470	0.0	0	300	390
QCQ	Rotherham HA	0.0	0	50	60	0.0	0	80	100
QCR	Sheffield HA	0.0	0	350	430	0.0	0	220	280
QDL	South Humber HA	0.0	0	90	110	0.0	0	130	160
West Midlands		*4.7*	*80*	*1,670*	*2,030*	*1.9*	*40*	*2,100*	*2,700*
QD9	Birmingham HA	6.8	60	880	1,030	2.7	20	630	790
QEA	Coventry HA	16.1	10	60	80	7.7	10	140	190
QEC	Dudley HA	4.3	0	40	50	4.6	0	100	170
QED	Herefordshire HA	2.5	0	20	30	0.0	0	60	70
QEE	Sandwell HA	3.8	0	50	60	0.0	0	80	100
QEF	Shropshire HA	0.0	0	90	110	4.0	10	160	210
QEG	Solihull HA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
QEH	North Staffordshire HA	0.0	0	210	240	0.0	0	180	220
QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	0.0	0	60	70	0.0	0	170	210
QEK	Walsall HA	0.0	0	60	70	0.0	0	130	150
QEL	Warwickshire HA	5.9	0	30	40	0.6	0	150	200
QEM	Wolverhampton HA	0.0	0	110	150	0.0	0	110	140
QEN	Worcestershire HA	0.0	0	60	90	0.0	0	200	260
North West		*1.6*	*40*	*2,380*	*3,010*	*1.0*	*30*	*2,880*	*3,550*
QC1	South Lancashire HA	*	*	*	*	0.0	0	30	40
QC2	Liverpool HA	0.8	10	650	840	0.0	0	180	230
QC3	Manchester HA	5.3	10	160	210	2.7	10	350	410
QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	0.0	0	70	90	2.1	0	90	120
QC5	St Helens & Knowsley HA	7.0	10	70	80	0.0	0	100	120
QC6	Salford & Trafford HA	2.2	10	550	670	2.9	10	180	220
QC7	Sefton HA	3.6	0	30	40	0.0	0	210	280
QC8	Stockport HA	0.0	0	40	60	0.0	0	140	160
QC9	West Pennine HA	0.6	0	160	210	0.0	0	150	180
QCT	Bury & Rochdale HA	0.0	0	50	70	0.0	0	160	190
QCV	North Cheshire HA	10.2	0	40	50	3.0	0	130	170

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3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

Region/HA Code	HA Name	Qualified paediatric nurses				Qualified midwives			
		3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)	3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)
QCW	South Cheshire HA	0.0	0	120	150	0.0	0	250	330
QCX	East Lancashire HA	0.0	0	130	160	0.0	0	230	280
QCY	North West Lancashire HA	0.0	0	120	150	0.0	0	260	330
QDA	Wigan & Bolton HA	0.0	0	100	120	0.0	0	270	310
QDC	Wirral HA	0.0	0	90	110	4.5	10	140	180
Eastern		*2.7*	*20*	*780*	*1,030*	*4.5*	*80*	*1,610*	*2,150*
QA6	Bedfordshire HA	0.0	0	100	130	4.0	10	190	270
QAX	North Essex HA	0.0	0	110	150	5.0	20	300	370
QAY	South Essex HA	0.0	0	100	110	1.4	0	210	260
QCF	Suffolk HA	1.7	0	60	100	0.0	0	110	150
QCP	Nottingham HA	0.7	0	400	470	0.0	0	300	390
QEP	East & North Hertfordshire HA	15.5	10	70	100	14.2	30	160	210
QEQ	West Hertfordshire HA	0.0	0	70	90	9.7	20	170	240
QER	Cambridgeshire HA	2.0	0	190	240	0.0	0	240	310
QET	Norfolk HA	4.4	0	90	120	2.2	10	240	340
London		*5.9*	*180*	*2,830*	*3,320*	*6.9*	*200*	*2,670*	*3,400*
QA2	Hillingdon HA	0.0	0	30	60	0.0	0	90	110
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	10.4	30	240	260	2.7	10	180	220
QA4	Enfield & Haringey HA	12.3	10	40	50	2.4	0	80	100
QA5	Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	27.4	10	30	30	5.3	10	180	210
QAA	Bexley & Greenwich HA	4.0	0	90	120	17.3	30	140	200
QAC	Bromley HA	7.6	0	30	40	23.6	20	70	80
QAD	Croydon HA	0.0	0	30	40	0.0	0	50	90
QAG	Kingston & Richmond HA	0.0	0	50	70	0.0	0	120	170
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	4.4	30	570	670	6.4	20	340	380
QAJ	Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	7.5	20	190	250	3.4	10	290	380
QAP	Barking & Havering HA	20.5	10	40	50	4.9	10	120	150
QAQ	Barnet HA	0.0	0	80	100	2.1	0	160	210
QAR	Brent & Harrow HA	18.1	10	50	70	0.0	0	140	170
QAT	Camden & Islington HA	3.5	40	1,070	1,150	0.0	0	180	230
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	11.8	10	100	130	8.4	20	260	380
QAW	East London & The City HA	5.8	10	200	250	18.0	60	280	340
South East		*5.8*	*110*	*1,760*	*2,330*	*3.4*	*90*	*2,550*	*3,410*
QA7	Berkshire HA	15.7	30	140	190	3.2	10	250	320
QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	7.2	10	100	140	8.8	20	210	280
QAE	East Kent HA	3.6	10	200	310	0.0	0	90	120
QAF	West Kent HA	8.2	20	180	220	6.7	30	360	480
QAK	East Surrey HA	20.6	20	60	70	14.9	20	110	150
QAL	West Surrey HA	9.4	10	100	140	1.3	0	220	320
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	2.2	0	170	230	0.7	0	140	170
QAN	West Sussex HA	0.0	0	80	110	3.1	10	190	250
QCC	Northamptonshire HA	1.0	0	100	130	0.0	0	210	270
QCE	Oxfordshire HA	6.5	10	190	230	1.3	0	230	300
QD1	North & Mid Hampshire HA	2.7	0	100	140	1.5	0	160	220
QD2	Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	0.0	0	140	170	0.5	0	190	250
QD3	Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	2.5	0	180	230	0.0	0	160	210
QD4	Isle of Wight HA	0.0	0	20	30	0.0	0	40	70

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2001
Vacancies in NHS Trusts by Region, HA area and NHS Trust, in the specified staff groups
3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

Region/HA Code	HA Name	Qualified paediatric nurses: 3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)	Qualified midwives: 3 month vacancy rates (per cent)	3 month vacancies	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (hc)
South West		*3.2*	*30*	*910*	*1,180*	*1.1*	*20*	*1,800*	*2,380*
QD5	Somerset HA	0.0	0	70	90	0.0	0	160	190
QD6	South & West Devon HA	0.0	0	120	150	0.4	0	240	300
QD7	Wiltshire HA	18.4	10	60	80	1.3	0	310	420
QD8	Avon HA	2.3	10	390	480	2.2	10	330	430
QDV	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	2.3	0	80	100	0.0	0	170	230
QDW	Dorset HA	0.0	0	80	130	0.0	0	200	290
QDX	North East & Devon HA	5.2	0	40	50	2.5	10	200	260
QDY	Gloucestershire HA	4.0	0	70	100	1.0	0	190	260

Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (wte).
Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 non-medical workforce censuses (whole time equivalent).
Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.
Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
* = figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.
Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
HA figures are based on Trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare.
Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates. Staff in post is as at 30 September 2000.
Due to organisational changes between September 2000 and March 2001 the totals for East Surrey HA and West Sussex HA may not equal previously published data.
Due to a different method of rounding, figures may not equal previously published data.

Property Sales

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been raised through the auction of *(a)* empty and *(b)* surplus NHS property since the publication of the NHS National Plan. [47822]

Mr. Hutton: The "one-off auction of empty and surplus NHS property" referred to in the NHS Plan is currently proceeding as a Public Private Partnership disposal of the majority of the Department's retained estate which was left following establishment of National Health Service Trusts and the transfer of property to them.

This disposal has been advertised through the Official Journal of the European Community process, and an "Invitation to Negotiate' has been issued to four prospective partners.

In the meantime, since publication of the NHS Plan, disposals of empty and surplus property have realised some £280 million.

Cardiology Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for in-patient cardiology treatment in each quater since March 1997. [47842]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Inpatient Waiting List by Quarter—Cardiology & Cardiothoracic Surgery Specialties

Year	Quarter	Total
1996–7	4	36,000
1997–8	4	38,000
1998–9	1	38,000
1998–9	2	37,000
1998–9	3	38,000
1998–9	4	35,000
1999–0	1	37,000
1999–0	2	36,000
1999–0	3	39,000
1999–0	4	38,000
2000–1	1	41,000
2000–1	2	40,000
2000–1	3	41,000
2000–1	4	38,000
2001–2	1	40,000
2001–2	2	40,000
2001–2	3	41,000

Source:
DH KH07 form.
Note:
Specialty level figures were not collected for Q1–Q3 1997–8.

Chlamydia

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population of England has access to opportunistic chlamydia screening. [47849]

Yvette Cooper: The information is not collected centrally. A national chlamydia screening programme will start to be phased in later this year to reduce undiagnosed infections. The details of the programme are still being developed but will build on learning from the successful pilots in Portsmouth and the Wirral. The programme will

involve opportunistic screening in healthcare settings such as community contraception and genitourinary medicine clinics.

Health Action Zones

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the performance of health action zones is monitored against the local priorities identified when the establishment of the first wave of health action zones was announced on 31 March 1998. [47021]

Mr. Hutton: Health Action Zones (HAZs) were initially set up to focus on local geographical or client group priorities. Until 31 March 2002, these were monitored by the lead health authority for the HAZ. From April 2002 onwards, principal responsibility for performance management of the National Health Service will be undertaken by the 28 new strategic health authorities.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to broaden the definition of a cancelled operation. [47857]

Mr. Hutton: Data on cancelled operations are currently collected for last minute cancellations, where a hospital cancels a patient for non-clinical reasons on the day the patient is due to arrive or after arrival in hospital, and on where a hospital cancels a patient for non-clinical reasons on the day of surgery.

Data are also collected on the number of patients readmitted within 30 days of cancellation (Patients Charter standard) and within 28 days of cancellation (NHS Plan guarantee).

There are no current plans to broaden the definition of a cancelled operation.

NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the activities of the NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust. [47821]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Local Improvement Finance Trust (NHS LIFT) initiative was announced in the NHS Plan. The objective of this initiative is to contribute to the overall NHS Plan targets of refurbishing or replacing up to 3,000 premises and 500 new one stop primary care centres by December 2004.

The NHS LIFT approach will bring together a number of individual developments providing a more co-ordinated approach to service development as well as helping to reduce procurement costs. New buildings provided under LIFTs will also enable the co-location of GP and community services, and wherever possible the location of social care agencies.

As a first step, a new public private partnership, Partnerships for Health (PfH) was established between the Department and Partnerships UK in September 2001. PfH will help localities develop and establish local LIFT companies. These local companies will be owned jointly by PfH, the local health economy and the private sector, and will build and develop premises, which will be leased to GPs and other primary care users.

In February 2001 the Department prioritised an initial six LIFT schemes, and in January 2002 a further twelve LIFT schemes were identified. Further announcements will be made later this year about a third wave of sites.

Two of the first-wave schemes (East London and the City and Camden and Islington), recently issued tender documentation, and it is expected that the other four first-wave schemes will issue their documentation in the near future. The value of the initial investment requirement in East London & City is £62.5 million and in Camden & Islington is £17 million.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column 806W, on general practitioners, what amount of time he expects a GP appraiser to spend on appraisals every year which would otherwise be spent on patient care. [47444]

Mr. Hutton: The introduction of General Practitioner appraisal will not be to the detriment of patient care. Indeed, over time we expect GP appraisal to contribute towards improving the quality of National Health Service primary care services offered to local communities. Research suggests that it is reasonable for a primary care trust to expect a GP appraiser to undertake between 10 and 25 appraisals annually. GPs' contractual frameworks include provision spend time on activities other than direct patient care. It will, of course, not always be possible to accommodate all appraisal activity without reducing the time available to the individual GP appraiser for direct patient care. In such cases detailed arrangements will need to be agreed between the primary care trust, the GP appraiser and his/her practice or personal medical services pilot provider. But we have made it clear that all primary care trusts should have a funded policy on the provision of locum cover, to support the implementation of GP appraisal.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the National Survey of GP Services. [46996]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of the National Survey of NHS Patients: 1998 General Practice survey was £788,000.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to complete his discussions with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to establish an evaluation process for international general practitioner recruitment; and when he expects such evaluation to commence. [47027]

Mr. Hutton: Discussions are underway with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. We aim to begin a full evaluation of the whole International Recruitment process later this year.

Overseas Recruitment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* total number and *(b)* percentage is of overseas nurses working in the UK as a proportion of nursing staff, by regional health authority in (i) the NHS and (ii) agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [48033]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

In order to practise as a nurse overseas applicants must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), formerly the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting. Overseas nurses registered with the NMC do not necessarily work in the National Health Service. The number of entrants to the register in the last three years are in the table below.

Overseas trained nurses and midwives registering with the UKCC

	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001
Overseas nurses registered with the UKCC	3,621	5,945	8,403

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas doctors there were working in the UK as a proportion of all doctors practising on NHS patients, broken down by regional health authority in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [48034]

Mr. Hutton: Regional health authorities were abolished in 1996 and replaced by regional offices, the data has therefore been broken down by regional office. The Department does not collect data on the number of overseas doctors working in the UK broken down by agencies.

Available information is shown in the tables. One table contains headcount figures, the other table contains percentage figures.

General Medical Practitioners[1] and Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical staff[2] within each region and by country of qualification

numbers

	1999				2000				2001			
	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere
England	91,340	66,330	4,850	20,160	93,910	68,060	4,770	21,070	96,790	69,830	4,810	22,140
Northern & Yorkshire	11,680	8,600	630	2,460	12,030	8,830	620	2,570	12,490	9,170	600	2,720
Trent	9,130	6,570	400	2,160	9,260	6,720	380	2,160	9,570	6,970	380	2,220
West Midlands	9,360	6,450	510	2,400	9,410	6,500	480	2,420	9,770	6,680	480	2,610
North West	13,150	8,590	770	3,790	13,570	8,770	770	4,030	13,780	8,970	720	4,090
Eastern	10,720	8,070	550	2,100	10,840	8,180	510	2,150	11,240	8,400	540	2,300
London	16,370	12,520	980	2,870	17,180	12,960	1,040	3,180	17,800	13,340	1,090	3,370
South East	12,050	8,640	610	2,790	12,410	8,930	560	2,920	12,880	9,100	630	3,160
South Western	9,100	7,080	410	1,610	9,470	7,370	410	1,690	9,820	7,600	400	1,820

Notes:
[1] General Medical Practioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.
[2] Excludes Hospital Practitioners and Clinical Assistants most of whom are also GPs working part time in hospitals Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census as at 30 September each year.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics as at 1 October 1999 and 30 September 2000 and 2001.

General Medical Practitioners[1] and Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical staff[2] within each region and by country of qualification

percentages[3]

	1999				2000				2001			
	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere	All Staff	United Kingdom	Rest of EEA	Elsewhere
England	100%	72.6%	5.3%	22.1%	100%	72.5%	5.1%	22.4%	100%	72.2%	5.0%	22.9%
Northern & Yorkshire	100%	73.6%	5.4%	21.1%	100%	73.4%	5.2%	21.4%	100%	73.4%	4.8%	21.8%
Trent	100%	72.0%	4.3%	23.7%	100%	72.6%	4.1%	23.3%	100%	72.8%	3.9%	23.2%
West Midlands	100%	68.8%	5.5%	25.7%	100%	69.1%	5.1%	25.7%	100%	68.4%	4.9%	26.7%
North West	100%	65.3%	5.8%	28.8%	100%	64.6%	5.7%	29.7%	100%	65.1%	5.2%	29.7%
Eastern	100%	75.3%	5.1%	19.6%	100%	75.5%	4.7%	19.8%	100%	74.8%	4.8%	20.5%
London	100%	76.5%	6.0%	17.5%	100%	75.5%	6.1%	18.5%	100%	75.0%	6.1%	18.9%
South East	100%	71.7%	5.1%	23.2%	100%	71.9%	4.5%	23.6%	100%	70.6%	4.9%	24.5%
South Western	100%	77.8%	4.5%	17.7%	100%	77.8%	4.4%	17.8%	100%	77.3%	4.1%	18.5%

Notes:
[1] General Medical Practioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.
[2] Excludes Hospital Practitioners and Clinical Assistants most of whom are also GPs working part time in hospitals.
[3] Percentages were calculated using unrounded figures.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census as at 30 September each year.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics as at 1 October 1999 and 30 September 2000 and 2001.

Midwives

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is, by regional health authority, *(a)* the total number of full-time and *(b)* part-time midwives and what the (i) modal, (ii) mean and (iii) median age is of midwives for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [48249]

Mr. Hutton: Regional Health Authorities were abolished in 1996. Information on midwives working full time and part time by Health Authority is shown in the table. The information about age is as follows.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Modal, mean and median ages of midwives in England as at 30 September each year

headcount

	1999	2000	2001
Mode	35	38	37
Mean	40	41	41
Median	39	40	40

Notes: Figures exclude bank staff, learners and agency staff.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

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NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Mean, median and modal ages of midwives in England as at 30 September each year

headcount

		1999			2000				2001			
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Bank	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Bank	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Bank
England total	22,800	11,070	9,840	1,900	22,570	10,660	10,200	1,710	23,080	10,720	10,780	1,570
Northern & Yorkshire	2,650	1,360	1,210	80	2,700	1,360	1,260	70	3,000	1,500	1,390	110
QDD Bradford HA	280	170	110	10	300	170	120	10	310	170	130	10
QDE County Durham & Darlington HA	190	100	90	—	190	100	90	10	200	100	100	10
QDF East Riding & Hull HA	230	100	120	10	210	100	100	*	240	100	120	20
QDG Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	170	80	70	20	160	80	70	10	180	90	60	20
QDH Leeds HA	290	160	110	20	340	180	130	30	330	190	130	—
QDJ Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	190	110	70	—	220	120	100	—	260	140	110	*
QDK North Cumbria HA	140	50	90	—	140	40	90	10	140	50	80	*
QDM Northumberland HA	160	80	80	*	150	70	80	—	170	70	80	20
QDN Sunderland HA	130	80	50	—	120	80	40	—	120	80	40	—
QDP Tees HA	250	120	120	*	240	130	110	*	300	150	150	—
QDQ Wakefield HA	180	80	90	10	170	80	90	10	160	70	90	10
QDR North Yorkshire HA	250	140	110	*	270	130	140	—	350	150	170	30
QDT Calderdale & Kirklees HA	180	90	90	—	180	90	90	—	250	120	130	—
Trent	2,270	1,100	1,090	80	2,280	1,040	1,190	50	2,200	940	1,220	40
QCG Barnsley HA	100	60	30	*	100	60	40	—	100	60	40	—
QCH North Derbyshire HA	120	70	50	*	120	60	50	*	140	70	60	*
QCJ Southern Derbyshire HA	180	110	80	—	190	100	90	—	190	90	90	10
QCK Doncaster HA	160	60	90	10	150	50	90	*	140	50	90	—
QCL Leicestershire HA	390	190	170	40	390	180	180	30	370	160	190	20
QCM Lincolnshire HA	260	100	140	10	260	100	150	10	250	90	160	—
QCN North Nottinghamshire HA	140	70	70	*	140	60	80	—	90	40	40	—
QCP Nottingham HA	360	170	190	—	390	160	240	—	460	170	290	—
QCQ Rotherham HA	110	60	50	—	100	50	50	—	110	50	50	—
QCR Sheffield HA	280	120	160	*	280	120	160	—	270	110	150	*
QDL South Humber HA	160	90	70	*	160	80	80	*	80	30	50	*
West Midlands	2,790	1,250	1,300	230	2,700	1,180	1,350	180	2,640	1,160	1,380	100
QD9 Birmingham HA	830	400	310	120	790	390	310	80	740	380	330	20
QEA Coventry HA	200	80	120	*	190	70	110	10	200	80	120	*
QEC Dudley HA	160	50	80	30	170	40	80	40	160	50	90	20
QED Herefordshire HA	70	30	40	*	70	30	40	—	70	30	40	*
QEE Sandwell HA	100	60	20	10	100	60	20	10	100	60	20	20
QEF Shropshire HA	210	50	160	—	210	40	170	—	210	40	160	—
QEH North Staffordshire HA	220	110	110	—	220	110	110	—	210	90	110	—
QEJ South Staffordshire HA	200	110	90	*	210	100	100	*	210	100	100	*
QEK Walsall HA	160	70	80	10	150	70	80	*	150	60	80	10
QEL Warwickshire HA	200	90	90	10	200	90	100	10	200	90	110	*
QEM Wolverhampton HA	140	70	70	—	140	70	70	—	140	60	70	—
QEN Worcestershire HA	290	120	130	40	260	100	140	20	260	100	140	20
North West	3,630	1,750	1,680	210	3,550	1,700	1,700	140	3,670	1,720	1,790	170
QC1 South Lancashire HA	40	30	10	—	40	30	10	—	40	30	*	—
QC2 Liverpool HA	230	100	120	10	240	100	120	20	340	140	200	*
QC3 Manchester HA	400	240	150	—	410	240	150	20	380	230	150	*
QC4 Morecambe Bay HA	120	50	60	20	120	50	70	*	160	70	90	10
QC5 St Helen's & Knowsley HA	120	70	50	—	120	60	60	—	120	60	60	—
QC6 Salford & Trafford HA	240	110	120	10	220	100	120	—	200	100	110	—
QC7 Sefton HA	230	100	120	10	280	100	150	40	130	50	60	10
QC8 Stockport HA	180	100	70	10	160	90	70	—	190	90	70	20
QC9 West Pennine HA	160	90	70	—	180	90	70	20	300	110	120	60
QCT Bury & Rochdale HA	210	100	110	*	190	100	100	*	200	100	100	*
QCV North Cheshire HA	160	60	100	—	170	70	90	10	160	70	90	—
QCW South Cheshire HA	360	140	180	40	330	140	180	10	340	140	180	20
QCX East Lancashire HA	340	140	130	70	280	150	130	*	270	140	140	—
QCY North West Lancashire HA	340	140	180	20	330	140	180	20	340	140	180	20
QDA Wigan and Bolton HA	310	180	130	—	310	160	150	—	330	160	180	*
QDC Wirral HA	190	100	70	20	180	90	70	10	180	90	70	20
Eastern	2,000	920	930	150	2,150	900	970	280	2,080	880	1,000	200
QA6 Bedfordshire HA	220	110	110	10	270	100	120	50	250	110	120	30
QAX North Essex HA	310	150	160	*	370	140	160	70	320	150	160	—
QAY South Essex HA	240	130	110	10	260	130	110	20	250	130	100	20

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Mean, median and modal ages of midwives in England as at 30 September each year

headcount

		1999				2000				2001			
		Total	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*
QCF	Suffolk HA	*160*	50	70	40	*150*	50	100	—	*140*	50	90	—
QEP	East & North Hertfordshire HA	*220*	100	100	20	*200*	90	90	20	*	—	—	—
QEQ	West Hertfordshire HA	*160*	50	70	40	*240*	100	90	60	—	—	—	—
QER	Cambridgeshire HA	*420*	200	190	20	*310*	140	140	30	*420*	140	170	120
QET	Norfolk HA	*270*	140	120	10	*340*	140	170	40	*310*	130	180	—
QEX	Hertfordshire HA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*380*	170	170	40
London		*3,700*	*2,060*	*930*	*710*	*3,400*	*1,940*	*920*	*540*	*3,530*	*2,010*	*1,020*	*500*
QA2	Hillingdon HA	*230*	110	70	50	*100*	60	40	—	*110*	60	50	—
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	*240*	160	60	20	*220*	140	60	20	*220*	140	70	10
QA4	Enfield & Haringey HA	*100*	70	20	10	*100*	70	20	10	*	—	—	—
QA5	Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	*220*	140	70	—	*210*	130	80	—	*120*	80	40	—
QAA	Bexley & Greenwich HA	*180*	60	80	30	*200*	60	90	50	—	—	—	—
QAC	Bromley HA	*90*	60	30	—	*80*	50	30	—	—	—	—	—
QAD	Croydon HA	*200*	60	40	100	*90*	30	20	40	*110*	50	50	10
QAG	Kingston & Richmond HA	*180*	70	80	30	*160*	70	70	20	*160*	60	70	30
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	*420*	300	60	60	*380*	290	60	30	*430*	300	100	40
QAJ	Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	*380*	190	120	60	*380*	180	120	80	*350*	190	110	50
QAP	Barking & Havering HA	*130*	90	40	*	*150*	90	40	20	*250*	140	70	40
QAQ	Barnet HA	*220*	120	60	30	*210*	100	60	50	—	—	—	—
QAR	Brent & Harrow HA	*160*	100	40	20	*180*	100	40	40	*130*	80	30	10
QAT	Camden & Islington HA	*220*	140	30	60	*230*	140	40	50	*220*	150	50	20
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	*330*	130	60	140	*380*	190	90	100	*440*	180	100	150
QAW	East London & the City HA	*420*	260	70	80	*340*	230	60	40	*370*	260	60	50
QEW	Barnet, Enfield & Haringey HA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*330*	190	80	60
QEY	Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich HA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*290*	120	130	40
South East		*3,360*	*1,510*	*1,580*	*270*	*3,410*	*1,500*	*1,640*	*260*	*3,550*	*1,530*	*1,750*	*270*
QA7	Berkshire HA	*310*	150	120	40	*320*	160	130	30	*340*	170	140	30
QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	*290*	140	120	30	*280*	130	120	30	*340*	130	140	70
QAE	East Kent HA	*130*	70	50	*	*120*	60	60	—	*260*	110	150	*
QAF	West Kent HA	*510*	220	200	80	*480*	220	200	60	*440*	220	190	20
QAK	East Surrey HA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*130*	70	60	*
QAL	West Surrey HA	*290*	110	140	40	*320*	130	150	40	*280*	100	150	30
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	*110*	60	50	*	*170*	90	80	10	*180*	90	80	*
QAN	West Sussex HA	*380*	180	160	40	*400*	180	170	50	*280*	110	120	50
QCC	Northamptonshire HA	*290*	120	160	10	*270*	120	150	10	*270*	120	140	*
QCE	Oxfordshire HA	*300*	140	140	10	*300*	140	140	20	*300*	130	170	—
QD1	North & Mid Hampshire HA	*220*	100	110	10	*220*	90	120	10	*250*	90	110	50
QD2	Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	*250*	100	150	*	*250*	100	150	10	—	—	—	—
QD3	Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	*210*	90	120	*	*210*	90	120	*	*180*	80	110	—
QD4	Isle Of Wight HA	*70*	20	50	—	*60*	10	50	—	—	—	—	—
QEV	Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*310*	110	200	*
South West		*2,400*	*1,100*	*1,120*	*180*	*2,380*	*1,030*	*1,170*	*180*	*2,410*	*980*	*1,240*	*180*
QD5	Somerset HA	*190*	100	90	*	*190*	90	90	*	*180*	80	100	*
QD6	South & West Devon HA	*310*	180	110	20	*300*	170	130	10	*300*	160	140	10
QD7	Wiltshire HA	*470*	180	200	90	*420*	180	210	40	*450*	170	240	50
QD8	Avon HA	*420*	190	210	10	*430*	180	210	40	*460*	150	250	50

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Mean, median and modal ages of midwives in England as at 30 September each year

headcount

		1999				2000				2001			
		Total	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Bank*
QDV	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	*220*	90	130	10	*230*	80	140	10	*220*	80	130	*
QDW	Dorset HA	*260*	110	120	30	*290*	110	130	60	*280*	110	120	50
QDX	North & East Devon HA	*260*	120	130	—	*260*	110	140	—	*270*	130	140	*
QDY	Gloucestershire HA	*280*	120	130	20	*260*	120	120	20	*260*	110	130	20

Notes: Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
Bank nurses work flexible hours to meet service requirements but do not have a full time or part time classification.
* five or less and greater than zero.
— zero.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much funding the Government plans to make available for research into a cure for cystic fibrosis; [47641]

(2) how much funding was made available for research into cystic fibrosis in each year from *(a)* 1992 to 2001. [47640]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease and receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The expenditure figures from 1992 to 1997 are not available. The MRC spend in each year from 1997 to 2001 is shown below:

1997–1998—£1.8 million
1998–1999—£1.9 million
1999–2000—£1.8 million
2000–2001—£1.5 million

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department's expenditure since 1995 on directly commissioned research projects relating to cystic fibrosis is as follows:

1995–1996—£143,100
1996–1997—£50,300
1997–1998—£40,800
1998–1999—£8,300
1999–2000—£113,900
2000–2001—£71,700

In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support funding for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported by National Health Service research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department but the total investment is considerably greater than just the spend on directly commissioned projects.

The MRC current support for cystic fibrosis includes work on gene therapy for cystic fibrosis.

It is not possible to predict what the future total level of Government expenditure will for cystic fibrosis research as new research proposals are regularly being considered and commissioned.

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for research into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands in funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

Blood Safety

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on blood safety in the NHS. [48577]

Yvette Cooper: About three million blood components are transfused to over a million National Health Service patients in the United Kingdom each year. This blood meets standards of safety that are among the best in the world. However, almost every medical treatment or intervention, including blood transfusion, is associated with some risk.

The recent annual study from SHOT (Serious Hazards of Transfusion) published on 10 April 2002 is extremely valuable in assessing the safety of blood transfusion and demonstrates that blood transfusion in the UK is very safe and becoming even safer with improving technology and clinical audit. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The SHOT report demonstrates that serious adverse events associated with blood transfusion are rare. However many of them are avoidable. Improving patient safety, including reducing unintended harm to patients, is a major Government priority. The Department will be working with SHOT, the National Blood Service and the new National Patient Safety Agency on strategies to reduce the level of avoidable incidents associated with blood transfusion.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has conducted into

transfusion-related acute lung injury with particular regard to blood donated by women who have had multiple births. [48578]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has not conducted specific research in this area. However, the National Blood Authority is investigating cases of transfusion related acute lung injury to inform research in this area. The National Blood Authority is also currently evaluating options for reducing the risk to patients from this syndrome.

NHS Managerial Staff

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many managerial staff are working in the NHS. [47652]

Mr. Hutton: The number of managers working within the Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) of the NHS is shown in the table.

The annual Department of Health census of General and Personal Medical Services staff does not provide a breakdown of managerial staff.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Managerial staff within the specific areas of work in England as at 30 September 2001

	Whole-time Equivalents	*headcount*
All managers	*34,060*	*35,740*
Of which		
Administration & estates	*26,280*	*27,420*
Of which		
Senior managers	9,370	9,740
Managers	16,910	17,680
Nurse managers	*5,230*	*5,590*
Scientific, therapeutic & technical managers	*2,010*	*2,180*
Ambulance managers	*540*	*540*

Notes: Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Mental Health

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to manage diversity within care services for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* children and *(c)* people with mental health problems. [47626]

Jacqui Smith: Through the National Service Framework for Older People (published in 2001), "Quality Protects" (launched in 1998), and the National Service Framework for Mental Health (published in 1999), and related initiatives, the Government is ensuring that services for older people, children and adults with mental health problems respectively are developed so that all people who need support, no matter their background and personal characteristics, can be provided with appropriate and effective help. In addition, the Government has announced that a National Service Framework for Children is being developed.

Counselling Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of GP practices have a counselling service attached. [47733]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the number of counsellors employed in Primary Care is not collected centrally.

Information is available from independent research to show that approximately half of all GPs have access to counselling and psychological therapies.

Social Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what strategies his Department has in place to reduce the number of temporary staff working in the social services sector. [47624]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched a £1.5 million social work recruitment campaign on 19 October 2001. The campaign consists of national advertising, information leaflets, posters, local and national public relations activity, a help line which those interested in learning more about social work can contact for further information, and a dedicated website. It has three aims, to:

raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5000 by 2004;

inform the public about what social workers actually do;

make existing social workers realise that their work is valued.

As the aim of the campaign is to attract more people to work in social care, this should in the long term reduce vacancy rates and therefore the use of agency staff to cover vacancies.

The help line has so far received over 14,000 calls, and the website has had over 11,000 visitors. The second phase of the campaign will be launched in May.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds are occupied by elderly patients waiting to be transferred to residential care homes. [47622]

Jacqui Smith: The latest information about the numbers of hospital beds occupied by older people awaiting transfer to a residential care home has been placed in the Library.

Foster Carers

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reforms he is planning to the revenue support grant in relation to foster carers. [48696]

Jacqui Smith: The Government recognises that there are limitations to the existing Standard Spending Assessment system. That is why work is being carried out to develop a new system for 2003–4 that will be fairer and easier to understand. We have commissioned research to inform this review and we are at the early stages of discussing the findings with local government representatives. We will be consulting widely on a range of options before final decisions are taken.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Food Standards Agency is taking to tackle the food hygiene knowledge gap across the population. [49070]

Yvette Cooper: A key element in the Food Standard's Agency's target to reduce UK foodborne disease by 20 per cent by 2006 is a nationwide food hygiene campaign, launched on 11 February 2002, to help improve standards of food hygiene in catering premises and in the domestic setting. The campaign, which will have a five year duration, is aimed initially at the catering industry and will subsequently broaden out to include the general public.

The Agency is also actively involved in promoting food hygiene with teachers, school children and students. The Agency and a consortium of other bodies has been involved in the development of a new web based food hygiene education package for 14–24 year olds (www.Good2Eat.info) which was launched on 15 April and has benefited from European Union financing (as part of a Europe-wide campaign on food safety). The Food Standards Agency also houses the website for two other food hygiene teaching resources, originally developed by the Health Education Authority: "Aliens in Our Food"—aimed at children at secondary schools, and "Safe T and the H Squad"—aimed at children in junior schools.

A stakeholder workshop will be held on 7 May to consider the current level of knowledge about foodborne disease and hygiene in the home, to review current or recent Agency work and to identify any gaps in research or surveillance. The workshop will also provide an opportunity to consider how hygiene messages can be effectively targeted towards consumers.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the new Food Standards Agency-specific conference framework, referred to on page 41 of the 2001 report of the Food Standards Agency, was introduced by the summer of 2001. [49216]

Jacqui Smith: A competence framework specific to the Food Standards Agency was introduced in October 2001. This reflects the Agency's values and way of working.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the tailored management development programme of the Food Standards Agency referred to on page 41 of the 2001 report of the Food Standards Agency. [49215]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) management scheme, which was launched in October 2001, is a major part of the Agency's general training and development programme. It has been prepared to help equip all managers in the FSA with the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours required to support the Agency's way of working and its core values.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the establishment of the baseline, referred to on page 41 of the 2001 report of the Food Standards Agency, in the context of the first staff survey conducted by the Agency. [49231]

Yvette Cooper: The first Food Standards Agency staff attitude survey was carried out in October 2000. The results were used as a baseline for comparison with the 2001 staff attitude survey, which took place at the end of 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Service Delivery Agreement target to develop and implement a cost-effective strategy to reduce the incidence of food-borne illness in humans has been met. [49078]

Yvette Cooper: Yes. The strategy was agreed by the Food Standards Agency's board at the public board meeting held on 9 May 2001 and has been published on the Agency's website. Six monthly updates on progress are presented to the board and these papers are also published on the Agency's website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Service Delivery Agreement target of the Food Standards Agency to contribute to the renegotiation of the European Meat Hygiene Directive so as better to protect public health and produce a more efficient enforcement system has been met. [49249]

Yvette Cooper: The European Meat Hygiene Directive is being consolidated into four new European Union Food Hygiene Regulations. The Food Standards Agency has contributed to the negotiations that have taken place to date on the proposals and also on a Commission decision, agreed last April, which requires the introduction of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) based controls in licensed meat plants. It is considered that the introduction of HACCP based controls will provide better protection for public health. The Commission, having withdrawn earlier proposals on official controls, is expected to publish new proposals shortly and the Agency will take part in the subsequent negotiations with a view to achieving a legislative base for a more efficient enforcement system.

Photodynamic Therapy

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is regarding photodynamic therapy and its availability on the NHS. [49022]

Jacqui Smith: At present, photodynamic therapy is not routinely available under the National Health Service. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is carrying out an appraisal of the use of photodynamic therapy in the treatment of macular disease, which they expect to complete in July, providing there are no appeals.

The Department has asked NHS bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all relevant factors including the available evidence on effect.

Equipment Assistance (Personal Care)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on providing people on income support with special equipment to help with personal care. [49842]

Jacqui Smith: People on income support who need equipment to help with personal care have it provided on the same basis as other people with the same needs. Equipment provided by the National Health Service is

free of charge to all. Equipment provided by local councils may attract a charge according to local policy.

Fluoride

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to distribute fluoridated milk in schools. [50607]

Yvette Cooper: Decisions on whether to offer fluoridated milk in schools are taken locally following consultation between the community dental service, the school and parents. There are currently seven fluoridated milk schemes at schools in the North West and Yorkshire.

Scanners

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of cancer were detected using *(a)* x-rays and *(b)* CT scanners in each hospital trust in the last 12 months. [50614]

Yvette Cooper: This information requested is not available. Information on the numbers of diagnostic tests undertaken annually does not record the clinical outcome of each individual test.

NHSnet

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the PSA target to connect all GP surgeries to NHSnet by the end of 2002 will be met. [47294]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* We are on track to meet target. There are likely be some dispensations agreed with Health Authorities for a small number of surgeries where it would not be practical or cost-effective to install a connection for a short period (e.g. where the GP is about to retire, or working from temporary premises).

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress he has achieved in establishing a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; [48010]

(2) will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [48012]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department of Health is committed to providing equality of opportunity in all aspects of its work and gender is one aspect to be considered along with race, disability, age and sexual orientation. All policy development must support of the core principles in the NHS Plan, one of which states that the NHS of the 21st century must be responsive to the needs of different groups and individuals within society and challenge discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexuality. The Department has been working with the Women and Equality unit on the production of the health section of its forthcoming publication "Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain".

The Department has also been working in collaboration with the Women and Equality Unit at the Cabinet Office on two case studies to test out the methodology developed by the Unit for assessing gender impact. These are the development of the National Service Framework for Diabetes and the implementation of the National Service Framework for Mental Health. These case studies are nearing completion.

The Diabetes National Service Framework was announced in April 1999 and the standard document to support the NSF was published in December 2001. The report of the use of the Gender Impact Assessment tool in the production of these standards is expected to be published via the Cabinet Office website in the near future. The Diabetes National Service Framework: *Standards* were developed with the help of an expert reference group with a wide range of representative interests, including service users. The Delivery Strategy will be published later this year and consultation on the contents is being undertaken through the department's website.

Gender impact assessment has been used in developing a strategy around women's mental health. The development of a strategy was announced in March 2001. A consultation document on the women's mental health strategy is to be published in the next few months. A three month formal consultation period will follow.

Press and Public Relations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 436W, how much the increase in personnel employed in a press or public relations function in his Department since 1997 has cost. [47554]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The annual costs of personnel employed in the Departments Communications Directorate since 1997–98 are shown in the table below (£,000):

Year	*News*	*Publicity*	*NHS Communications*	*Total*
1997–98	1,062	1,216	399	2,677
1998–99	1,239	1,122	496	2,857
1999–02	1,253	1,276	543	3,072
2000–01	1,233	839	1,159	3,231
2001–02	1,265	904	1,182	3,351

1. It is not possible to provide a comparable breakdown of costs. The figures provided include all Communications Directorate staff (staff and staff related costs).
2. For the financial year 2001–02 the annual budget figures are shown as the final expenditure figures are not yet available.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Food Standards Agency is taking to detect infected meat which has been imported from abroad and *(a)* is unsafe for human consumption and *(b)* could pass the infection to a farm animal; and if he will make a statement. [48175]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 April 2002]:* European Union (EU) food hygiene legislation on meat for human consumption requires that all meat sold on the single market must be fit for human consumption, and

free from animal diseases. It must have passed the specified health checks under veterinary supervision, and have been awarded the appropriate health mark.

Meat produced within the EU may circulate freely on the single market, and is not subject to border controls. However, imports of meat from other EU states are subject to random checks by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) at meat cutting plants, or by local authorities in meat plants under their supervision. Following problems over the presence of Specified Risk Material in contravention of BSE rules, the Food Standards Agency has instructed the MHS to inspect every single consignment of imported carcass beef.

All meat imports from third countries also have to satisfy the conditions set out in EU food hygiene and import legislation. The latter includes prior notification and importation through EU authorised Border Inspection Posts (BIPs). In the BIP, the meat is subject to a 100 per cent check of identity and documentation, and a random physical check. The controls cover both public and animal health aspects with responsibility resting respectively with the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Local authorities, including port health authorities, have day-to-day responsibility for enforcement of the import legislation in BIPs.

Agency officials are exploring proposals made in a report approved by the Board of the Food Standards Agency with a view to making a number of improvements to controls on imports at ports, and have already issued written guidance to port health authorities and local authorities to ensure there is continued vigilance and checks on imported products both at the point of import and at the retail level. In addition the Food Standards Agency is taking an active role in interdepartmental initiatives led by DEFRA aimed at co-ordinating action across Government concerned with illegal imports of meat.

Sussex Ambulance Service

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost to public funds since 1 May 1997 from the work carried out, including consultation processes, on the future configuration of the ambulance service serving Sussex. [49278]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* The information is not held centrally.

Treatment Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates on *(a)* the cost of procedures in NHS hospitals and *(b)* the charges for procedures in private hospitals and private beds in NHS hospitals. [50063]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Reference costs data is the main source of cost data on individual treatments and procedures in the National Health Service. This information is collected annually from NHS providers (including primary care trusts) and is analysed to produce national average costs which are published.

The level of detail is dependent on the services. Inpatient and day case episodes are sub-divided into over 500 Healthcare Resource Groups (HRGs). HRGs are groups of clinically similar procedures and treatments which are iso-resource. They are developed by clinicians, and signed off by the respective Royal Colleges.

Outpatient attendances are, at a minimum, analysed on the number of first and follow up attendances for each specialty. Some specialties are analysed using more sophisticated workload measures. Full details can be found on the Department's website and copies of the Reference Costs 2001 publication are in the Library.

The Department does not collect information on charges for procedures either in private or NHS hospitals for private patients. It has, however, carried out a survey of NHS health authorities and trusts on the acute elective activity they commissioned from the independent sector last year and the related costs, and will make available key results shortly.

NHS Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what deficit or surplus was carried forward by each NHS trust, health authority and primary care trust and group in England at the beginning of financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [50064]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* Information relating to NHS trust surpluses and deficits for the 2000–01 financial year has been placed in the library. The NHS trust information requested for 2001–02 and 2002–03 will not be available until the annual audited accounts are completed and published for those financial years.

In anticipation of the introduction of Resource accounting and budgeting across all Government departments from April 2001, a change made to the format of the annual accounts from 2000–01 means that health authorities (including Primary Care Groups) and primary care trusts, are no longer required to account on an income & expenditure basis. The concept of income and expenditure deficits and surpluses is, therefore, no longer applicable, having been replaced by a measure which seeks to ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts live within the approved resource limits set by the Department.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers regional NHS officials have to claw back *(a)* unspent allocations at the end of the year for which they have been allocated and *(b)* ring-fenced allocations and special purpose grants during the year for which they have been allocated. [50067]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* HM Treasury allows the Department to carry forward under spends from one year to the next. In turn, the Department allows the NHS this same flexibility.

Section 97(6) of the NHS Act 1977 as amended provides for the Secretary of State to issue directions to ring fence specific allotments of funding. Ring fenced funding may only be used for the purposes specified in such directions. The Secretary of State may, under section

97(5) of the NHS Act 1977 as amended, claw back under spends of ring fenced funding. However this has not been the recent practice.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45591]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer Monday 25 March]:* The information requested is shown in the table (all figures are expressed in cash terms). Attention is drawn to the footnotes to the table as a lot of these early PFI schemes changed in functionality terms after the appointment of the preferred bidder.

1998	*Preferred Bidder Price*	*Final Contract Price*
Greenwich	£15,355,000 (annual unitary charge)	£17,327,000 (annual unitary charge)[1]
Calderdale	£17,500,000 (annual unitary charge)	£14,500,000 (annual unitary charge)[2]
South Manchester	£539,000,000 (total cash flows over 45 years)	£519,000,000 (total cash flows over 35 years)
Norfolk and Norwich	£28,825,000 (annual unitary charge)[3]	£35,300,000 (annual unitary charge)
North Durham	£14,660,000 (annual unitary charge)	£11,960,000 (annual unitary charge)[4]
1999		
South Tees	£20,300,000 (annual unitary charge)	£21,900,000 (annual unitary charge)[5]
Swindon and Marlborough	£8,575,000 (annual availability charge only)[6]	£10,914,000 (annual availability charge only)[7]
Worcester	£15,557,000 (annual unitary charge)	£18,302,000 (annual unitary charge)[8]
Hereford	£9,471,000 (annual unitary charge)	£9,517,000 (annual unitary charge)
King's	£6,439,000 (annual availability charge only)[9]	£7,211,000 (annual availability charge only)
2000 (only 4 major schemes signed contracts in 2000)		
St George's	No change in annual unitary charge between preferred bidder stage and final contract price	£6,804,000 (annual unitary charge)
Leeds Community	£9,090,000 (annual unitary charge)	£8,130,000 (annual unitary charge)[10]
Hull and East Yorks	£320,000 (annual unitary charge)	£1,400,000 (annual unitary charge)[11]
UCLH	Construction price for the 2 phases of the development was £153,000,000	Construction price for the 2 phases of the development was £225,000,000[12]
2001 (only 3 major schemes signed contracts in 2001)		
West Berkshire	£4,019,512 (annual unitary charge)	£4,020,000 (annual unitary charge)
Dudley	£27,484,000 (annual unitary charge)	£25,954,000 (annual unitary charge)
West Middlesex	£8,595,000 (annual unitary charge)	£8,875,000 (annual unitary charge)

[1] Final contract price includes interest rate adjustment.
[2] Initial proposal was for all new build; this was negotiated by the Trust to be a mix of new build and refurbished buildings, hence the reduction in price.
[3] Preferred bidder price for initial specification of 701 beds; final contract price for 809 beds.
[4] Sterile services was removed after the preferred bidder stage; the design also underwent some changes.
[5] Project underwent considerable service/build variations before contract close.
[6] The figures in both columns for Swindon and Marlborough exclude facilities management costs because at preferred bidder stage the range of services to be included in the scheme had not yet been decided.
[7] The scheme at preferred bidder stage was for the redevelopment of the existing Princess Margaret Hospital, whilst the charge at financial close is for a new build on a green field site i.e. a completely different type of project. The former had a substantial element of refurbished building and was around 10 per cent smaller.
[8] Incorporates addition of 74 beds at Kidderminster and equipment.
[9] Includes an adjustment to exclude the benefit of a capital sale receipt of £2.8 million to ensure a like-for-like comparison with final contract price.
[10] The reduction was due to negotiations with the bidder, reduction in interest rates of 1.7 per cent and the sale of land which reduced the unitary charge by £492,000 per annum.
[11] The scheme cost increased from £3.9 million to £8.1 million due to inclusion of additional facilities and "hard FM" services.
[12] Scheme cost increased due to addition of more beds to the scheme following the National Beds Inquiry Report in February 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Crawley Hospital Energy Management for the Surrey and Sussex Health Care NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49516]

Yvette Cooper: The Crawley scheme was set in April 1999 on a ten-year contract. It is a cost-neutral scheme (i.e. the costs of the scheme are offset by the energy savings generated).

The public sector comparator was made and showed the Honeywell Scheme to cost the Trust £400,000 less than pursuing a non-PFI alternative over the life of the scheme.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the PSA target for efficiency and other value for money gains in Departmental operations of 2.5 per cent was met in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [47281]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer Wednesday 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on meeting this PSA target in was published in the Department's 2001 Departmental Report, a copy of which is in the Library. This recorded that we were on course to deliver the target.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he had made of whether the target to bring sickness absence levels down to 6.8 days per staff year by 2003 will be met. [47361]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many auditors have been trained since April 2001 in pursuit of the Service Delivery Agreement target to protect consumers through improved food safety and standards. [49241]

Yvette Cooper: The targets published in the 2000 spending review delivery agreement were achieved. By April 2001, 6 auditors in England, 3 in Scotland and 2 in Northern Ireland were trained to audit local authorities. Since April 2001, 1 auditor has been trained in Wales and a further 2 auditors have been trained in England, with a further 2 to be trained during 2002–2003. More will be trained as the programme of audits requires.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the 2002 Departmental report will be published. [49584]

Mr. Hutton: The 2002 Departmental Reports will be published in spring 2002. The dates will be announced shortly.

NHS Direct

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what is the average time it takes to get through to NHS Direct over the last month for which figures are available. [46715]

Mr. Hutton *[holding reply 10 April 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the average time it takes for NHS Direct to answer the telephone is approximately thirty seconds after the confidentiality message finishes.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions; [49144]

(2) what the cost was to his Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated. [49102]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the member for Livingston on 17 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 929W.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the target has been in each of the last five years for efficiency savings as a percentage of total running costs for each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if the target was met. [49637]

Mr. Leslie: Details of the Equal Opportunities Commission's expenditure and accounts are published in their combined annual report and accounts, which is available in the Library of the House. Efficiency savings for my Department's Advisory NDPBs are those applicable to the Department as a whole.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of its consultation documents published in 2001 in electronic or printed form the Cabinet Office has monitored and evaluated in accordance with its Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [49952]

Mr. Leslie: All five Cabinet Office consultation documents published in 2001 that are subject to the Code of Practice were monitored to ensure compliance with the Code. No evaluation of the consultations has been undertaken so far.

The Cabinet Office's Centre for Management and Policy Studies is developing a "consultation toolkit" to help officials within the Cabinet Office and throughout central government consult more effectively. It will include a section on evaluation.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which consultation documents published by the Cabinet Office in 2001 were not made available as paper copies. [49951]

Mr. Leslie: All five Cabinet Office consultation documents published in 2001 that are subject to the Code of Practice were made available as paper copies.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of which of its consultation documents published in 2001 in electronic or printed form the Cabinet Office allowed less than the recommended minimum 12 weeks' consultation period; and what explanation for this departure from the Code of Practice on Written Consultations was given. [49950]

Mr. Leslie: None of the five Cabinet Office UK national public consultation documents published in 2001 that are subject to the Code of Practice allowed less than a 12-week consultation period.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which mechanisms the Cabinet Office uses for monitoring and evaluating the quality of its consultation documents in electronic and printed form. [49953]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office Consultation Co-ordinator monitors departmental consultations that are subject to the Code of Practice and advises officials on compliance when required. The Cabinet Office's Centre for Management and Policy Studies is developing a "consultation toolkit" to help officials within the Cabinet Office and throughout central government consult more effectively. It will include a section on evaluation.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints the Cabinet Office has received about its 2001 consultations in electronic or printed form. [49947]

Mr. Leslie: Two complaints were received and responded to in relation to one of the five Cabinet Office consultation documents published in 2001 that are subject to the Code of Practice.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Cabinet Office has published the results of all its 2001 written consultations in electronic or printed form. [49948]

Mr. Leslie: Results have been published for one of the five Cabinet Office consultations published in 2001 that were subject to the Code of Practice. Results have been published both in print and electronic form, for the consultation on "The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales" (August 2001). Details are available from the House of Commons library and on the Civil Contingency Unit's website at www.ukresilience.info.

Information on the results for the four other Cabinet Office consultations is as follows:

Young Runaways (March 2001)

The formal written consultation was part of a wider consultation process that included field visits, internationally and in England, as well as further consultation with young people through focus groups. The written consultation replies will be reflected in the final report to be published in Autumn 2002 on the Social Exclusion Unit website at www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk.

Raising the Educational Attainment of Children in Care (July 2001)

The analysis of responses will be published on the Internet as part of the project's "Knowledge Pool", which is due to be launched on 23 April 2002. The Knowledge Pool will be on the Cabinet Office's Social Exclusion Unit website at www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk.

Transport and Social Exclusion July 2001

The results of the consultation will be published in the Summer on the Social Exclusion website at www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk.

Licensing of Crown Copyright (HMSO—Cabinet Office Agency) (October 2001)

The results will be published on the HMSO's website at www.hmso.gov.ukonce the analysis of responses is complete.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government departments and agencies have appointed designated consultation co-ordinators in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [49955]

Mr. Leslie: The following departments and agencies have appointed designated consultation co-ordinators:

Main Departments

The Cabinet Office
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Education and Skills
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department of Health
Department for International Development
Department for Trade and Industry
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Department for Work and Pensions
Home Office
Lord Chancellor's Department
Ministry of Defence
Northern Ireland Office
HM Treasury

Other Departments and Agencies

Charity Commission
The Court Service
Driving Standards Agency
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Forestry Commission
Food Standards Agency
Health and Safety Executive
Highways Agency
HM Customs and Excise
HM Land Registry
Inland Revenue
National Lottery Commission
Office of Gas and Electricity Supplies
Office of Telecommunications
Office for National Statistics
Patent Office
Planning Inspectorate
Privy Council Office
Public Record Office
Rural Payments Agency
Radio Communications Agency
Valuation Office
Vehicle Inspectorate

Refurbishment

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the certificates showing that timber used for replacement doors and windows in the refurbishment of the Cabinet Office has been certified as coming from sustainable sources. [51417]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at column 1251.

My Department is currently, with Balfour Beatty, undertaking a full investigation and will report back to the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the use of wood from sustainable sources in the refurbishment of the Cabinet Office. [49490]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at column 1251.

My Department is currently, with Balfour Beatty, undertaking a full investigation and will report back to the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what organisation or company provided the certification for the doors and windows for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland buildings to show that they were produced from sustainably managed sources; and if he will place a copy of these certificates in the Library; [41345]

(2) who provided, or is providing, the *(a)* windows and *(b)* doors for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland buildings. [41346]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at column 1251W.

My Department is currently, with Balfour Beatty, undertaking a full investigation and will report back to the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, (1) how much has been spent on timber for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building; [35686]

(2) how much certified timber has been used in the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building; and what proportion of the total timber purchased for this refurbishment this represents; [35685]

(3) what action was taken by his Department to ensure that timber procured for the refurbishment of the Ripley and Kirkland building was sourced *(a)* sustainably and *(b)* legally. [35684]

Mr. Leslie *[pursuant to the answer I gave on 14 February, column 558]:* I regret to say that the information I provided was incorrect. The contract used with the main contractor for the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall (comprising the Ripley and Kirkland Buildings) did not specify that all timber should be supplied from certifiable sustainably managed sources upon which certificates are to be made available. The contract does require that timber for the doors and door frames in the Ripley Building should be "supplied from a certified renewable source. Certificates to be provided." The contract did not specify the source of any other timber to be used in the buildings.

I provided the original answer to the House in good faith on the basis of information provided to Cabinet Office officials. I am grateful to my hon. friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North for her interest in this matter. As a result of her investigations, we are currently, with Balfour Beatty, undertaking a full investigation in to all circumstances surrounding this matter and will report back to the House.

Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will list the members of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. [49827]

Mr. Leslie: Mike Granatt is the head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, of which there are currently 123 members.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Residential Care

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing home places available to the elderly in each of the last three years. [49923]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The requested information is shown in the table.

Number of places in homes for elderly and elderly mentally infirm people England

Rounded Numbers

31 March	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Residential Care	265,090	263,430	260,070
Nursing Care	150,370	149,960	142,520

Source: DH Returns.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the hunger strike by asylum seekers at Dungavel detention centre; [50513]

(2) how many children are detained at his Department's Dungavel centre; how many of that number have special needs as a result of disability or health problems; and what level of education and healthcare is provided for these children; [50438]

(3) if he will make a statement on his assessment of the management of the Dungavel detention centre in Scotland; [50436]

(4) what medical care is available to asylum seekers detained at the Dungavel centre. [50437]

Angela Eagle: Dungavel Removal Centre is managed and operated by Premier Services Ltd. All removal centres must provide for the safety and care of detainees in compliance with the Detention Centre Rules 2001. The Rules set out the rights and responsibilities of those held in removal centres and of those who operate such centres. The contract with Premier reflects the requirements of the Rules.

The number and profile of detainees, including the number of children, at an immigration removal centre changes from day-to-day. Internal management information records that on the morning of Monday 15 April 2002 there were 15 children at Dungavel Removal Centre and of these, two had special needs as a result of disability or health problems.

A programme of modular education is provided at Dungavel for all school age children.

There are excellent medical facilities at Dungavel in the dedicated healthcare unit. This unit includes two hospital beds. There is a full time doctor and five full time nurses. There is a 24-hour on call facility to both doctors and nurses. There is a weekly visit by a dentist and an optician visits the centre fortnightly. These medical facilities are available to all detainees including children.

Reports that have recently been circulating suggesting that there has been a hunger strike by a number of detainees at Dungavel are completely unfounded.

On Tuesday 9 April a number of detainees announced their intention to stage what they termed a "non-compliance" day. Detainees refused to get out of bed, take part in removal centre activities such as education or sport activities or eat in the centre's dining hall. They did, however, continue to buy food from the centre's shop.

Most detainees ate lunch and supper the next day and the centre has been operating normally since.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of asylum seekers held in removal centres are waiting for an initial decision on their application; and if he will make a statement. [48699]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Asylum And Immigration Act

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [50809]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Information from the Home Office Court Proceedings database on a principal offence basis indicates that in 2000, 32 persons were prosecuted under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. More recent information is not yet available. Information on the number of prosecutions in 2001 is due to be published in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2001" later this year.

The Government set out its proposals for tackling illegal working in Chapter 5 of the White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain" (CM 5387). These proposals included suggested amendments to section 8 of the 1996 Act, which now form part of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 12 April 2002.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43284]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 211W.

With regard to the pay of special advisers, I refer the Hon Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, Offical Report, column 11W.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33868]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 26 February 2002, *Official Report* column 1266W.

Police Reform

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he will gain under the proposed Police Reform Bill; if police authorities will be involved in directions given to chief officers and in the suspension of chief constables under the proposed reforms; what the role of the community support officers will be; what police powers will be given to accredited persons and what their responsibilities will be; what estimate he has made of how much the proposals on police reform will cost; and if he will make a statement. [48850]

Mr. John Denham *[holding answer 17 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to Explanatory Notes published with the Bill.

Asylum Cases

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was from first application to initial decision in asylum cases in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [50808]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the reply given on 3 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1066W which gives the latest available information.

Information for the 12 months to March 2002 will be available on 30 May 2002.

Vehicle Clamping

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has of the number of vehicles clamped in the last full year for which figures are available; what was the *(a)* total number and *(b)* monetary amount of fines levied; what proportion and what amount of the fines levied were collected; and if he will make a statement; [49908]

(2) what regulations govern private clamping companies; [49910]

(3) what was the largest fine that could be imposed in respect of an uncollected vehicle, which had been towed away after it had been clamped, in each of the last five years. [49909]

Mr. Denham: There are no regulations relating to clamping on private property and we do not collect any information about the number of vehicles clamped or the fines levied. The Private Security Industry Act 2001 creates the Security Industry Authority. The authority, which will regulate the industry through licensing, will begin operations in 2003 and will have wheel clamping as one of its priority areas.

Experience Corps Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 595W, regarding the experience corps initiative if the initiative has been launched. [50399]

Angela Eagle: The Experience Corps Company began this initiative in November 2001. This is across the nine English government regions, seven of which have operations under way. I understand that the Experience Corps Company will launch in the South East, which includes Buckingham, and South West Regions by June 2002.

Yarl's Wood Detention Centre

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his statement of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 441, on the Yarl's Wood fire, whether fatalities have been discovered since 25 February. [50018]

Angela Eagle: No fatalities have been discovered to date.

Immigration

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time for determination of applications for indefinite leave to remain in the UK on the basis of marriage was in the last 12 months. [49943]

Angela Eagle: I regret that there are no published data on decision times for individual types of applications for indefinite leave to remain. Our aim is to decide 65 per cent of all straightforward applications on initial consideration within three weeks. Due to the exceptionally high number of applications received over the past year, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance, it is at present taking up to six weeks to decide an application on initial consideration. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible. Information on expected processing times for straightforward cases is provided to applicants on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate web site at http://194.203.40.90/default.asp?PageId=113

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate received the application from Mrs. F. N. M., a Jamaican national living in Aylesbury, for leave to remain in the United Kingdom as the wife of a person with indefinite leave to remain (ref M1005958); when he intends to notify the applicant of his decision; and if he will make a statement. [50039]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate received Mrs. M's application on 14 February 2000. She was notified on 16 April 2002 that she had been granted leave to remain. I am sorry that this application was overlooked whilst a waiting a hearing date for her outstanding appeal.

Football Hooligans

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, by club, who purport to support English Nationwide and Premier League football teams are classified as football hooligans within Home Office categories. [49931]

Angela Eagle: Those housed in Accommodation Centres will receive a small cash allowance for incidental expenses, which could include public transport.

Asylum Services (Edinburgh)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with representatives of the City of Edinburgh Council following its decision to pull out of negotiations with the National Asylum Support Service. [42730]

Angela Eagle: The City of Edinburgh Council has advised officials from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) that they wish to suspend formal negotiations regarding a contract to supply accommodation for dispersed asylum seekers.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Rainsbrook (Onley) Secure Training Centre by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49650]

Beverley Hughes: The estimated total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for Hassockfield (Medomsley) Secure Training Centre by comparison with a Public Sector alternative is £29.5 million (exeluding VAT).

The contract was amended on 9 August 2001 to provide an additional 36 trainee places. The estimated total savings to public funds of these additional places by comparison with a Public Sector alternative is £10.5 million (excluding VAT).

Certificates of Identity

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which European Union countries do not accept the Home Office Certificate of Identity as a valid travel document; what reasons each of them has provided his Department for this policy; how he has addressed each of these reasons; when he expects the Certificate of Identity to be accepted throughout the EU; and if he will make a statement. [48891]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office Certificate of Identity (CID) is a travel document issued to foreign nationals, other than refugees, who are resident in the United Kingdom and cannot obtain a passport from their national authorities.

The CID is issued on a discretionary basis, not under an international convention. European Union Member States are not obliged to recognise the document. Those Member States which do not do so, and generally do not issue travel visas to CID holders, include France, Belgium, Germany, Greece and Spain.

The stance taken by all these countries is largely influenced by the fact that CID holders have no *absolute* right of re-admission on return from travel abroad. In response we have explained that this does not cause difficulties in practice, as CID holders are entitled to return to any United Kingdom port on a date within the CID's validity, and a visa is not required. Under the Immigration Rules, re-admission after examination by an immigration officer is not an automatic entitlement, but would normally be granted, on the basis that residency here is to be resumed. There are no plans to give CID holders an absolute right of re-admission. To do so would put them in a more favourable position than other foreign nationals who are resident here. Only British citizens, and Commonwealth citizens who have the right of abode here, have an unconditional right of re-entry.

Positive efforts will continue to be made by the Home Office with a view to achieving full acceptance for the CID, including giving consideration to alteration of the standard wording of the CID to meet Schengen concerns.

Documents (Croydon)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records are kept regarding the whereabouts of documents sent to the Home Office facility in Croydon. [49683]

Angela Eagle: All packages received by recorded or special delivery are recorded on a database on the date of receipt. There is an audit trail of the subsequent movement of those packages. All applications and their movements are recorded on a case information database. Details of the passports submitted by applicants are recorded in their individual case records on that database. These systems are supported by local manual records recording the movement of passports and any other valuable documents.

Leave to Remain Applications

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring systems are used to track applications by non-UK citizens to remain in the UK on the basis of marriage. [49682]

Angela Eagle: All new applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom, including those lodged on the basis of marriage, are recorded on a case information database, together with any subsequent actions that may take place concerning that application.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time was to process an application for a non-UK citizen to remain in the UK on the basis of marriage over the last 12 months. [49684]

Angela Eagle: I regret that there are no published data on decision times for individual types of spouse applications. Our aim is to decide 65 per cent of all straightforward applications on initial consideration within three weeks. Due to the exceptionally high number of applications received over the past year, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance, it is at present taking up to six weeks to decide an application on initial consideration. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible. Information on expected processing times for straightforward cases is provided to applicants on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate web site at http://194.203.40.90/default.asp?PageId=113.

Passports (Return)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time was for a passport to be returned to United Kingdom citizens from the Home Office facility in Croydon over the last 12 months. [49685]

Angela Eagle: This information is not available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. However, United Kingdom passports are received only in those cases where the sponsor is a British citizen and where a passport is required as evidence of that status. They are normally returned with any other documents submitted by the applicant when an application is decided. Over the last 12 months, the majority of applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom were decided within three weeks, but over recent months this has been nearer to six weeks due to high levels of intake.

Asylum Seekers (Throckmorton Airfield)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the additional funding required for *(a)* policing and *(b)* fire services if an asylum seekers centre were to be established at Throckmorton airfield; [48727]

(2) what assessment he has made of the additional funding required for *(a)* transport and *(b)* housing if an asylum seekers centre were to be established at Throckmorton airfield. [48725]

Angela Eagle: In making final decisions on preferred sites, we will take all the relevant factors into account including those to which the hon Member refers. These assessments have not yet been made.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum cases have been dealt with over the last three years; how many cases have succeeded after the appeal process; how many cases have been refused; how many of those refused did not seek

appeal; how many of those denied asylum have been removed from the UK; how many left voluntarily; how many are awaiting removal; and if he will make a statement. [47390]

Angela Eagle: Information for 1999 to 2001 on applications for asylum, and initial decisions made, is shown in Table 1. However these initial decisions do not all relate to applications made between 1999 and 2001.

Table 1: Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, and initial decisions[1,2], 1999–2001

Number of principal applicants

			Cases considered under normal procedures[5]			*Backlog clearance exercise[6]*	
	Applications received[3]	*Initial Decisions[4]*	*Granted asylum*	*Granted ELR*	*Refused*	*Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria*	*Refused under backlog criteria[7]*
1999	71,160	33,720	7,815	2,465	11,025	11,140	1,275
2000[p]	80,315	109,205	10,375	11,495	75,680	10,325	1,335
2001[p]	71,700	118,195	10,960	19,510	87,725	—	—
Total[p]	*223,170*	*261,125*	*29,150*	*33,470*	*174,430*	*21,470*	*2,605*

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
[3] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January and March 2000.
[4] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[5] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[6] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
[7] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
[p] Figures for 2000 and 2001 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on the numbers of appeals allowed and dismissed at the adjudicator stage is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Outcome of Asylum Appeals at Adjudicator Stage, 1999–2001[1]

Number of principal appellants

	Allowed	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Total*
1999	5,280	11,135	3,050	19,460
2000[p]	3,340	15,580	475	19,395
2001[p]	8,155	34,440	825	43,415
Total[p]	*16,770*	*61,155*	*4,350*	*82,275*

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[p] Figures for 2000 and 2001 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on the numbers of further appeals to the Tribunal which were allowed, dismissed and withdrawn, for which data are available, is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Outcome of Asylum Appeals at Tribunal Stage, 1999–2001[1,2]

	Appellant[3]			*Secretary of State[3]*			
	Allowed	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Total Determined[4]*
1999	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2000[p]	560	730	110	130	115	25	2,635
2001[p]	1,305	830	100	270	100	15	3,190
Total[p]	*1,865*	*1,560*	*210*	*400*	*210*	*45*	*5,825*

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Appeals to the Tribunal can be brought be the appellant or the Secretary of State against a decision of an adjudicator. The figures do not distinguish and will include appeals brought by appellants and the Secretary of State.
[3] Total of these figures will not equal total determined in final column as these figures relate to cases for which information is known by the Home Office.
[4] Based on data supplied by the Lord Chancellor's Department.
[p] Figures for 2000 and 2001 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on the numbers of Judicial Reviews which were allowed, dismissed and withdrawn, for which data are available, is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Outcome of Asylum Appeals at Judicial Review, 1999–2001[1,2]

Number of principal appellants

	Allowed	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Total*
1999	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2000[p]	365	300	95	755
2001[p]	260	60	65	390
Total[p]	*625*	*360*	*160*	*1,145*

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Figures refer to substantive judicial reviews (exclude permission applications). The figures also exclude asylum support judicial reviews.
[p] Figures for 2000 and 2001 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on the numbers refused at the initial decision stage who did not appeal is not available for the last three years and could only be obtained by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost. However analysis of electronic data based on cases where data are available, indicated that around 50–60 per cent of refusals result in an appeal.

It is not possible to determine how many persons, denied asylum in this period, have been removed or await removal. The total number of asylum seekers (excluding dependants) removed in the last three years is given in Table 5. These figures include persons applying for asylum prior to 1999, and those departing voluntarily. The table identifies persons leaving voluntarily under Assisted Voluntary Return programmes. Others departing voluntarily after enforcement action has been initiated are included within the total numbers removed but cannot be separately identified. It is also not possible to say how many persons depart without informing the Immigration Service.

Table 5: Asylum applicants removed from the United Kingdom, 1999–2001

Number of principal applicants

	Principal asylum applicants removed[1,2]	*Of which, Assisted Voluntary Returns*[3]
1999	7,660	50
2000[r]	8,980	550
2001[r,4]	9,285	995
Total[r,4]	*25,925*	*1,595*

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Includes persons departing "voluntarily" after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.
[3] Persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes.
[4] Figures exclude 1,055 dependants of asylum seekers who were removed in the period April to December 2001. Data on dependants removed have only been collected since April 2001.
[r] Figures for 2000 and 2001 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on initial decisions, asylum appeals and removals is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to March 2002, and will be available from 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether residents of accommodation centres for asylum seekers will be able to go to and fro as they wish. [48939]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Mr. Barrett) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 98W.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sum his Department will transfer from its budget to the Ministry of Defence in respect of land vacated by the Ministry of Defence logistics at Bicester if such land is used by his Department as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers; and by whom, and how, such sums have been calculated. [48949]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Ministry of Defence and Home Office officials are in contact on this issue, although no agreement has as yet been reached.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February to the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), *Official Report*, column 57W, on asylum accommodation centres, what further sites his Department has identified through procurement competition as possible sites for accommodation centres for asylum seekers; and if he will specify the sites and the criteria used in their selection. [48952]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1134W.

No further sites have as yet been identified.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to land vacated by Ministry of Defence Logistics at Bicester, what consultations *(a)* have taken and *(b)* will take place with members of the local community; and how consultation has been or will be carried out in respect of the proposal to establish an accommodation centre for asylum seekers on this land. [48943]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Officials are discussing with relevant planning authorities the best way of consulting the public and other interested parties in the areas identified as having potential accommodation centre sites.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of the establishment of accommodation centres for asylum seekers, if there will be compensation payable to householders living nearby whose property may be reduced in value as a consequence of the setting up of such accommodation centres. [48935]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* We do not anticipate grounds for compensation of this nature.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

Mr. James Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what representations his Department has made to French officials on the situation at the Sangatte refugee camp in Northern France. [46983]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom and French Governments have developed close working relationships at all levels on bilateral asylum and immigration issues. There are frequent discussions of the problems of cross Channel illegal immigration and the situation at Sangatte in particular.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the French Prime Minister discussed Sangatte and the situation in Northern France during the United Kingdom/French Summit on 29 November 2001. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) also discussed the issue with French Social Affairs Minister Elizabeth Guigou on 21 January 2002, and has raised it on a number of occasions with Interior Minister Daniel Vaillant. Officials from both sides are in regular contact on the issue and a Cross Channel Commission subgroup is dealing specifically with the issues surrounding Sangatte. The group met in Paris on 13 February and in London on 18 March to discuss possible ways forward. A further meeting is due to take place in Paris shortly.

Prisons (Education)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent on literacy lessons in prison in each of the last 10 years. [48913]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not collected centrally on the amount of money spent on individual subjects areas. However, the table shows education spend from 1992–93 to 2001–02.

Financial Year	*Education Expenditure (millions)*
1992–93	£31.22
1993–94	£31.08
1994–95	£36.75
1995–96	£36.95
1996–97	£34.50
1997–98	£36.17
1998–99	£39.04
1999–00	£40.89
2000–01	£41.87
2001–02	£52.60

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special advisers there were in his Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46942]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* From 1997 to 2001 there were two special advisers in the Home Office.

In relation to special advisers since June 2001, I refer the hon Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 211W.

With regard to the pay of special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April, *Official Report,* column 11W.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41260]

Mr. Blunkett: From 1997 to 2001 there were two special advisers in the Home Office.

In relation to special advisers since June 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 211W.

With regard to the pay of special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April, *Official Report,* column 11W.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 383**

SESSION 2001–2002

10th April—19th April 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
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HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

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- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
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Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
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- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
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- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

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- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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